

What's Leadership?

by **Lou Stoops**

Corporations are spending huge amounts of money attempting to answer this question but there still seems to be debate regarding a clear and basic definition. The bookstores are filled with titles that illustrate one paradigm of leadership after another, yet a workable definition is lacking. The core definition of leadership that I like best is summed up in the word influence. Influence is at the heart of what it means to be a leader. A leader is someone who has it. It can be positive influence or negative influence, makes no difference. Influence is leadership.

This definition lends itself to development. Since everyone has influence of some sort, everyone is a leader. How you use your influence is the determining factor of the kind of leader you are. We can influence people in powerful ways, for good or ill. It's up to us to learn how to express influence in ways that promote the best interest of those we lead. Acquiring positive methods and characteristics will improve your leadership as a spouse, a parent, and an employee or as a business owner. Your personal and professional life, to become happy and productive, depends upon you using your influence in a positive manner.

The following methods of influence work best when they flow from a heart that's genuine. You can't fake it and expect to be a good leader.

Listen With Your Heart As Well As Your Head

People respond to our efforts to influence them if they believe we have their best interest at heart. To do this, we must take the time and expend the energy, to listen. Listen for feelings as well as facts. What people say can be insightful, but how they say it can be extremely insightful. Listen to the voice inflections; observe the body language. Put yourself in their place. Have compassion.

Focus On Them

If you want to lead people, influencing them in helpful ways, then get over yourself. Great leaders focus upon others. When you're engaged conversation with someone, don't be thinking of what you're going to say next while they're speaking. Focus in on them. Influence costs; you have to pay attention!

Be Helpful

Good leaders help people. Become a resource person for others. When someone shares a need, find a way to help. Over the years I've developed quite a database of resource agencies and people. When I meet someone and they have a particular need, I will often research my database to provide some sort of real help for the person. It may be information; might be a contact. It will be helpful and they will be pleasantly surprised that I took time and put forth effort in their behalf.

Honestly Influence

People are used to others not being honest. With often find ourselves shrouding our real opinions and play a deception game. I'm not for being rude or hurtful, but many times we shroud our real opinions from the individual, only to gossip later. A good leader seeks to be honest in their dealings. They influence people with truth. The Bible teaches us to "...speak the truth in love." A good leader realizes that how you speak truth is just as important as speaking the truth.



Priority

Developing Leaders from the Inside Out

Lead With Your Life

If you desire to have real influence, this becomes crucial. What we do speak's louder than what we say. Parents need this understanding from the beginning. Children follow the actions and attitudes of the parents long before they're old enough to process their words. To lead well we must live well.

Are you a leader? Of course you are. What kind of leader are you? Hopefully, your influence helps instead of hinders. Decide today that you'll seek to do your best to lead in a positive manner and if you do, you'll find that both your personal and professional life will become much happier and more productive.