Moving From Management to Leadership

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Volunteer management courses have traditionally taught management functions to volunteer managers. Little attention has been given to the role of leadership, often because volunteer managers have not been viewed as leaders within the organization. They have been considered mid-level managers, and educational programs and courses have sought to impart primarily the skills and competencies needed to perform the job. According to Levitt (as cited by Zaleznik, 1977, p. 68), “management consists of the rational design, organization, direction and control of the activities required to attain the selected purposes, and the motivating and rewarding of people to do the work”.

The Changing the Paradigm research of the Points of Light Foundation (1995) articulated the need to combine inspiring leadership with effective management for highly effective volunteer program development. This language reflects what is being discussed and written about by a wide range of experts in both the public and private sector. Workplace and generational changes call into question reliance on management techniques that grew out of industrial era, hierarchical structures. Today’s employees and volunteers want to be part of the decision-making process, engaged in the planning and evaluation of programs and projects. They look for leadership rather than management (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Wheatley (1997) suggested that: Most of us were raised in a culture that told us that the way to manage for excellence was to tell people exactly what they had to do and make sure they did it. We learned to play master designer, assuming we could engineer people into perfect performance. But you can’t direct people into perfection: you can only engage them enough so they want to do perfect work. (p. 25)

Lynch (1993) concurred: Quietly a revolution in leadership is occurring across North America. . . . As the pace of change accelerates, the need for leadership becomes more critical. Those who continue to manage in the old ways will find their organizations in crisis. . . . If we are to be a workable society, if we are to make the world a better place in which to live, those in management positions must lead as well as manage. . . . To respond quickly to changing circumstances, first-line and middle-level managers must exercise leadership. (p.3-4)
The debate between management and leadership is not a contemporary one (Manske, 1987; Zalezik, 1977); the conclusions, however, are:

While both management and leadership are necessary, the change and complexity associated with the future demands that the leadership role takes precedence over the management role. . . . Leading in this environment implies learning new ways of operating and behaving based on the demands and reality of a changing context. . . . Commitment to improve one’s personal capacity to lead is generally based on intrinsic motivation. . . . The leadership role in today’s organizations place great emphasis on transforming the enterprise through others (Hall, 1997, pp. 395, 402).

There is increasing awareness that shared leadership, (i.e., leaders at all level - policy making, executive and middle management) is the most effective model for encouraging and facilitating high impact volunteer involvement within organizations. It is no longer sufficient for a volunteer administrator simply to have the management skills for organizing and operating a volunteer program. Today’s volunteer administrators must serve as a focal point for the leadership of the volunteer program (Merrill, 1995). The management functions become dispersed throughout the organization. The volunteer administrator assumes a greater role in training and working with paid staff, as well as volunteers, to accomplish organizational goals. There is less focus on managing volunteers and greater emphasis on creating and communicating the shared vision and values.

As leaders, volunteer administrators facilitate relationships and support systems that allow volunteers to make significant contributions to the organization’s mission. This change in role necessitates a new look at the competencies required for leadership.

Traditional management teaching implies that the ideal organization is orderly and stable, that the organizational process can and should be engineered so that things run like clockwork. . . . Traditional management teachings suggest that the job of management is primarily one of control. . . . Leaders don’t command and control: they serve and support. (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, pp. 15-16)

According to Wheatly (1997): People do not need the intricate directions, time lines, plans, and organizational charts that we thought we had to give them. But people do need a lot from their leaders. They need information, access to one another, resources, trust, and follow-through. Leaders are necessary to foster experimentation, to help create connections across the organization, to feed the system with rich information from multiple sources - all while helping everyone stay clear on what we agreed we wanted to accomplish and who we wanted to be. (p. 25)
Drucker (1996) suggested that: The core characteristics of effective leaders . . . include basic intelligence, clear and strong values, high levels of personal energy, the ability and desire to grow constantly, vision, infectious curiosity, a good memory, and the ability to make followers feel good about themselves. . . . Built on [these] foundation characteristics are enabling behaviors . . . including empathy, predictability, persuasive capability, the ability and willingness to lead by personal example, and communication skills. . . . It is the weaving together, the dynamic interaction, of the characteristics on a day-by-day, minute-by-minute basis that allow truly effective leadership. (pp. 222-225)

Vineyard (1993) wrote about the changing role of volunteer program administrators. She identified the need to move away from the direct management of volunteers to a greater leadership role within the organization. She coined such terms as “leadershift” and “relational management” which had “little to do with directing the nuts and bolts but has more to do with how people relate to work, themselves and others” (pp. 186-187). Vineyard gradually changed her language from “volunteer executives” to “leaders” as she described the competencies required to move the profession into the next century. Volunteer administrators have traditionally viewed themselves as managers of people and programs. Yet, many have served as pioneers, designing, directing, and sustaining volunteer programs with limited resources and often little organizational support.

They served as leaders in an emerging profession, going beyond designing systems of control and reward by displaying innovation, individual character, and the courage of conviction.

Contrary to the myth that leadership is reserved for only a few, or that leaders are born not made, a wide range of contemporary experts have shown that leadership is a learnable set of capacities that can be acquired by ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results (Apps, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 1995). According to DePree (1989): Leadership is an art, something to be learned over time, not simply by reading books. Leadership is more tribal than scientific, more a weaving of relationship than an amassing of information. . . . The goal of thinking hard about leadership is not to produce great or charismatic or well-known leaders. The measure of leadership is not the quality of the head, but the tone of the body. (pp. 3, 11-12)

References


Wheatly, M. “Goodbye command and control.” Leader to Leader, Summer, 1997, No. 5, (p. 25)


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