Why We Need Leaders
by Gary Rush, IAF CPF

Businesses, governments, communities, and organizations in general need leaders. I have been consulting businesses for the past 20 years and the most common problem has been the lack of effective leadership. I once facilitated a series of employee satisfaction workshops for the IT department of a major corporation. I anticipated that salaries or workload would be the major complaint. When the workshops were done, the top two complaints were leadership failures:

"We don't know the company vision."
"Senior Management doesn't communicate with us."

Issues that can be easily corrected still persist in many organizations. Organizations seem to think that if someone is "in charge," as in management, they have a leader. That isn't true. In developing a strategic plan for a major government agency who had recently changed from having a career senior executive to a politically appointed senior executive, changing every 4 years, I asked the executives to develop a vision - where they would be in 20 years. Their response was, "On the beach in Florida." We laughed and I rephrased, "Where will your agency be in 20 years?" Their response was, "We don't care, because we'll be on the beach in Florida."

They knew that their senior executive would change every 4 years so, why bother setting a 20-year vision? The problem was that senior management had never expressed a vision for the agency - they had a manager; what they needed was a leader. How effective is the agency when their management is only thinking about being on a beach in Florida?

Trust in our "leaders" has waned in recent years due to the number of senior executives indicted for fraud, the number of senior executives in jail, the number of political leaders caught lying, and even respected news anchors reporting half truths or outright lies. Where have our leaders gone? Our society is craving real leaders - those we trust and want to follow. Unfortunately, most organizations invest in management training but not so much in leadership training.

Leadership is critical to business and to life. There has been a lot of work done and books written about leadership, yet it is still very undervalued. Most companies spend more time and money training management than they do training leadership. The most successful organizations - whether they are a business, government, community or military - are successful because of great leaders. Of all the skills needed in groups, leadership is the most important.

WHAT IS A LEADER?
First of all, let me define some terms. *Leader* – One who guides or <u>inspires</u> others in action or opinion; one who takes the lead in any enterprise or movement; one who is "followed."

Leader is a role.

Leadership – The <u>lifting of people's vision</u> to a higher sight, the raising of their performance to a higher standard, the building of their personality beyond its normal limitations (Drucker, 1985).

Leadership is an event.

Manager – One who <u>supervises</u> or directs others in an enterprise. Everyone from supervisor through president is a "manager."

Manager is a job.

Management – The <u>organizational process</u> that includes strategic planning, setting objectives, managing resources, deploying the human and financial assets needed to achieve objectives, and measuring results. Management is the effective utilization and coordination of resources to achieve defined objectives with maximum efficiency.

Management is a process.

I underlined key words in each definition. Leaders guide and inspire. Managers support the process. Both are important. "Inventories can be managed, but people must be led." H. Ross Perot. Management training is important but it isn't leadership training.

WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

Leaders may be born, created, or rise to the occasion but all possess similar characteristics. These are a combination of their personality, their beliefs, and their capabilities - what you are, know, and do. Together, they create a leader. Effective leaders inspire trust and confidence in their followers.

<u>Effective leaders communicate clearly</u> and honestly to their followers. The leader inspires and leads through strategic thinking, building trust, supporting and empowering their followers, setting the example, valuing their beliefs and ethics, using their knowledge of the job, building teams, and effective decision making. They pull it together by listening, envisioning, and communicating bolstered by their personality and confidence.

NEEDED SKILLS

What skills does a leader need? Effective leaders need skills for:

• Active Listening
• Managing Conflict
• Decision Making
• Strategic Thinking
• Empowering Their Followers
• Building Teams

These skills help the leader achieve their mission in life. That mission is to:
Define a Vision
Then:
• Enable
• Make possible
• Make it easier for the group to:
     o Communicate effectively
     o Feel part of the whole
     o Successfully achieve the vision

PRIMARY ROLE

The leader's primary role is to envision an outcome then enable and empower his or her team to achieve that vision. Strategic thinking enables the leader to articulate the vision. Team building, managing conflict, and decision-making enable the team - they help the team do their job. Listening and empowering help the team feel part of and buy-in to the vision.

DEVELOPING LEADERS

Whether you believe that leaders are born, created, or rise to the occasion, capabilities can be trained. Just as we can train managers to follow human resource procedures, we can train leaders to listen to their people, to build successful teams, and to establish and communicate visions. The military has been doing this for years. It is equally important for businesses and other organizations. Once trained, budding leaders need to be nurtured. They need good examples to follow. They need to be allowed to lead - and fail. Many businesses are risk-averse. They punish failures and

that not only stifles innovation, it stifles leadership. Executives become "safe" and stop leading resorting to managing only. Organizations get their leaders by training potential future leaders, nurturing them, and allowing them to lead.

Every organization needs to establish a concerted leadership development program. This is very important. Begin by identifying potential leaders in the organization. Start with those who express interest - that shows a desire. Watch to see who in the organization naturally leads - they exist. When you identify them, encourage them, determine their training needs, and get them trained.

Training is the least expensive way to improve any organization. Once they have training, let them lead. Assign mentors so they can grow into their role and the organization can risk failure without it becoming disastrous. As Ralph Nader said, "The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers." In the highly competitive and highly volatile world we live in, those with great leaders will do great things. Those with ineffective leaders will flounder. Great leaders have created every great society. RL

As a Facilitator, **Gary Rush** improves client business performance through effective application of exceptional facilitation processes and he is highly skilled at engaging participants and guiding them to consensus. Gary has written numerous "how-to" books including the ***FoCuSeDTM Facilitator Guide*** – a comprehensive reference manual sharing his step-by-step process so that students can replicate his practices. Learn more about Gary at <u>MGR Consulting.</u>