

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF GREAT LEADERSHIP: COMPETENCE

Competence is another essential quality of great leadership. We all admire people who demonstrate high levels of competence. The people who you influence or lead expect you to be a competent leader, i.e. they expect you to be well qualified and fit for leadership.

One definition of competence is the ability to do something well, measured against a standard. It refers especially to ability acquired through experience or training.

Competence is characterized by both knowledge and skills. The potential for success in personal and professional situations is based on an understanding of your competencies – the strengths you bring to an endeavor – as well as your weaknesses. When I teach the young adults in our leadership institute, I teach out of revelation, knowledge, and experience. Yet, I acknowledge that I am also continually evolving. I remain an eager learner. I search for ways to keep learning, growing, and improving.

Leadership expert John Maxwell states, “Highly competent people always go the extra mile. For them, good enough is never enough.” Highly competent people can’t settle for mediocrity or just getting by; they focus on excellence. They are not content with doing something halfway. They measure themselves against their God-given potential and stretch to reach higher and further. In the process, they motivate others to do the same.

Leaders of small organizations or businesses often by necessity wear many hats, requiring them to fulfill roles, perform tasks, or assume responsibilities for which they may not be well prepared. It’s a challenge to learn as much as is possible to carry on until people more skilled come along. In the meantime, one may feel like a jack-of-all-trades but a master-of-none! It’s difficult to develop competence if you’re trying to do everything. Instead, fortify your weak areas by collaborating with people who are strong where you are weak.

Synergy is a wonderful thing! It is everywhere in nature. It means essentially that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, where there is synergy $1 + 1$ does not equal 2; it equals 3 or more. In relationships, synergy is achieved when two or more people work together to create a better solution than either could alone. It’s not your way or my way but a better way, a higher way – a third alternative. It begins with the belief that the people involved will gain more insight by understanding what others have to contribute. The excitement of the mutual learning and insight will create a momentum toward more and more insights, learning and growth.

Synergy requires the right chemistry and emotional maturity in a group to develop. It’s a process that doesn’t just happen. Working towards it is a highly creative endeavor that does require you to get your security from integrity and inner values. If not, you may find the experience unpleasant or threatening. Nevertheless, there are mutually satisfying benefits for those able to participate.

Personally, I enjoy trying new things. Sometimes, I discover I am good at them, but often I am painfully aware that there are others much more capable and competent – others from whom I can learn and

benefit. It would be better to focus my energies on doing something that synchronizes my best skills, knowledge, interests, and opportunities to work together. Highly competent people consistently perform well, because they determine to invest their best to realize their divine potential and make the greatest contributions. And they are open to learning from others and giving those around them the freedom to make their greatest contributions.

It's important to realize which contributions are the most important in pursuing a mission or purpose. We live in a fast-paced, constantly changing environment. It benefits us to keep up on those skills and knowledge that are most relevant to our personal mission and career. The way we have always done things may no longer be the best. It also helps to anticipate where we may be in the future and prepare in advance.

Maxwell also states, "A competent person does what he does well, continually persevering and distilling what's best – and he stops doing what he doesn't do well." That means focusing on your strengths and putting the majority of your energy into what you do well in order to become highly competent in that particular area.

While developing our overall level of competence, consider there are several types of competence that are important in leadership and which exist in people in varying degrees:

Professional or technical

When taking on new responsibilities, compare your competencies to the expectations of the task, identify gaps between them, and take the actions necessary to close the gaps. Many ways exist to bring you up to speed. Look for opportunities to gain beneficial experience and increase your knowledge base.

Social

Leadership demands social competence. Leadership means relating to other people in a way that influences their thoughts, attitudes, and/or actions. Nothing happens in organizations, institutions, or business without people; therefore, the ability to entertain, inform, convince, persuade, and negotiate with others to get things done is essential. But interpersonal relationships are fraught with both written and non-written rules. Social competence is a complex, multidimensional concept that involves possessing the necessary skills (social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral) to relate effectively to others and to succeed as a member of society. It is also the foundation upon which expectations for future interactions and perceptions of one's own behavior are built. When you are building new relationships, look for synergistic opportunities to work together.

Cultural

Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures – cultures possessing particular values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals in that group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world. In a highly diverse world, a

melting pot of cultures, races, religions, and ideas, it's critical that a leader seeks to understand others and appreciate diversity. It goes beyond acknowledging or accepting differences. It means actually celebrating differences.

Cultural competence is important to seeking synergy, since the essence of synergy is to value the mental, emotional, and psychological differences between people - to respect them, to build on strengths, and to compensate for weaknesses. The person who possesses cultural competence celebrates differences, understanding that people (or cultures) see the world from different perspectives.

It requires humility, flexibility, self-awareness, and reverence to recognize our own perceptual limitations, cultural lenses, and preferences and to appreciate the rich resources available through interaction with the hearts and minds of other human beings; however, we need to see through each other's eyes to get a more comprehensive picture and understanding of the world we function in. If we are willing to listen and truly understand, we can demonstrate the skills, values, and attitudes necessary to deliver service and work effectively and harmoniously with diverse individuals and groups.

Communication

Communication competence is the degree to which a communicator's goals are achieved through effective and appropriate interaction. The leader possessing communication competence sends messages which promote attainment of these goals while maintaining social acceptability. He or she attempts to align with the goals and methods of others to produce smooth, productive, and often enjoyable dialogue. The ability to communicate candidly, clearly, and effectively is an absolutely vital skill for every leader. Communication sets the tone with the people you lead. Being open and sincere builds the trust needed to cement relationships and to develop community and cohesiveness, whereas poor communication causes confusion, distrust, and can lead to disengagement. It behooves every leader to understand the principles of communication and develop solid communication skills.

With the dizzying array of opportunities and challenges before us, let's ask, "What do I do best? How can I make the greatest impact? Where will my contributions be of the greatest value?" Once answered, go with your heart and follow the flow.

Beverly A. Najt
4Ekselans
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