Values-Based Leadership

Introduction

What is values-based leadership? In simple terms, values-based leadership is leading by staying true to one’s principles and core values. You may be wondering, does this mean that a values-based leader should never comprise or change their tactics? The answer quite simply is no. The leader may change his or her strategy, tactics, or approach given a specific situation, but they should never compromise their underlying values, beliefs, or principles.

This reading will identify and analyze the key qualities for values-based leadership and provide examples of past and present values-based leaders.

Key Qualities for Values-Based Leaders

The following article has been adapted from Harry Jensen Kramer Jr.’s book, From Values to Action: The Four Principles of Values-Based Leadership. There are four essential qualities of a values-based leader. A description of each quality is provided below.

1. **Self-reflection** is the capacity of human beings to exercise introspection and the willingness to learn more about their fundamental nature, purpose and essence. A person must be aware of how his or her experiences, education, priorities, beliefs, and values affect how he or she makes decisions, leads others, and handles conflict.

2. **Balance** refers to a person’s ability to view a situation from different perspectives. A person should remain open minded and consider all opinions before making decisions.

3. **Self-confidence** is essential for leaders to truly believe in themselves. Leaders should be able to identify personal areas of strength and weakness while working to improve their abilities. Leaders with high self-confidence are better equipped to ask for help when needed and use their strengths to assist others whenever possible.
4. **Humility** will help to keep things in perspective for a leader. One should never automatically assume that they know more than others or know what is best for every situation; rather, a leader should remain humble and seek out help when necessary.

**Examples of Values-Based Leaders**

Let’s look at a few examples of well-known values-based leaders throughout history.

- **Mahatma Gandhi** never wavered from his ultimate goal of using non-violent means to achieve Indian independence.

- **Mother Teresa** spent much of her life working to alleviate the tragic conditions suffered by the poor, the sick, the orphaned, and the dying.

- **Martin Luther King Jr.** led the civil rights movement, dedicating much of his life to achieving racial equality throughout the United States.

- **Nelson Mandela**, the former President of South Africa, fought to end Apartheid and to bring democratic values to his country.

Values-based leadership is visible throughout the business world. In our modern society there are many great examples of leaders who have embraced this approach.

- **Robert Galvin**, son of Motorola’s founder, stayed true to his values and spent much of his time as CEO working to instill exceptional quality and excellence throughout the company.

- **Linda Mason**, founder of Bright Horizons, regularly demonstrates her passion for helping young children get the right start in life. Her company works to provide outstanding childcare and education in order to promote early cognitive development.

- **Howard Schultz**, Starbuck’s current CEO, remains steadfast in his efforts to build a profitable and sustainable future for his company without forgoing his belief that everyone deserves to make a livable wage. He worked to ensure that
all of his employees—from high-level executives all the way down to baristas—have access to the same healthcare benefits and company incentives.

- **John Mackey**, co-founder of Whole Foods Market, has built a thriving grocery store empire without sacrificing the quality of his products or the value offered to his customers.

**Summary**

- **Values-based leaders** align their personal values with those of their organization.
- While it’s acceptable to adjust a basic strategy or tactics to achieve a business goal, Leaders should never compromise their fundamental principles or core values.
- There are four key qualities of a values-based leader: self-reflection, balance, self-confidence, and humility.
- A person can be a values-based leader in any position or level by applying the four key qualities of values-based leadership.
- Values-based leaders are selfless and driven by the needs of others; they are not motivated by power, money, status, or fame.