Do You Really Want to Be a Leader?

I once thought that leaders spent their time immersed in thoughts about the distant future, surrounded by admiring, happy people looking up to them as willing mentors. Leaders led a life of thinking, studying, relaxed research of the latest trends, unchallenged respect, and endless harmony. Leaders face no conflicts or arguments. After all, they’re leaders and people listen to them.

Alas, the reality of being a leader is that it can be awfully lonely, terribly frustrating, and easily drive you to cynicism. And yet, today there are more and more people who want to become leaders. When asked why, they really don’t have a good reason except that they think they can make more money. Little do they know that, as a leader, you get handed lots of abuse. A good leader takes a little more of the blame, a little less of the credit, and does a lot more of the work.

If you are still interested in becoming a leader, ask yourself these five questions:

1. **Do other peoples failure’s annoy me or challenge me?**
   Every company has employees who need a lot of help. Do the failures of the people that work for you annoy you, or challenge you to help them improve? Do you look for ways to help them succeed and overcome their shortcomings? Do you encourage them to seek ways to improve? If not, being a leader may not be for you.

2. **Am I using people, or am I cultivating and mentoring them?**
   Simply put, do you manipulate people or do you mentor them to be better professionals? If you are a manipulator, people will ultimately figure that out and you will lose their loyalty. They will then leave,
creating a hole in your organization. Furthermore, they will surely warn others of your manipulative tactics. If you are a manipulator, being a leader is not for you.

3. Do I direct people or do I develop them?
Are you wrapped up in telling people what to do, or do you look for ways for your staff to learn from every task? Are you more concerned with the mechanics of getting things done rather than why you are doing what you are doing? Is merely reaching a milestone more important to you than the benefit of what is being done? If so, being a leader is not for you.

4. Do I criticize or do I encourage?
Is your first instinct is to criticize—why didn’t you do it this way or that way? Or do you take every opportunity to encourage people to do things their way? And when they fail, do you encourage them to try again? Remember, as a leader you are building up people, not tearing them down. If you lean toward criticism and tearing people down, being a leader is not for you.

5. Do I shun controversy or judiciously pick my battles?
There are too many managers today who avoid controversy and conflict at all costs. There are also managers who look for every opportunity to argue just for the sake of argument. To be a successful leader, you need to pick your battles carefully and fight them to win. You need to be prepared for controversy but not seek it out. If you shun controversy at all costs, being a leader is not for you.

Good leaders are definitely needed today. It can be a lonely job, and being continually in the spotlight can make it difficult to avoid becoming arrogant. You need to surround yourself with good people who will keep you humble. The old saw is true: power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

When you choose to become a leader, you surrender yourself to others. You have to be able to listen, be disciplined, and be able to