Leadership in Group Process by Jane Marie Downey, M.Ed.

What is a Leader?

If you are a leader someone is following you in some way. Therefore, when we talk about leaders we must also delve into the tricky topic of groups or the people who follow.

We all want to be leaders these days, or so we think, because our popular culture tells us that is our preference. The word leader implies possession of a degree of power, a measure of autonomy and creativity or freedom.

This discussion of leadership will address the following Leadership Skill Requirements as defined by Jane M. Downey, M.Ed. of Clarity Concepts, Inc.:

1. Visioning and Clarity of Focus
2. Matching project priorities to Vision
3. Emotional Intelligence
4. Communication Skills
5. Ability to Overcome Fear
6. Strength to make Decisions
7. Motivational and Coaching Skills
8. Team Management Skills including Facilitation
9. Mastery of the Creative Process
10. Ability to Match Project Needs with Resources

"Authentic leaders have absorbed the fundamental fact of existence-that you can't get around life's inherent contradictions. The leadership mind is spacious. It has ample room for the ambiguities of the world, for conflicting feelings and for feelings and contradictory ideas….I believe the central leadership attribute is the ability to manage polarity".

Peter Kostenbaum as quoted in Fast Company, March 2000.

- **Visioning and Clarity of Focus**

A great leader has a clear picture of future results and aligns organizational strategy with this vision. A leader must be intimately familiar with the end destination that Stephen Covey refers to as, "Keep the End in Mind". Without a roadmap, a concept of the future or a belief in new opportunities, the energy for momentum and growth with not only be lost, but it will be dissipated on activities that do not generate the desired organizational outcome. It is a leader's responsibility to set a vision, and then keep the vision in focus at the same time often holding disparate events together.

Visioning is a process that should be done on a macro level and then fine-tuned into smaller goals and objectives for each group and organizational activity. Individuals, as leaders, should develop their own personal mission and vision and work diligently to make sure that their goals match intrinsically with those of the organization they serve. There is great power in harnessing a view of the future and turning it into reality.

- **Matching project priorities to Vision**

Understanding that many projects, desired outcomes and resources are in competition within the organization, an effective leader will retain the vision in sight and use it as the litmus test for making and establishing priorities. If an organization is well aware of the activities targeted for the most support, internal conflict is reduced because priorities have been established through clear guidelines. This creation of clear structure is an essential element of managing groups. It also allows the leader to delegate authority and responsibility through effective communication of the overarching organizational goals.

- **Emotional Intelligence**

Daniel Goleman introduced the concept of Emotional Intelligence in his best-selling book. An effective leader understands him or herself and has a great degree of understanding of human behavior. This translates into the ability to communicate clearly, to regulate his responses to a perceived threat and to maintain strength and focus in a crisis response. In short, an emotionally intelligent manager is knowledgeable about the fight/flight response and makes sure his rational and cognitive brain functions are engaged before he acts or responds.

Let's review the specific aspects of the fight/flight response:

- Something happens in your life that makes you uncomfortable (It can be as little as a past memory)
- You perceive that you are under attack (You may not even be conscious of this)
- Your brain signals the release of ACTH
- Your adrenals release cortisol
- Cortisol increases the release of amino acids including homocysteine from the skeletal muscle and fatty acids from adipose tissue.
- Released amino acids are absorbed by the liver and converted to glucose, which are subsequently secreted into the blood to be used for energy by certain tissues such as brain cells and red blood cells.

- The fatty acids released from the adipose tissue are use for energy by skeletal muscle, thus sparing the available glucose for use by the brain.
- Insulin levels rise
- Your heart rate elevates, and your blood vessels constrict
- Digestion shuts down and blood flow is diverted
- Your breathing becomes shallow to take in more oxygen for a physical response

This physiological response sounds great if you need to make a run for it. If you don't engage in physical action, you will have an abundance of insulin, glucose, fatty acids and neuropeptides generated in your body with no immediate physical release. This can greatly contribute to disease states if you sustain these levels due to repeated stresses.

Now let's examine what happens to your "mind" when you perceive an attack. That is, when your mind believes you are under threat, your body physically responds to this threat by strengthening certain survival mechanisms which can include: increased heart rate, dry mouth, shallow breathing, and the ability to concentrate only on the threat. This is created by a surge of adrenaline so that you can fight the monster.

It is our perception that triggers this response to both imagined and real dangers. This physical response does not assist you unless the fear is real; in fact, it very often makes your mind go blank. Have you ever had your mind go blank during a public presentation or some other perceived stress? Why does this happen? It is noteworthy that these stressful events are stored in an entirely different area of the brain, known as the amygdala.

The amygdala is the part of the brain that remembers stressful events. Our bodies are programmed to remember those events that are perceived to threaten our survival. Thus amygdala arousals have a memory imprint that is stronger. When the brain believes it perceives such an event, the conscious mind is bypassed, and the amygdala instructs the body to prepare for a fight. This means that, in effect, the brain has two memory systems; one for ordinary facts and one for emotionally charged ones.   When threatened, we want to bypass the cognitive mind so we can react quickly.

We only need our current reality to mirror a small part of an old trauma, and the crisis response is triggered. The more traumas you have experienced, the easier to trigger a fight/flight response. When this response is activated, we are operating from a more primitive part of our brain. Who knows what your original trauma may be? It could be embarrassment at show and tell in the first grade or fear taught by our parents.

Whether it is a present-day event or a memory, is now irrelevant. This amygdala arousal creates difficulty when there is no threat. In the case of arousal there is no use or release for this increased physical capacity, and we must learn to "turn off" the mechanism through relaxation techniques.

How do you stop your fight/flight stress response? Here are some ideas:

Stop:

- Pause before you respond when under stress
- Breathe deeply and calmly
- Stretch gently
- Take a Break: empty your mind so no stress is present

Relax:

- Listen to soft, soothing music
- Find a soothing environ
- Sing your favorite song
- Drink soothing herbal teas

Know yourself:

- Talk with a friend, counselor, or loved one
- Recognize and study your stress triggers
- Practice your stressful situations so you "unlearn" your fear.
- Gather more information about your situation to dispel fear

- **Communication Skills**

An effective leader needs an incredible amount of information to chart a course for his/her organization. Many failures in decision-making are easily tracked back to the failure of a leader to solicit the proper information or a group fails to hear or accept information that may be difficult. The process when a group makes a "bad" decision, even though all of the necessary facts and critical information are contained within the group is known as "Group Think". This is exactly what happened when NASA made the decision for the last launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger. Although an engineer from Morton Thiokol had the information that the freezing temperatures would put too much pressure on the O-rings and the predicted launch temperature was much less that the O-ring's specifications, because of peer pressure too numerous to examine here, his only protest was to say, "It is not on the right side of goodness" and the launch took place.

An effective leader will listen to information that is difficult to hear and will remain open to new possibilities. This creates innovation, discussed later in this manual. The facilitation skills also discussed herein bring forth processes

that allow groups to avoid the pitfalls of "group think" by allowing contributions to be made without criticism and perceived failure.

Very often in business we have to discuss issues with our team members or other departments on which we may not agree. The best conflict resolution results from discussing the issues, listening to the other party and providing constructive feedback. Unfortunately, many of us have been trained to criticize or provide judgment instead of offering methods of improvement, and hearing alternative viewpoints.

Active listening means getting involved in your conversations. It means asking questions that will encourage the other person to "engage".

The necessary components of effective listening include:

- Adopting a manner that is harmonious with the other person in terms of pacing, volume and tone of voice.
- Adjusting your body postures so the other person feels comfortable
- Maintaining intermittent eye contact
- Paraphrasing what the other person has said, or how they are feeling
- Praising or complimenting them if it feels natural
- Repeating points of your conversation that surprise you
- Asking questions
- Clarifying vocabulary or jargon you do not understand
- Making sure you speak for yourself and not the other person.
- Talking about what you have observed, think or perhaps fear.
- Using short clear statements to break messages into small parts

- **Ability to Overcome Fear**

A leader understands that fear is a natural and healthy reaction and at the same time, does not allow fear to stop a new idea or direction. A leader engages in risk management, the study of the potential risk outcomes of an activity or venture and makes calculated risks based on the information available. It may be scary that the actual outcome is unknown, but a leader works as hard as possible to control that outcome through resources, group motivation and positive thinking. Change and transformation are a natural process, and a great leader begins to embrace the unknown and to consider the thought of staying in exactly the same place the frightening outcome.

Fear is a gift. Effective leaders know how to tap into what is known as real fear, and not one based on an old outdated emotional response from the past. Leaders tap into intuition that may be able to provide guidance on the "right" decision. Only through recognition of the difference between anxiety and a true gut reaction can this internal wisdom be accessed. Fear is not overridden; it is overcome through research, and the emotional intelligence of self-understanding.

According to Larry Wilson, in *Play to Win*, there are four fatal fears that can cripple a leader or an organization:

- Fear of Failure
- Fear of being Wrong
- Fear of Rejection
- Fear of Discomfort

An effective leader analyzes these emotional responses and with great regard sorts through the real facts of a new situation to make healthy and intelligent choices for the team he is leading.

Interestingly, studies cited in *See Jane Win* and *The Rise of the Creative Class* have shown that individuals that can handle rejection, which is have had difficult childhood experiences of feeling different or wrong, are the ones more likely to generate creative ideas and be willing to take risks. Being "one of the gang" does not necessarily create the effective leader in today's fast-moving economy. Controlling change is the key to leadership success.

- **Strength to make Decisions**

This strength recognizes the ability to overcome the fear of failure and the wisdom to isolate real threats versus perceived emotional risks. It is extremely difficult to make a choice that others may not support. Therefore, a great leader is willing to be unpopular and be considered the "odd man out" at times. Of course, a great leader will have much support, but there are times when difficult choices must be made and the effective leader will know that the quicker a change is made, the better it will be for the organization. Living in uncertainty or confusion that is created through indecision is very damaging to employee morale and the overall direction of an organization.

When we explore the process of group evolution it will also be made clear that a great leader that develops a strong self-directed team, will experience a period of time in which the group revolts against the leader. This is highly predictable and because the effective leader understands this process and can remain comfortable in peer pressure situations, he or she will resist the urge to

stifle this creative outburst and allow the group to find its way and develop the necessary structure towards a greater stage of maturity.

A leader will also carefully analyze the decision-making techniques to be used. In some cases, the leader may receive contributing information and make a stand alone or unilateral decision. In other cases, the group may be asked to make a decision based on majority vote or in another on consensus. The most important aspect of decision-making is engendering and creating the support for your decision even if it is a choice not "liked" by everyone. Group process studies show that if the decision is not well discussed, the leader can foolishly believe a decision is supported because people did not speak out and in fact, the work is being sabotaged on a quiet level. A great leader will allow group members to dissent to avoid this destructive process.

- **Motivational and Coaching Skills**

As a leader, you must be able to motivate others to follow and to take your lead. How can you create a motivating environment?

- Develop open and honest communications (Let your employees know that "bad" news is welcome so information flows)
- Provide a willingness to support others
- Generate a spirit of cooperation

People are motivated by a supportive, acknowledging environment in which they feel appreciated and that their contributions are important. Money and compensation are always a key, but most employees leave jobs for more challenge, opportunity or an open creative climate.

People are also motivated by power. Where do you as a leader find your power?

Reward Power: The ability to give or to take away
Coercive Power: The ability to punish
Legitimate Power: The ability to enact
Referent Power: The ability to be identified with and liked
Expert Power: The ability to influence with knowledge

It is important to recognize that self-directed teams will be grown and nurtured through reward, knowledge and support. Using coercive power in a decision-making environment can keep critical information hidden and demoralize a group. An effective leader will work as a coach, encouraging and highlighting the positive aspects of performance, recognizing strengths and continually pointing out the goal.

There are times that constructive feedback or criticism must be given to generate better performance. A great leader will not allow substandard work to be accepted. If feedback of a correctional nature is to be given, here are some guidelines:

Constructive Feedback should be:
- Descriptive
- Specific
- Focused on Behaviors
- Directed towards behavior that can be changed
- Considerate to both parties
- Interactive
- Well timed
- Given infrequently
- Well organized and insightful

- **Team Management Skills including Facilitation**

Group skills are learned and must be practiced. You are not born with them and depending on your background, you could have been poorly educated on how to work in groups. For example, a very strict schooling system that did not allow for group interaction, trains individuals to seek direction and not use self-directed processes. Additionally, many schools of thought emphasize the "getting the work done" aspect of teams without teaching the need to develop communication channels and openness to diversity.

Successful teams require excellence in two key areas. The first, which you practice every day, is what are called **Task** items. Or simply, getting your work done. The second key is known as maintenance, relationship or **Process** components of teams. They involve information processing, communication and decision-making skills.

The questions a group should ask is what the Results of the group are:
1. Were goals achieved?
2. Is the "customer" satisfied? Every group must be infinitely clear on its definition of who is the customer.

Results are achieved by focusing on **Tasks**:
1. Did the group work?
2. Were group roles clear?
3. Were the group's efforts coordinated or was it simply a mix of individual efforts?

This output will be significantly affected by the **Process** and relationship components of the team:

1. Did members feel supported?
2. Was trust established?
3. Did all members participate?

III. Stages of Team Development

Teams, grow and evolve like humans. They have an early infancy stage, a toddler stage that can drive a leader crazy, an adolescent stage where the group needs to be supported but likes to think they are "all grown up" and finally they reach the adult stage where they can handle most challenges and tasks with little direction. These stages of team development are:

Norming: Dependency and Inclusion   Leadership Style: Directive
In the early stages of a group, anxiety will be high without a designated leader. The development of a communication structure is critical. The group members are extremely polite and courteous when they first meet. The members with perceived power will be given more attention, credibility and group time. Members who are shy will often remain silent.

Storming: Counter dependency and Fight   Leadership Style: Coaching
In this stage it is key to expect conflict and hostility. The successful resolution of this conflict enables the team to move into greater productivity and continue to develop self-grown norms. This is the how the group develops shared values and experiences. Individuals with hidden views will begin to contribute and share their thoughts. Additionally, there will be a shift in perception concerning the leader. A great leader should prepare for a mutiny in stage two. As the group struggles to define its communication style, it will often project anger on to the leader or if that is not comfortable, one member of the group.

Forming: Trust and Structure   Leadership Style: Supporting
In this third stage, trust and cohesion are emphasized as the group structure is adjusted to improved goal achievement. This stage anticipates a higher level of negotiation concerning roles, processes, and communication structure. The increased level of trust facilitates this. The group has successfully survived the fighting in stage two and now has less dependency on its s leader.

As the group successfully reaches this stage, all leaders will lose some influence as the team is becoming self-directed and leadership is becoming shared. For those who have been traditionally in leadership positions, this move to more of a facilitator is a major change.

Work: Self-Directed Performing   Leadership Style: Delegating
This is the stage of the self-directed team. Although work occurs in every phase of a group's maturation, at this stage the group is incredibly focused on goal achievement. It is important to note that some research indicates that this stage is never reached before six months of formation. Cooperative groups facilitate performance. Utilizing facilitation, innovation, total quality and

other group intervention techniques can help a group grow through these stages and provide tools to give them structure until they have pushed through the conflict phase.

As you can see the leader moves from a dictatorial, highly directive position to one of coaching, supporting and finally truly delegating as the team evolves. Ken Blanchard has a highly regarded training module entitled "Situational Leadership" which addresses choosing a leadership style to match your group.

Very often, a novice leader will assume that a group is at stage 4 and delegation can begin. Teams need to grow through the other three stages particularly to develop trust and structure so that they become self-directional.

- **Mastery of the Creative Process**

An effective leader understands that new ideas and concepts are often contradictory to established norms. Thus, in some way the effective leader allows and hopefully encourages the generation of innovative solutions. Much of our traditional educational systems do not support individual thinking or creativity. The effective leader will stimulate new ways of thinking by providing a supportive, nonjudgmental and creative environment. He or she will understand and communicate that innovation is a learning process as most people are shy about sharing their exciting concepts. When an organization begins to celebrate the failures that are created on the way to creating a successful concept, the proper structure is in place to thrive in this fast-moving creative age.

Facilitation is an important aspect of the creative process as it allows a group to have the nonjudgmental structure that may only be found in a stage four performing group. Thus, training your teams on hearing all new ideas, thinking "crazy" outcomes and wishing for the moon is the way to not only generate excitement, but literally, the future of your operation.

- **Ability to Match Project Needs with Resources**

An effective leader will fully understand the difference between a short-lived working group focused on completing a directed task versus a team that will be supported and allowed to mature to a self-directed team with its own culture, internal leadership and output. It is imperative that the right style of group is matched with the right project. Additionally, the effective leader will choose the leadership style appropriate to the stage of development of the group.

A high-functioning group or team will have:

- Mission that is redefined into team goals
- Regular interaction
- Codes of conduct
- System of accountability
- Measurement of progress
- Resources both structural and informational
- Team processing
- Celebrations

The leader will determine if the team or group has generated these processes internally or if external influence is needed to round out the support necessary for success.

Getting Clear the Clarity Concepts® Personal Leadership Model

C	Clarify: Clearly define what you want	Co-Create: Know that you have the power
L	Love: Love yourself, everyone and everything	Let Go: Know that something superior can happen
E	Embody: Know that something superior can happen	Entertain: Have faith in the possibility
A	Attend: Focus on your goal; Do not get distracted.	Affirm: Declare daily your positive outcome(s)
R	Radiate: Acknowledge the power in your life	Resonate: Align your actions with your goal