



How Do You Become A Better Leader?

The games may have changed, but the rules remain the same.

THE YEAR WAS 213 B.C. HANNIBAL, THE great Carthaginian general, was about to be attacked by the Roman general Varo. Hannibal had 22,000 men; Varo had 72,000. Hannibal was advised to retreat, but he had a vision.

Hannibal decided that he would expose a weak front to Varo, knowing that when Varo saw this he would attack — forgetting about Hannibal's strong (and hidden) left and right flanks. After Varo assaulted this front line, Hannibal would encircle Varo and destroy him.

Now Hannibal's followers thought he was nuts. But because he had a vision and could effectively communicate it, Hannibal was able to persuade his troops to accept his vision and commit to its success. What ensued was one of the most decisive battles in the history of war. More than 60,000 Romans were killed in that single encounter.

Hannibal succeeded against the odds because he had the qualities of a leader: Vision, Communication, Persuasion and Commitment. Today, the same qualities are still paramount to anyone who must effectively communicate ideas to co-workers, employees or customers.

How do the qualities of leadership apply to you? According to Bill Gergely, senior corporate marketing manager at Pioneer-Standard Electronics in Cleveland, OH, "We believe that proper leadership aids our field support in doing their jobs better. We believe in open lines of communication and including our people in decisions, while at the same time using leadership skills to guide them in the direction that they need to go."

So, how do you become a better leader?

• **First, in order to develop your vision, access a need.** It might be improving customer relations, cultivating new customers, introducing a new product. Second, conduct a thorough study of your company's history (answers to the present often come out of the past). Pinpoint the successes and failures. Third, study your competition. What new products have they introduced? How are they

working to create excellent customer service? Research successful and not-so-successful marketing strategies.

• **The next step is communication.** In the book *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker states that more than 60 percent of all problems in corporations are attributed to poor communication. If you can't communicate, you can't build a team. You must surround yourself with a cohesive group of individuals who understand your vision and are empowered to make decisions, based on their understanding of that vision.

There is no stronger form of communication than to lead by example. William Hewitt's vision in the 1950s was to turn an old farm machinery company called John Deere into a multi-national corporation. Instead of dictating orders, Hewitt rolled up his sleeves and got into the trenches with his employees. He unceasingly asked: "Can we do this any better?" One long-time employee summed it up by saying, "Hewitt made us learn how good we are."

• **After communication comes persuasion, closely followed by commitment.** In order to persuade others to commit to your vision, you must first be committed to its success. Without that commitment, it will be difficult to handle the negativity and fear of change that will come from those who don't want you to succeed. Some leaders, however, can use negativity to their advantage. Ted Turner loves to hear people tell him he can't do something. "There's nothing that makes me feel better," he once said.

The vision, communication, persuasion and commitment principles have been around for centuries. The games may have changed, but the rules remain the same: No matter what you want to accomplish in your company, by being a better leader you will be able to guide your team to victory... even when others think the odds are against you. ☐

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He is an advisor and speaker for many

Fortune 500 corporations on the topics of leadership, creativity and teamwork.

Look for Bob at this fall's High Performance Marketing conference, held Sept. 27-29 in Chicago.