

### Leadership – Consistency and Common Decency

In addition to possessing integrity and demonstrating competence, leaders must also be consistent in their values and vision. Such **consistency** requires a foundation of principles for one's actions and a well-developed guide for how to proceed. Followers will quickly lose confidence in an erratic leader or one without a clear and compelling vision.

Being consistent does not in any way imply rigidity or inflexibility in your thinking, planning, or execution. A hallmark of leadership is the recognition that we operate in a fluid world where everything changes all the time. As German military theorist von Moltke said, "No battle plan survives contact with the enemy." The same could be said for any plan and the constantly unfolding realities faced by every enterprise.

When a leader demonstrates consistent values and a persistent pursuit of well-defined objectives, followers can feel confident in their leader and the direction he is taking them. An unpredictable leader, who bounces from one initiative to another and whose plans, performance, and behavior are constantly changing, creates a situation much like the Doom Loop described by Jim Collins in *Good to Great*.

*"The comparison companies followed a different pattern, the doom loop. Rather than accumulating momentum – turn by turn of the flywheel – they tried to skip buildup and jump immediately to breakthrough. Then, with disappointing results, they'd lurch back and forth, failing to maintain consistent direction."*

Employees can deal with some agenda changes from senior management, but continually changing initiatives sap them of their enthusiasm and willingness to adapt. This is particularly so when they are not involved in decision-making and they are not treated as if they matter.

This brings us to **common decency** and how followers are treated. While every person may have his or her own conception of what is decent, common decency encompasses those behaviors considered to be the ideal in human intercourse. Among them are:

- Respect—regard or consideration for others and their needs.
- Sensitivity—heightened awareness to needs and concerns of others.
- Courtesy—polite behavior, respect, consideration, helpfulness.
- Kindness—goodwill, generosity, charity, and sympathy toward others.
- Generosity of Spirit—absence of meanness or smallness of mind or character.

When a leader demonstrates these behaviors in his dealings with all constituents, it naturally creates strong, trusting relationships. Once again, though, consistency is essential. A leader cannot be kind one day and callous the next and expect his constituents to trust him.

As children we are taught the common decency of the Golden Rule—treating others as we wish to be treated. But as we grow older we are often faced with stressful situations and unpleasant people who cause us to develop our own defensive responses and disagreeable behaviors.

Yet, just as these habits were learned over time, they can be unlearned by conscious effort. While we cannot control what happens to us, we can control our reactions to events. Making the effort to treat others well will go a long way toward building meaningful relationships with all constituents.

*Ed Rehkopf, Excerpted from Leadership on the Line – The Workbook, Clarity Publications, 2009*