

# ATTRIBUTES THAT BUILD EFFECTIVE LEADERS

AMANDA MONTAGUE

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

*This paper explores three attributes that can assist leaders in becoming more effective: the power of storytelling, emotional intelligence, and organizational communication. There are several styles of leadership and several ways that people learn, so we can infer that there is not one right way to lead. However, there are certain attributes and abilities that could set a leader apart from others, regardless of the style of leadership. Literature shows that the three attributes mentioned above assist in the effectiveness of an organization. The intention of this paper is to provide information to support effective leadership.*

Leadership can be found everywhere—within families, school, and work. A person may function in the role of “leader” without even realizing it. For that reason alone, it would be important to learn how to become a more effective leader and to understand why managers and administrators lead the way they do. This paper addresses three points of leadership that are important attributes in understanding how leaders can and have become more effective. These include the power of storytelling, emotional intelligence, and organizational commitment. While there may not be an antidote for how to make every leader “great” or even effective, these three attributes and ideas can help both leaders and followers to better understand and appreciate their roles.

**POWER OF STORYTELLING**

Goncalves (2013) reasons that there are seven types of leadership powers found in the work place: legitimate (authority from a formal position), expert (people who possess information and specific skills), coercive (influencing others by fear), reward (worker doing what is asked, desiring benefits and rewards), referent (association between person exercising power and icon that wields influence/power), charisma (force of character, getting people to do what leader wants), and information (knowledge a leader possesses to influence followers in their favor). After describing each leadership power, Goncalves concludes that not one singular “power” is better than another—each style offers attributes that work, and things that do not work. In the end, the idea expressed is that the most important trait or “power” for a leader to have in the twenty-first century is to be a “storyteller” (p. 3). Some may ask the question, “How can storytelling make a leader more effective?”

When people share or tell stories, stronger connections are more likely to take place among those sharing the stories and those listening: “In leadership, solid rhetoric and self-confidence...create trust among followers” (Auvinen, Aaltio, & Blomqvist, 2013, p. 1). Stories tend to draw people in, especially personal stories. If a leader seeks to inspire those they lead, they must get their attention which is more quickly offered when stories or metaphors are shared (Harris & Barnes, 2006). Leaders who share stories relating to those they lead come across as more approachable and engaging, rather than intimidating or indifferent.

To better internalize the value of being a storyteller as a leader, Goncalves (2013) relates this message in his article:

In this new century, successful leaders will have to become storytellers. Not only are we seduced by stories (that’s why we like books, movies and theater), but we must invariably place stories above price and quality. We often justify a lack of or excess of those attributes with stories. We always have a story for why we must pay the high cost for a Starbucks coffee, or for a high-priced Apple computer, for a higher cost FedEx shipment or skyrocketing tuitions at colleges and universities.

Yet, all the organizations listed above have leaders that knew how to tell their story, not only to their peers and subordinates, but also to the public, thereby becoming somewhat of a celebrity in the process (p. 3).

It is interesting to consider any organization that has become popular or well-known probably had a leader who shared a story and made a connection. As the power of storytelling continues to be studied and researched, leaders who learn how to share their own stories of success and failure effectively create connections with and confidence from those whom they lead. We may conclude from these findings that storytelling has become a valuable asset in leadership; however, it is not the only asset that leaders should seek after.

### **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Emotional intelligence can simply be defined as achieving a balanced emotional state or being able to reason intelligently with emotions (George, 2000). Regarding leaders, “the objective of having this intelligence is...to achieve the desired emotional state so that the employees are able to attain their expected performance” (Alkahtani, 2015, p. 24). Leadership is sometimes known for being an emotional process since leaders not only manage their emotions, but also the emotions of their followers for the sake of productivity (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, & Boyle, 2006). Alkahtani focused particularly on the relationship between emotional intelligence and the transformational leadership style, as well as the relationship between emotional intelligence and the transactional leadership style. Transformational leadership, in which “the vision of the leader must be conveyed to the follower” (p. 25), is the preferred leadership style among leaders and employees. Transactional leadership provides more power to the leader, and followers agree to do as their leaders ask for the sake of accomplishing goals. What Alkahtani found in the relationships between these leadership styles and emotional intelligence is as follows:

Leaders with high emotional intelligence abilities are hypothesized to enhance the relationship between transformational leadership styles and organizational commitment and change the direction of the relationship

between transactional leadership styles and organizational commitment of employees in the organization (p. 24).

From Alkahtani's work we observe that leaders who have high emotional intelligence, whether they are transformational or transactional, both enhance and change relationships among employees within the company. However, this begs the question: Does emotional intelligence have an overall effect on employees, regardless of leadership style?

George (2000) found that leaders who have high emotional intelligence can produce more creative and constructive thinking in the work place. Work can be extremely hectic and stressful, particularly for leaders who also need to manage and handle stress in a positive way, so it does not negatively affect employees. Maintaining emotional intelligence and stability could be seen as something enhancing a leader's ability to ameliorate stress and increase productivity and creativity. According to George, perhaps style of leadership does not matter when it comes to having emotional intelligence. Indeed, having emotional intelligence generally enhances great leadership.

Based on these studies, we may conclude that a leader who has high emotional intelligence will have a better, more positive influence on the entire organization, which could consist of hundreds of people or a team of ten or fewer individuals. Regardless of the number of people involved, leaders with personal, emotional stability and balance are better suited to respond to employees' individual needs, helping them to find emotional balance as well. Emotional stability enhances great leadership.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT**

Organizational commitment refers to an employee's commitment or attachment to their employer and organization where they work. According to most findings, commitment or lack of commitment to a company stems from leadership and management teams. Clinebell, Skudiene, Trijonyte, and Reardon (2013) suggest, "the leader should be very familiar with any impact his/her demonstrated behavior has on followers' perceptions towards the work place, or even the organization as a whole, and adapt his/her leadership behaviors in order to enhance followers' commitments" (p. 140).

Clinebell et al. (2013) based their theory on previous studies in the field of organizational commitment. The purpose of their research was “to examine the relationship between distinct leadership styles and separate dimensions of organizational commitment in two foreign subsidiaries of one multinational organization” (p. 140). They studied three types of commitment generally found in employees: affective (employees stay because they want to stay), continuance (employees stay because they need to stay), and normative commitment (employees feel they ought to stay). As part of the research, types of commitment were compared with three specific leadership styles: transactional (certain transactions or bargains between employee and leader/manager), transformational (leaders share vision with employees), and passive-avoidant (indifferent, only acts when necessary) leadership. Data was collected using a survey questionnaire measuring each of the variables listed above; 359 questionnaires were distributed. The results of these studies indicate transformational and transactional leadership positively affect all styles of commitment, while passive-avoidant leadership has only a negative effect on affective commitment.

Both positive and negative relationships between leadership and the commitment of followers were demonstrated in the research. Transformational and transactional leadership styles appear to have a more positive impact on relationships with employees, thus increasing their desire to stay and be committed to the organization.

## **DISCUSSION**

Those who lead may not necessarily have a formal title, but there are a variety of roles that can be considered leadership, including, being a parent, older sibling, caregiver, peer, friend, etc. Everyone is or can be a leader in some way. Because of this, leadership should be embraced as something meant to be learned. Though individuals who lead are not perfect, they can become exceptional and influential to those who follow them.

Warren Bennis said it best: “The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born—that there is a genetic factor to leadership. That’s nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born” (Kruse, 2016). Discussed in this paper, there are attributes leaders can seek to attain that will enable them to lead more positively and effectively.

Leaders, or future leaders, should consider storytelling, emotional intelligence, and organizational commitment as attributes that will assist in more successful and effective leadership.

REFERENCES

- Alkahtani, A. H. (2015). The influence of leadership styles on organizational commitment: The moderating effect of emotional intelligence. *Business and Management Studies*, 2(1). doi:10.11114/bms.v2i1.1091
- Auvinen, T., Aaltio, I., & Blomqvist, K. (2013). Constructing leadership by storytelling—the meaning of trust and narratives. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 34(6), 496–514. doi:10.1108/LODJ-10-2011-0102
- Clinebell, S., Skudiene, V., Trijonyte, R., & Reardon, J. (2013). Impact of leadership styles on employee organizational commitment. *Journal of Service Science (JSS)*, 6(1), 139–151. doi:10.19030/jss.v6i1.8244
- George, J. M. (2000). Emotions and leadership: The role of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations*, 53(8), 1027–1055. doi:10.1177/0018726700538001
- Goncalves, M. (2013). Leadership styles: The power to influence others. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 4(4), 1–3.
- Harris, J. & Barnes, B. K. (2006). Leadership storytelling. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 38(7), 350–354. doi:10.1108/00197850610704534
- Kerr, R., Garvin, J., Heaton, N., & Boyle, E. (2006). Emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 27(4), 265–279. doi: 10.1108/01437730610666028
- Kruse, K. (2016, July 16). 100 Best quotes on leadership. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/10/16/quotes-on-leadership/#78592c132feb>