

THE VETERINARIANS AND THEIR ROLE IN LEADERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Kenya many people think that only politicians and appointed administrators are leaders. This concept is drawing us backwards instead of pushing us forward because attention is diverted towards platform speakers and demagogues and we forget about those many persons who are leading our industries, learning research institutions, civil service, NGOs and religious organizations. As veterinarians, one of the most important roles we must assume is that of leadership. This role carries with it considerable amount of responsibilities to our clients, patients, community and staff. The first organizational goal as leaders is to earn the respect of our staff, clients and community. This respect does not mean that all our staff will always like us: sometimes we will make seemingly unpopular decisions. But a decision whether popular or not is a decision—it provides a direction. One way to bring down an organization or a thriving practice is to fail to make decisions or to be indecisive, a situation, which borders on powerlessness and as Rosabeth Kanter of Harvard Business School has said; 'Powerlessness corrupts but absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely'.

BUT WHAT IS LEADERSHIP OR WHO IS A LEADER?

Many times we mistake managers for leaders but this is because the difference between the two is subtle: 'Managers are people who do things right but leaders are people who do the right things'. The difference may be summarized as activities of mastering routine, i.e. efficiency (managers) versus activities of vision and judgement i.e. effectiveness (leaders). It is interesting to observe the reaction of a manager and of a leader to a new idea/invention or change brought forward by a junior member of staff. A manager is likely to retort 'it will never work'. But a leader is likely to ask 'how do you see that working here, Mr Kazamoyo?'

You can see that the manager's response does not give much room for opening a conversation or dialogue; he does not belong; he has no ideas to offer, bright ideas can only come from the Manager; the Manager does not want to listen.

On the other hand, the leader's approach is one of encouragement, he is ready to listen to the young employee; he has opened a conversation/dialogue.

It has been said earlier that managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing. It is, however, not uncommon for a leader to do the wrong thing and do it well. It is equally not uncommon for a manager to do an excellent job of solving the wrong problem.

What then, are the attributes of a leader? What qualities make people to respect and follow a leader?

1. *Technical Competence*

This means knowing the key bits of information that are critical to sound decision making; A leader should never claim to know everything.

2. *Conceptual Awareness/Vision*

As Father Theodore Hesburg of Notre Dame University once said, 'The very essence of leadership is what you have as a vision'. Vision is the big picture of where an organization is going and the responsibility of a leader is to develop a vision. Good leaders will first confer with their people and then use the input to increase a powerful vision for the betterment of the organization.

3. *Honesty*

Not being honest with your employee is called MANAGEMENT BY FITNESS. If an employee does not get a promotion because he/she lack the necessary skills, be honest with him/her and tell him/her so. This will help him/her to improve his/her skills, but if you tell him/her that promotion was denied because of budgetary constraints you have not helped him/her at all. You create bitterness if the next day somebody else is promoted.

4. *Management of Attention*

Leaders are the kinds of people that others are drawn to. This is because they have an agenda, a clear vision of where they are going. When you are around such people you sense commitment which makes you want to join them and realize their vision. Leaders make their dreams apparent and they enroll others in making them happen. Some people call them charismatic.

5. *Management of Meaning*

To make the dream apparent, leaders must communicate

their vision and align others with it. The ideas must be made tangible and real. A leader must listen for feelings as well as or content and stay open to opinions and ideas from others. A leader must be able to express succinctly his ideas or vision in a non-intimidating manner. When you communicate meaning you create team spirit. Good communication inspires and brings out the best in people.

6. *Management of Trust*

The main determinant of trust is consistency; people need to know where you stand.

7. *Management of Self*

This means the appropriate deployment of one's capabilities; you know yourself and what you are good at. A leader has the capacity to learn from his/her mistakes and to use something that does not go well as a stepping stone. Leaders should not dwell on their mistakes so long as they made an honest effort. Equally important, good leaders do not dwell on their greatness and achievement at every given opportunity. Let others judge or assess you. Leaders do not try to be all things to all people. They must learn to overcome the strong human urge of wanting to feel that 'only the players can win a game'.

The above attributes if effectively applied lead to the following results:

1. People will feel important: each one feels that at least in a small way he/she can make a difference.
2. Learning and competence matter: leaders value learning and mastery; there are no failures, only mistakes that give us feedback and tell us what to do next.

3. People will feel part of a community/a sense of belonging: where there is leadership there is a team. Even those who do not get a long feel a sense of community.
4. People will find work interesting: leaders pull rather than push people along. Pulling attracts and influences them to enroll in a vision for the future. Motivation is through identification rather than rewards and punishments. The result is quality performance and dedication.

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