

## The New Leadership Criterion

### Moving Beyond Spanky And Our Gang

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The new dynamics and challenges of the twenty-first century will demand a new approach to leadership and the process of selecting leaders. Popularity and pedigree were often the only "qualifications" a leader had to fulfill to find himself or herself imbued with power, authority and responsibility. No longer are those superficial criteria sufficient to lead in a changing and diverse marketplace. The new criteria will be based on demonstrated competence instead of slick PR campaigns.

Quickly reflect on the criteria used to select the playground bully. Odds are there was no Rorschach Inkblot, MMPI, Myers-Briggs or DISC instruments used to determine who would be the bully or the subsequent pecking order for the balance of the population. Historically, in many organizations the leaders were, in effect, the bullies. In the steel industry or in the military, the foreman of a shop or the platoon's "Gunny" Sergeant quite often was the one who could dish out the meanest "beat-down." While perhaps not as blatant in more recent history, but with only scant and slight variations, the bully theme was still very much alive and a bit too common place at the end of the last century.

Today's individual contributors are not interested or tolerant of a bullying leader. In most corporate and private enterprises that old rhetoric that espouses "fraternization leads to contempt" as proven to be grossly exaggerated and inaccurate. Today's "followers" have the capacity and inclination to lead in ways that their historical counterparts never dreamed. With this new embracing of the process of leadership, the expectations held by the direct reports continue expand and escalate. In essence, leaders today have to earn the followship of their direct reports. No longer are the direct reports looking to be impressed, they want to be inspired, respected, utilized and rewarded.

Why was Spanky the leader of the gang? Is your organization being lead by a "Spanky" type of leader? Spanky worked the old criteria to his advantage. He had the gang hoodwinked into believing he was smarter, brighter, braver, and more creative then the rest of the gang. Spanky manipulated and molded the insecurities of the gang into his own platform of power and influence. Today, a "Spanky" leader would have a tough time maintaining such a farce. Not that it couldn't happen; it's just that the gang members won't stick around for 220 episodes!

While Our Gang made for moderately entertaining television, it is far from an ideal model for leadership selection. The new criterion calls for honesty, intimacy and risk taking. These are the components for building and maintaining an effective relationship with your team of associates, peers and direct reports.

If it is true, that people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care, then the leader in the demanding twenty-first century will have to abandon the vaulted security of the towering office and get to know the reality of those in the trenches. To paraphrase Colin Powell, "No Chief of Staff can offer a better report than a General on the ground." Let's explore the key components.

Honesty is simply sharing information in a timely fashion so the individual contributors can team as solution seekers instead of spectators. While there is respect for "need-to-know" boundaries, let's remember the direct reports are in the trenches and perhaps were aware of the situation before you were even apprised. Honesty is sharing the truth "in-house" so the team doesn't have to hear it in the "out-house."

Intimacy is not a term that is often used in leadership conversations, but it is the prerequisite of tapping into the discretionary effort of the team members. How much more would you do for a leader that valued you as an individual? How much more would you do for a leader who attempted to understand your reality and perspective? That is what I mean by intimacy. Intimacy is taking the time to learn about the reality of a junior accountant or entry level salesperson. Or going out of your way, out of your comfort zone, to gain their perspective and to share yours in return. Intimacy pays dividends to the leader's effectiveness and the organization's bottom line.

Because honesty and intimacy are such an anomaly, there is stern opposition and violent objection to the mere suggestion that these power tools be incorporated into the modern leader's toolkit. But the hypocrisy of the objection screams! We've already established (from your own personal experience) that you worked harder, gave more, and were more committed when you worked for a leader that valued you and your input, a leader that respected your individuality, and took time to learn about your reality. Why then are we so reluctant to use what we know is effective?

To be a leader, we must take risks. The first is to risk being different. To risk that a more "humane" approach to leadership is not only expected by those we lead, but to also recognize that a "humane" approach to leadership is highly preferred and highly effective amongst those we lead today in our multi-national, multi-cultural, mixed gender and global enterprises.

Spanky may have had the gang fooled, but today's individual contributors aren't willing to work for, with, or around a "Spanky" leader. Instead, they are expecting a leader who excels in establishing and maintaining the human interface. They are expecting a leader who is comfortable with honesty, intimacy, and risk taking. In absence of your mastery of those competencies, you will have no "gang" to lead in the demanding twenty-first century.

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