

Leadership Defined

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The author has been a student of leadership for over twenty-five years, during which time he has have read an untold number of books and articles on the topic. In reading this wide array of authors thoughts on leadership I have seen the term defined in many different ways. Over time, I became aware that certain words seem to appear quite often in the many leadership definitions. So, I finally took the words that were most often repeated and formulated them in to what I believe to be a working definition of leadership.

Leadership is the process of influencing and motivating others to accomplish the goals of the organization because they want to.

Now, let's analyze what these words mean. First, we note that leadership is a *process*. Webster's defines process as a series of actions or operations concurring to an end. This infers that a process is not immediate, but rather something that occurs over time. So we see that leadership is something that is ongoing and must be continually worked on because it takes time to do it.

Next, we note that leadership involves influencing others. What does it mean to influence? If you are a supervisor you can just order your workers to do what is needed. As long it is a lawful order and is part of their job responsibilities, they have to do it or suffer the consequences. However, if you are constantly getting your people to do their work through forcefully ordering them, how much productivity would it be reasonable to expect. The minimum is what you will get. They will do what they have to too keep you off their back. So, how do you influence someone? You talk to them, explain things to them, ask their input, and seek their cooperation. If someone feels that they have a part in something; are a stakeholder in the outcome, they will be more willing to work hard to accomplish their assigned tasks. So, much of influencing people really involves simply how you talk to them. If you treat you employees with respect and demonstrate concern for them, they will be much more willing to produce for you.

The definition next speaks about motivating others. In conjunction with influencing, if you provide employees with a reason to do something through which they can see a personal benefit in doing it, they will be much more willing to do it. By explaining what has to be done and why it is important to the organization, to you the supervisor, and most importantly, to the employee that you want to do it, you will develop motivated and productive employees.

The next important point in the definition is "others." Leadership involves getting work done through the efforts of other people. In good organizations, you have been promoted because you have proven to be among the best at what you do, and have exhibited some characteristics of leadership. Once you accept a supervisory position you must recognize that you are no longer getting paid to "do," you are now getting paid to see that it gets done by others. You are there to guide, train and help them while watching out for the wellbeing of the organization.

Next the definition speaks of accomplishing the goals of the organization. As individuals we all have personal goals that motivate us. However, it is important to note that for an organization to succeed we must understand and share in the organizational goals. This does not mean that every employee must completely and unquestionably embrace everything the organization stands for. But, organizational success can only be accomplished when the employees understand the direction the organizational goals are attempting to take the organization, and they generally agree with that direction and see how it also is of personal benefit. If you can get your employees to this point, you can then work on developing them into a true team that works together for shared success. It is important to note that if the organization is not successful, then it will no longer need us as employees, so it behooves us to become shareholders in common goals.

The final and perhaps most important step in the leadership process is getting your employees to work toward accomplishing the organization's goals *because they want to*. I call this "crossing the bridge," or going from being a guided worker to one who realizes the importance of Maslow's self-actualization. If you can develop an employee into one who understands the organizational goals, sees them as being in line with their personal goals, and becomes self-motivated from within to working hard toward accomplishing those goals so that s/he can share in the benefits of such accomplishment, you will have helped in the development of an excellent employee who is a value to the organization and a credit to her/himself, and someone that we all can be proud of.

When you study leadership you find that it is hard work. It is much easier to simply be a competent manager and tend to the organization's material needs. Leadership involves being a competent manager, but also getting heavily involved in the people part of the job. However, for those of us that have chosen this path, we realize that having a part in the effective development of employees is extremely rewarding. By choosing to lead you allow yourself the opportunity to have a positive impact on individuals within the organization as well as the overall good of the organization. Take the challenge and enjoy!