

What Does it Take to be an Everyday Leader?

By Joan Fox

Leadership is remarkable. It is written about and spoken about more than any other single subject. It is held out as a characteristic that is nearly sacred, and spoken about with a sense of adoration and awe.

Indeed we not only desire but need leadership. Historians tout individual leaders as legends who won wars, mastered space and made decisions which saved entire populations. Few stepped up; many followed.

So we see the pictures, read the stories and tell the tales of the significant few that have moved among us and achieved significance and we call them leaders. The CEO's, the generals, the Kings and Queens, the Presidents, the scientists, the physicians and the architects (please forgive the many omissions) who shaped our present day state are dear to us.

We believe they had qualities that you and I may never possess or at least have to work at diligently. The goal of being a great leader seems to be more aspirational than real. We believe others were and are better equipped to influence because of their intelligence, natural talents or achieved position. We believe we must sit in workshops and be coached to accomplish anything close.

But I feel we got it wrong. The individuals that we with some degree of naiveté hold in esteem had and have the same flaws, daily challenges and Achilles heels as we all do. What they did was a matter of making a simple conscious purposeful choice to serve others and they made that choice many times, everyday. This is worthy of our respect and at the same time not beyond our own grasp.

Everyday leadership is not about the traditional leadership stuff. There is nothing wrong with the traditional thoughts about leadership. But it is time to talk about leadership which is not in the context of leading someone else—just leading oneself through everyday life in an extraordinary way.

You and I have control over our choices. We have no control over the family we are born into, the actions of a hostile nation toward our country or what a random stranger will do to us as we pass them on the street.

But it is absolutely titillating when we realize that we can control how we think and if we can control our thoughts, our feelings and actions are not far behind. And that is sheer magic.

There are five requirements for everyday leadership:

- Everyday leaders bring their “best self” to whatever they do. Self-management is a critical and a driving principle of everyday leaders.
- Everyday leaders lead from any seat. You do not have to be in a position of leadership to “take” a position of leadership.
- Everyday leaders make tough choices and have tough conversations. So many of us are unwilling to say what needs to be said. Yet, taking the time and cornering the courage to have a tough conversation can be life changing.
- Everyday leaders are possibilarians. The ability to see what is first possible over what is impossible is a differentiator.
- Everyday leaders make others “feel served” and there is a huge difference between “getting served” and “feeling served.”

Everyday leadership is about how we choose to be in the circumstances we are in. It is about the choices we make in situations that occur daily. It is a philosophy of taking action to influence what we can in a positive way. If leadership is influence, then everyday leadership is how we influence everyday.

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