

FEATURE



Leadership —

The Secret to Success

by Jodi Lemacks *with* Jon Caswell



How does an organization survive, much less thrive, at a time when the national economy is uncertain, people are becoming more and more polarized in their beliefs, and technology that negates in-person contact seems to be increasing? That's a tall order, but the answer is short – good leadership. While national issues certainly influence organizations, studies show that leaders have a significant impact on a group's success or failure as well as on the experiences of its members. With the election of national officers for MHI at hand, the issue of leadership is a pertinent – and timely – one.

So how do we make sure MHI has good leaders? It may be that some leaders are born, but most are made, and to stay effective, all leaders must continuously work on their own leadership skills. Leaders rarely get to rest on their laurels, so they must always be developing. Another thing successful leaders must do is develop new leaders. Whether born or made, all leaders must continue to learn and grow, at the same time empowering the leaders of tomorrow.

“Our leaders must always be on the lookout to identify a successor and then draw that person in and see how they work,” said Margaret Elbert, current president of MHI. “As leaders, we must always be open to hear new ideas and challenges and work on them. That shows we have not stopped in our growth and that we understand that ours are not the only acceptable ideas.”

Kevin Cashman, author of *Leadership from the Inside Out*, posits that leadership development must come from within. In his book he identifies six pathways to help leaders understand how to develop themselves. These pathways are all essential to developing leadership qualities, and one path does not need to occur before another.

Rule #1 – Know Thyself

The first pathway Cashman identified he calls personal mastery. Personal mastery involves exploring who we are as leaders. We all know of leaders who appear “fake” or as if they are promoting a personal agenda. Followers do not trust these leaders and, as a result, many people will leave the group. Also, followers often become involved in an organization because of its mission, and when they determine a leader’s mission is not the same as the organization’s, they will seek out another organization more in line with that mission. As leaders, it is crucial to portray your authentic self.

“The first quality of a good leader is his knowledge of where he is taking the group,” said Henry Atkinson, immediate past president of Chapter 28 in Richmond, Va., winner of the 2007 President’s Cup. “That

generally drawn to others a lot like themselves, but for organizations to succeed, we need diversity. To get diverse members, we need to look at how we view others and how that affects the diversity of the group. What should our leadership group look like? Is the leadership style being used (e.g., top-down or consensus-driven) the most effective one for the group? When people in leadership look at these questions, they become more “real” as leaders, and their group members are more likely to trust in them and in the group.

Relinquishing Control = Effective Leadership

The second thing leaders should master is an understanding of their own talents. Each of us is blessed with different gifts and skills, and good leaders use those gifts and talents to accomplish things for the group.

Unfortunately, many leaders want to control every aspect of the organization because they feel that they can do the job best or that they are the only person willing to do the job. This may get the task at hand done, but it’s not an effective way to grow an organization. “My vice president told me that I was going to be tough act to follow,”

said Randy Gay, president of Chapter 324 in Missoula, Mont. “I am not a good delegator, so I do a lot. Now that I’m trying to find a replacement, I realize that I need to change the perception that the president has to be all-consumed to have a successful chapter.”

Leaders need to conduct activities that they do well and learn to capitalize on the gifts and talents of their followers by delegating tasks where others have strengths. Leaders who do everything for the group often suffer burnout. “Chapters must get new members, or it will be nearly impossible to develop new leaders,” said Dennis Ragan, chairman of the national Nominating Committee and a member of Chapter 135 in Timberville, Va. “We can only recycle our existing members through the various offices of the chapter so many times before they burn out and, understandably, will no longer serve, which leads to a chapter closing.”



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knowledge includes objectives, risks, rewards and costs in time and money. Second, he must inspire confidence in his followers that he has the knowledge and ability to lead them there. This comes from his experience in doing it before or from extrapolation from similar circumstances. Augmenting these skills and abilities, a good leader must be honest and truthful with himself and his followers, tough and compassionate, and dedicated to the task at hand.”

To accomplish personal mastery, Cashman suggests that you ask yourself what you believe about yourself, other people, life and leadership. To figure out what we believe about ourselves, we can ask questions like,

“Who do I feel that I am?”

“How do I think others see me as a leader?”

“What things are most important to me?”

“What values do I hold dear?”

These questions have no right or wrong answers, just illuminating ones. When you can better understand whether your own values and beliefs reflect those of the organization, you are more likely to be successful.

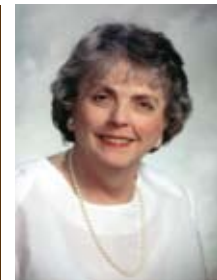
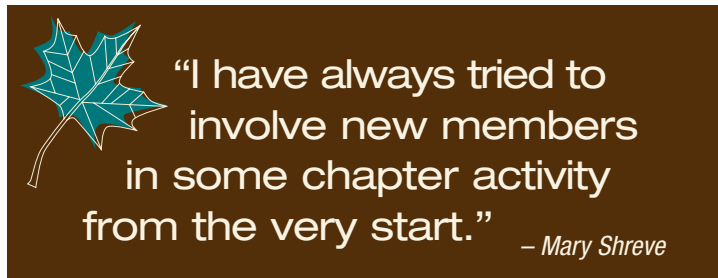
Determining what you believe about other people is also very important. People are

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— Randy Gay



In addition, members of groups where the leadership has too much control are unhappy because they don't feel included or needed. Good leaders use the talents of as many group members as possible. "I have always tried to involve new members in some chapter activity from the very start," said Mary Shreve, current president of Chapter 28 in Richmond, Va.



Improvement or Flop, Try Something New

Third, leaders need to be open to change – letting go of old patterns and taking a fresh approach helps organizations grow. Just because "this is the way we have always done it" doesn't mean it's the best way to do it. The world is constantly changing, so leaders and groups need to change too. For example, realizing that the Hispanic population is increasing dramatically in this country, effective leaders will find ways to include people of Hispanic descent in their groups.

"I have tried to implement a lot of different 'improvements,' most of which have turned into 'flops,'" Randy Gay said. "But I don't quit. Maybe the next one will be a real winner!"

Listening Between the Lines

The fourth area for mastery is interpersonal skills. Many organizations, especially small ones, have leaders with wonderful intellect and technical expertise, but their people skills may be lacking. Sometimes that happens because it takes good organization and the ability to complete tasks to get into a leadership position in the first place. However, leaders must look at others as human beings, understanding that they have similar

wants, fears and needs to their own. When a leader sees others as people, rather than as followers or group members, it sets a context that everyone is working toward a common goal. When group members are headed in the same direction, the leader can lead more effectively.

"To me, one very important quality any leader needs is to be a good listener," said George Dunkelberg of Chapter 145 in Cedar Falls, Iowa and an ARD. "By that I mean not just hearing the words people say, but developing an ability to interpret what people are really trying to communicate. My mother's term for it was 'listening between the lines.' If a leader really develops that one skill, then he or she will automatically become more effective in all the other qualities needed to be a good leader."

"I make a point of knowing something about each member who attends meetings and recognizing the achievements of our members both in and out of MHI," Mary Shreve said.

The Hardest Thing – Relax

Simply being is the fifth area good leaders must master. Leaders, especially those with a cardiac condition, need times of silence when they can be present in the world, without the mind chatter that focuses on the past or worries about the future. This is a difficult skill for most leaders because they are doers, but

WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR

The Nominating Committee uses six basic qualities of a leader as a guideline when considering and recruiting potential candidates:

1. Leaders understand the objectives of MHI and are able to convey this understanding to the people around them. They are communicators.
2. Leaders understand the importance of teamwork and are able to help create the conditions necessary for it to exist.
3. Leaders recognize the challenges and are not afraid of them.
4. Leaders are able to delegate. They don't have to and shouldn't do everything themselves.
5. Leaders inspire confidence and interest in being involved in the process.
6. Leaders have the ability to help other people see the best in themselves.



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it’s a skill that needs to be worked on. There are many ways to access this quiet consciousness, but the point is to relax intentionally for a few minutes every day. This “non-activity” such as listening quietly to music or walking in nature enhances creativity and underlies good leadership. (See “Sit Still, Do Nothing” on p. 13.)

A Balanced Life = Effective Leadership

Finally, good leaders need balance in their lives. Most leaders work much more than is needed to get the job done, often neglecting family, friends, exercise and good nutrition as well as the personal time mentioned above. This often results in uneasiness, irritability or lack of focus. It’s hard continue to lead well when you’re “off.” When a person’s life is out of balance, it’s easy for unforeseen pressure to produce dramatic and stress-filled episodes, including health crises, that interrupt focus and disrupt progress.

“I have always said that family comes first and your health runs right next to it,” said President Elbert. “There is no leadership position worth giving up one thing that made your life full, fun and challenging. Some days you must turn the computer off, take the phone off the hook and say enough. Tomorrow I will start over. Life is much too precious to lose the joy and just work, work, work to be recognized. It’s not worth it.”

Plan on Leaving

Once leaders develop themselves, they must look to develop the leaders who will follow them so that the organization continues to grow and flourish. The reality is that many times leadership transitions fail. To prevent this, leaders must carefully consider

who the future leaders should be and how to provide them with the best chance of success. Good succession planning is essential.

“I suggest that you put any new members to work right away; that way you can assess their skills and capabilities,” Dennis Ragan said. “Watch how people interact at meetings, and make note of those people who demonstrate strong ‘people’ skills. Notice who steps up to volunteer for chapter projects.” (See “What They’re Looking For,” p. 11.)

To develop future leaders, current leaders must seek out people with gifts and talents that would benefit the organization. “In our chapter, each board member and

“In our chapter, each board member and committee member targets a replacement for ourselves.”

– Jo Ann Kats



committee member targets a replacement for ourselves and recruits them for that job,” said Jo Ann Kats of Chapter 11 in Louisville, Ky. This means looking beyond friends, the most vocal people in the group, or even the people who want to do the job, and truly considering what group members might bring to the organization.

WINNING TIP

Identifying talent is the precursor to good leadership. In MHI, ARDs have the task of identifying new talent. They use the Talent Identification Program (TIP) to pass along information on potential leaders. All national and regional officers are constantly on the lookout for talented individuals, and they encourage suggestions and referrals from members. “We must increase our visibility

through community outreach,” said Nominating Committee chairman Dennis Ragan. “Chapter outreach efforts must be directed to younger heart patients and families. Not just the 30- and 40-year-olds, but those people who are newly retired or about to retire and may have time to volunteer. Our need for capable leadership has never been greater than it is right now.” Make your suggestions to your ARD.



Dennis Ragan

SIT STILL, DO NOTHING

From "Finding Time Sitting Still," a meditation course

"We ask new members to fill out a brief questionnaire, which includes basic biographical information, interests, etc.," George Dunkelberg said. "We use that information when needs arise within the chapter. When our secretary recently resigned for health reasons, we were able to identify several possible replacements, one of whom took the job."

Again, diversity is essential to your chapter's survival, so it's good to look at people of different ages, races, cultures, socio-economic statuses, etc. as future leaders. (See "Winning TIP" on p. 12.)

"We identify members of our chapter who attend meetings regularly, express their concerns about the chapter, and seem to have a certain talent," said Mike Weber of Chapter 296 in Longwood, Fla. "Then we try to cultivate that talent by getting them involved with some aspect of the chapter that interests them. After folks become board members, we try to assess their desires relating to a leadership position. We 'groom' our future presidents by asking them to run for vice president first. In that position they work closely with the president with the intention of moving into the presidency."

Once a leader identifies potential leaders, he or she needs to make sure they have the resources they need to lead. This requires open communication with the potential leaders. First of all, they need to know exactly what they are getting into and what is expected of them. It also means finding opportunities to empower these potential leaders to take charge of certain tasks, as Mike Weber suggested. These opportunities should involve clear expectations and accountability.

"When new leadership enters all excited and determined they are going to do the best job, we must give them the education, tools and benefit of our experience to help them," President Elbert said. "Before they take office, meet with the new officers for a question-and-answer session. Most important, let them know that you are there for them, only a phone call away. You dreamed and they helped you; now it is their dream, and you need to help them make it happen."

Finally, it's generally productive for leaders to mentor potential leaders. Chapter 16 of Lynchburg, Va., winner of the 2008 President's Cup, has instituted a mentoring program where a new officer is tutored by the outgoing officer. This kind of mentoring is always done with the understanding that the new leader may do things differently. That's necessary for the growth and well-being of your group.

Leadership is what gets organizations like MHI through challenging times. Perhaps it is time to look within yourself

It's hard to relax when you've got a lot on your mind, but that's exactly the time you need to. It may be impossible to turn off a torrent of thoughts, but it is possible to slow them down. It's as easy as breathing and watching.

Close your eyes. Think of your mind as a river and each thought is a leaf on its surface. Now take a deep breath and sit on the banks of that river where you can watch those leaves go by. As a thought-leaf passes, label it with the emotion it carries – sad thought, happy thought, angry thought, regretful thought, to-do list thought – and let it go. Soon another thought will appear; identify it and let it go. Do it again for the next thought that comes, and the next and the next. Do this for five minutes. Breathe deeply at first or when you've found that you've tumbled into the river of thought and emotion and your breathing has gone shallow, but then let your breathing return to normal.

At first this may feel awkward or impossible, but do it anyway. Daily practice of a simple thought-watching/breathing technique like this can have many beneficial consequences – from enhanced creativity to better sleep and lower blood pressure. The secret to receiving these benefits is daily practice. Inconsistent practice produces inconsistent results.

and see if you have something your chapter or group needs. Now here's the good thing about giving yourself to your chapter – your chapter improves, you grow and heart patients are served. That's what's called a win-win-win situation. ❤️

Editor's Note: Jodi Lemacks teaches leadership for the School of Continuing Studies at University of Richmond. She is also the National Program Coordinator for MLH.



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