Core Leadership Skills for the SH&E Professional

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Introduction

"We must become the change we want to see."

--Mahatma Gandhi

Leadership has been described as the "process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task" [1]. A definition more inclusive of followers comes from Alan Keith of Genentech who said "Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen." [2] Students of leadership have produced theories involving traits [3], situational interaction, function, behavior, power, vision and values [4], charisma, and intelligence among others.

In *The human equation: Building profits by putting people first* (1998), Jeffery Pfeffer notes that Japanese production plants provide 700% more training on first year new hires than their U.S. counterparts. After that, they provide more than twice the amount. And that training is not just about specialist skills, but also the type you will find in leadership programs, such as general competence and organizational culture. The point he brings out is that they normally plan on keeping their people longer, thus it makes more sense in developing them.

Often workers themselves will demand more training when they have the clout to do so. When programmers were in heavy demand during the Y2K problem, many were demanding at least 80 hours of training per year, not only in new programming skills, but also in leadership skills. As we will discuss later in this paper self recognition of training and development needs is actually a result of strong organizational leadership.

What this shows us is that those wishing to be effective safety leaders (at whatever level) take control of their own development. They seek out or demand training opportunities that will make a difference in their performance. Effective leaders look for training programs that will help them develop specific skills that they can use on the job. However, they need to pass through various organizational barriers before they can take up this role.

In fact, Leadership is not just for leaders anymore. Top companies are beginning to understand that sustaining peak performance requires a firm-wide commitment to developing leaders that is tightly aligned to organizational objectives. Organizations must find ways to cascade leadership from senior management to men and women at all levels [5].

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership attributes, such as beliefs, values, ethics,

character, knowledge, and skills. Leadership differs in that it makes the followers want to achieve high goals, rather than simply bossing people around.

Leadership and Understanding the Needs of Employees

<u>Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs</u>
Human needs are an important part of human nature. Values, beliefs, and customs differ from country to country and group to group, but all people have similar needs. As a safety leader you must understand these needs because they are powerful motivators. This is what we strive to understand in Behavior Based Safety Models which then allows us to influence the safety outcomes we desire.

Abraham Maslow felt that human needs were arranged in a hierarchical order (Maslow, 1954). He based his theory on healthy, creative people who used all their talents, potential, and capabilities. At the time, this methodology differed from most other psychological research in that it was based on observing disturbed people.

There are two major groups of human needs: basic needs and Meta needs.

Basic needs are physiological, such as food, water, and sleep; and psychological, such as affection, security, and self-esteem. These basic needs are also called deficiency needs because if they are not met by an individual, then that person will strive to make up the deficiency.

The higher needs are called Meta needs or being needs (growth needs). These include justice, goodness, beauty, order, unity, etc. Basic needs normally take priority over growth needs. For example, a person who lacks food or water will not normally attend to justice or beauty needs.

These needs are listed below in hierarchical order. The basic needs on the bottom of the list (1 to 4) must normally be met before the Meta or being needs above them can be met. The four Meta needs (5 to 8) can be pursued in any order, depending upon a person's wants or circumstances, as long as the basic needs have all been met.

8. Self-transcendence - a transegoic (see below) level that emphasizes visionary intuition, altruism, and unity consciousness.

7. Self-actualization - know exactly who you are, where you are going, and what you want to accomplish, a state of well-being.

6. Aesthetic - at peace, more curious about the inner workings of all things.

5. Cognitive - learning for learning alone, contribute knowledge.

4. Esteem - feeling of moving up in world, recognition, few doubts about self.

3. Belongingness and love - belong to a group, close friends to confide with.

2. Safety - feel free from immediate danger.

1. Physiological - food, water, shelter, sex.

Maslow posited that people want and are forever striving to meet various goals. Because the lower level needs are more immediate and urgent, then they come into play as the source and direction of a person's goal if they are not satisfied.

A need higher in the hierarchy will become a motive of behavior as long as the needs below it have been satisfied. Unsatisfied lower needs (say, a person working with unsafe equipment or in an unsafe environment) will dominate unsatisfied higher needs and must be

satisfied before the person can climb up the hierarchy. How can a person reach Level 5 Cognitive where they are self motivated to continue learn and contribute without initially feeling safe in their work environment as the individual's safety needs take over and dominate their behavior?. These needs have to do with people's yearning for a predictable, orderly world in which injustice and inconsistency are under control, the familiar frequent and the unfamiliar rare.

Knowing where a person is located (or feels located) on this scale aids in determining effective motivators to encourage them to work safely. Not all employees are at the self level of motivation.

It should be noted that almost no one stays in one particular hierarchy for an extended period. We constantly strive to move up, while at the same time various forces outside our control try to push us down. Those on top get pushed down for short time periods, i.e., death of a loved-one or an idea that does not work, while those on the bottom get pushed up, i.e., come across a small prize. Our goal as leaders therefore is to help people obtain the skills and knowledge that will push them up the hierarchy on a more permanent basis. People who have their basic needs met become much better workers as they are able to concentrate on fulfilling the visions put forth to them, rather than consistently struggling to make ends meet.

Characteristics of self-actualizing people

In Maslow's model, as in safety, the ultimate goal of life is self-actualization, which is almost never fully attained but rather is something to always strive towards. These workers demonstrate some key skill sets which can be exploited by good safety leaders. In general they;

- Have better perceptions of reality and are comfortable with it.

- Accept themselves and their own natures.

- Lack of artificiality.

- They focus on problems outside themselves and are concerned with basic issues and eternal questions.

- They like privacy and tend to be detached.

- Rely on self development and continued growth.

- Appreciate the basic pleasures of life (e.g. do not take blessings for granted).

- Have a deep feeling of kinship with others.

- Are deeply democratic and are not really aware of differences.

- Have strong ethical and moral standards.

- Are original, inventive, less constricted and fresher than others

- Transegoic*

Transegoic means a higher, psychic, or spiritual state of development. The 'trans' is related to transcendence, while the 'ego' is based on Freud's work. We go from preEGOic levels to EGOic levels to transEGOic. The EGO in all three terms is used in the Jungian sense of consciousness as opposed to the unconscious. Ego equates with the personality.

Maslow later theorized that this level does not stop; it goes on to self-transcendence, which carries us to the spiritual level, e.g. Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Dalai Lama, or even poets, such as Robert Frost. Maslow's self-transcendence level recognizes the human need for

ethics, creativity, compassion and spirituality. Without this spiritual or transegoic sense, we are simply animals or machines.

While the research of Maslow's theory has undergone limited empirical scrutiny, it still remains quite popular due to its simplicity and being the start of the movement away from a totally behaviorist/reductionist/mechanistic approach to a more humanistic one. In addition, a lot of concerns are directed at his methodology: Pick a small number of people that he declares self-actualizing; read and talk about them; and come to the conclusion about self-actualization. However, he understood this, and thought of his work as simply a method of pointing the way, rather than being the final say. In addition, he hoped that others would take up the cause and complete what he had begun.

Understanding Leadership and Management

Managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing. - Warren Bennis, Ph.D. "On Becoming a Leader" (1989)

We have stated that management skills are necessary for the execution of work, but not for providing "leadership". In fact good leaders are made not born. If you have the desire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience. They demonstrate their leadership ability by developing the requisite skills and knowledge.

In 2004 Marshall Goldsmith and Howard Morgan reviewed leadership development programs in eight major corporations [5]. The leaders who returned from the training, discussed their own improvement priorities with their co-workers and then regularly followed up with these co-workers, showed striking improvement. Leaders who did not have ongoing dialogue with colleagues showed improvement that barely exceeded random chance. The overarching conclusion distilled from the surveys in all the programs was that personal contact mattered. As we shall see creating empathy with workers is one of core leadership attributes that is essential for success.

To inspire those around you into higher levels of teamwork, there are certain things you must be, know, and, do. These often do not come naturally, but are acquired through continual work and study. Good leaders are continually working and studying to improve their leadership skills; they are NOT resting on their laurels. To understand this we must first look at the following question; what are the differences between management and leadership?

Abraham Zaleznik in his 1977 Harvard Business Review article "*Managers and leaders: Are they different?*" delineated differences between leadership and management. He saw leaders as inspiring visionaries, concerned about substance; while managers he views as planners who have concerns with process. While managers seek activity with people, they "maintain a low level of emotional involvement in those relationships."' and "lack empathy". Warren Bennis in his book *On Becoming a Leader* (1989) further explicated a dichotomy between managers and leaders and drew twelve distinctions between the two groups:

- Managers administer, leaders innovate
- Managers ask how and when, leaders ask what and why
- Managers focus on systems, leaders focus on people
- Managers do things right, leaders do the right things
- Managers maintain, leaders develop

- Managers rely on control, leaders inspire trust
- Managers have a short-term perspective, leaders have a longer-term perspective
- Managers accept the status-quo, leaders challenge the status-quo
- Managers have an eye on the bottom line, leaders have an eye on the horizon
- Managers imitate, leaders originate
- Managers emulate the classic good soldier, leaders are their own person
- Managers copy, leaders show originality

In safety this translates into management tasks, such as;

- Setting SSHE metrics
- Hiring trainers
- Writing SOP's
- Reviewing data
- Providing PPE

As opposed to leadership tasks such as;

- Modeling behaviors (leading by example)
- Advocating for the "right thing"
- Creating an environment for open discussion
- Not being afraid to try new ways of doing things
- Encouraging and celebrating success

For Bennis, becoming a leader is the process of becoming and fully expressing oneself (as per Maslow's self actualization theory). He stresses the importance of taking charge of your own learning, urging us to blame no one for our circumstances and reflect deeply on our experiences. Bennis notes that we become leaders by seeking to understand the world, listening to others, and participating.

Bennis identifies several key ingredients of leadership, including:

- A guiding vision
- Passion (hope and inspiration)
- Integrity (self-knowledge, candor and maturity) and trust
- Curiosity and daring

Because many safety activities focus on government regulations, many well-intentioned safety managers spend much of their time nagging others about complying with minimum safety standards. Safety leaders, on the other hand, keep their eye on the ultimate goal - keeping employees safe and healthy - and employ their enthusiasm, commitment and knowledge to achieve that goal. "Management" is an organizational skill while "Leadership" is a relationship skill.

Leadership is not power - power is the capacity to bring about desired outcomes and prevent those not desired. Power can be derived from status, position, money, expertise,

charisma, ability to harm, access to media, control of assets, communications skills, physical strength.

While leaders always have power, the powerful are not always leaders. A thug who sticks a gun in your back has "power" but not leadership

Leadership is not status - status or position may enhance the opportunity for leadership (and accountability). Some may have status or position, yet do not understand how to lead. Such "position" is assigned from above while leadership is conferred from below.

Leadership is not authority - a person may have subordinates, but not followers. People will follow and by default confer leadership but only if the person acts like a leader

In making the determination of the style exhibited on a day to day basis in your organization you should consider:

- What is important to me? What are my values, beliefs and ethics?

- How am I demonstrating those values, beliefs and ethics every day?

- Is the larger organization designed to support my values, beliefs and ethics?

- What are disconnects within my immediate organization and for me with the larger enterprise?

- What can I do to change how I behave with my immediate organization to demonstrate my belief in them?

- What additional assistance do those that I work with need to succeed and how can I ensure that they get everything they need to create personal and organizational safety success?

In summary safety leaders must have the essential quality of stewardship, a caretaker quality. They must serve in a manner that encourages confidence, trust and loyalty. Subordinates are not to be abused; they are to be guided, developed and rewarded for their performance. Punishment is to be reserved as a consequence of last resort and sparingly applied only when all other attempts have failed to encourage the rebellious to comply.

Some Core Attributes of Safety Leaders

Not everyone will agree on a particular set of attributes and skills for leadership.

"Leonardo da Vinci didn't sign up for a webinar to learn about the possibilities of flight. Rather, he wandered and studied birds." - Gregerman (2007) [7]

LOYALTY- is defined as; the act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action. We want people to be aligned with corporate objectives and loyal to the company's overall philosophy. Priorities change, values do not. Employees soon realize if we are not being genuine when we talk about "safety is our number one priority". Often they only need to look at their working environment to determine whether such statements are factual.

We need to create an environment where people are not afraid to speak up and challenge the status quo if they believe it is in the best interest of the company.

COURAGE- there is many types of courage. It can be divided into two categories; physical courage and moral courage. The physical courage is the first half of the definition above; in the face of pain, danger or even death.

Moral courage would be found in the second half of the definition; doing what is considered to be right. Instead of physical harm one may face potential consequences of isolation or retribution based on the circumstances and actions taken. I think when most of us think of courage, our immediate thought relates to physical courage, however for safety leaders moral courage is far more important. [8]

DECISIVENESS - having the ability to make decisions quickly, firmly, and clearly taking into account all (current) facts bearing on the situation. Safety leaders cannot afford to be irresolute as not having the ability the make quick decisions can often lead to potentially disastrous consequences. [9]

ANTICIPATION - in today's rapidly-changing workplace, you will have an advantage if you can succeed in integrating change into your safety strategy effectively. Using foresight and anticipation to envisage possible future scenarios is the first step in preparing for change and managing it successfully.

There is big difference between anticipating and guessing. Anticipation means expecting, being aware of something in advance, to regard it as possible. The ability to anticipate is one of the key ingredients of efficient speed and change management. "Being able to anticipate that which is likely to occur in the next few months and the next few years is enough to give you an edge over 99% of the population who simply go along with whatever happens".[10]

SELF-CONFIDENCE- self-confidence is a term used to describe how secure a person is in their own decisions and actions. This can be applied generally or to specific situations or tasks. Self-confidence can also allow you the ability to envision your success in advance and manifest the reality you wish to create.

In safety leadership self confidence is often developed a period of time and comes along with being in situations that allow you to gain experience. This is also coupled with a sound technical knowledge of the issues being addressed.

ACCOUNTABILITY- unfortunately, most people view accountability as something that happens when performance wanes, problems develop or results fail to materialize. In fact, many think accountability only crops up when something goes wrong or when someone else wants to pinpoint the cause of the problem, all for the sake of pinning blame and pointing the finger.

Consider the following new definition of accountability and how it relates to safety leadership: "A personal choice to rise above one's circumstances and demonstrate the ownership necessary for achieving desired results; to see it, own it, solve it and do it."

This definition includes a mindset or attitude of continually asking, "What else can I do to rise above my circumstances and achieve the results I desire?"

It requires a level of ownership that includes making, keeping, and answering for personal commitments. Such a perspective embraces both current and future efforts rather than reactive and historical explanations. Armed with this new definition of accountability, you can help yourself and others do everything possible to overcome difficult circumstances and achieve desired results. [11]

RESPONSIBILITY- being responsible means that others can depend on you. You are willing to be accountable for your own actions. When things go wrong you stand up and make amends rather than excuses. When you are responsible you keep your agreement and you give your best to any job more importantly others can trust you.

CREDIBILITY- if there is one defining characteristic of leaders who are effective over long periods of time; it's that they behave in ways that cause people to see them as credible. That means that they are believed, and trusted, both in the specifics of what they say, and generally, as people.

Credible leaders are consistent in their words and their behaviors. They are not constantly shifting courses, and reversing their decisions. They retain their value set even under adverse conditions. They do not shift their leadership and management styles here and there. They are consistent. In addition, they are honest to the degree that it's reasonably possible to be so. That may sound odd, but even safety leaders may be in positions where they cannot reveal everything they know to followers. In this sense honesty does not necessarily mean sharing everything (since some things often need to remain confidential). It does mean that what a leader can share is the truth.

Credibility and trustworthiness occur through personal contact, and effective interpersonal communication. For example, a responsive leader will be perceived as more credible and trustworthy as compared to a relatively non-responsive leader. And, a leader who knows when to interact face-to-face (rather than, let's say via email) will tend to be seen as more credible, and inspire greater loyalty compared to a leader who uses technology based communication.

EMPATHY-a formal definition of Empathy is the ability to identify and understand another's situation, feelings and motives. It's our capacity to recognize the concerns other people have. Empathy means: "putting yourself in the other person's shoes" or "seeing things through someone else's eyes".

Unfortunately, the word "empathy" is not comfortably used in business leadership discussions. It sounds a little soft and does not align well with the vigorous phrases we initially associate with leadership. However, it fits very well in the vocabulary of the safety leader.

We need empathy not only to inspire others, but also when we're figuring out how to express something, or even whether to express it. While we're deciding, we need a sense of what the impacts of various options might be, which requires empathy. Here are some other applications of empathy skills.

Framing a message

To communicate effectively, it helps to have a feel for how your message will land, whether it's an apology, persuasion, congratulations, or something painful.

Timing and not-timing

Empathy helps you know when to act, and when not to act.

Leading, motivating, inspiring and deterring

If your goal is to energize (or inhibit) others, the choices you make are more effective if you take into account the personal icebergs of those others.

Detecting overload

The usual indicators of overload are burnout or error rates. Empathy can help you detect overload before the damage is done.

Negotiating and dealing with conflict

Reaching solutions that appeal to all parties is easier with an understanding of the inner experience of all parties. Empathy helps.

DESIRE- leaders lead by example, not just by their words and ideas. The most effective form of leadership is built upon a sincere desire to make a positive contribution (improve the safety of the workplace) - linked with other leadership skills.

The desire to make a positive contribution is more of a mindset rather than a skill. It is a mindset that can be fostered and developed through effective training, coaching and mentoring. No one is "born" a natural leader, as some would suggest. Environment and personality style can create the illusion of a "natural" leader, but all leadership skills are learned. Anyone can develop the mindset and skills of leadership if a true desire exists.

Leadership Development

Leadership can be thought of existing on several levels (Fig. 1). Leadership has many components. Becoming a trusted leader means climbing a continuum of steps, constantly striving for increased knowledge and organizational development.

The leader naturally sets the tone of the safety culture and that has a direct effect on morale and performance. Whatever the leader gives to the group will be given back. Whatever the leader expects will be expected of him or her.
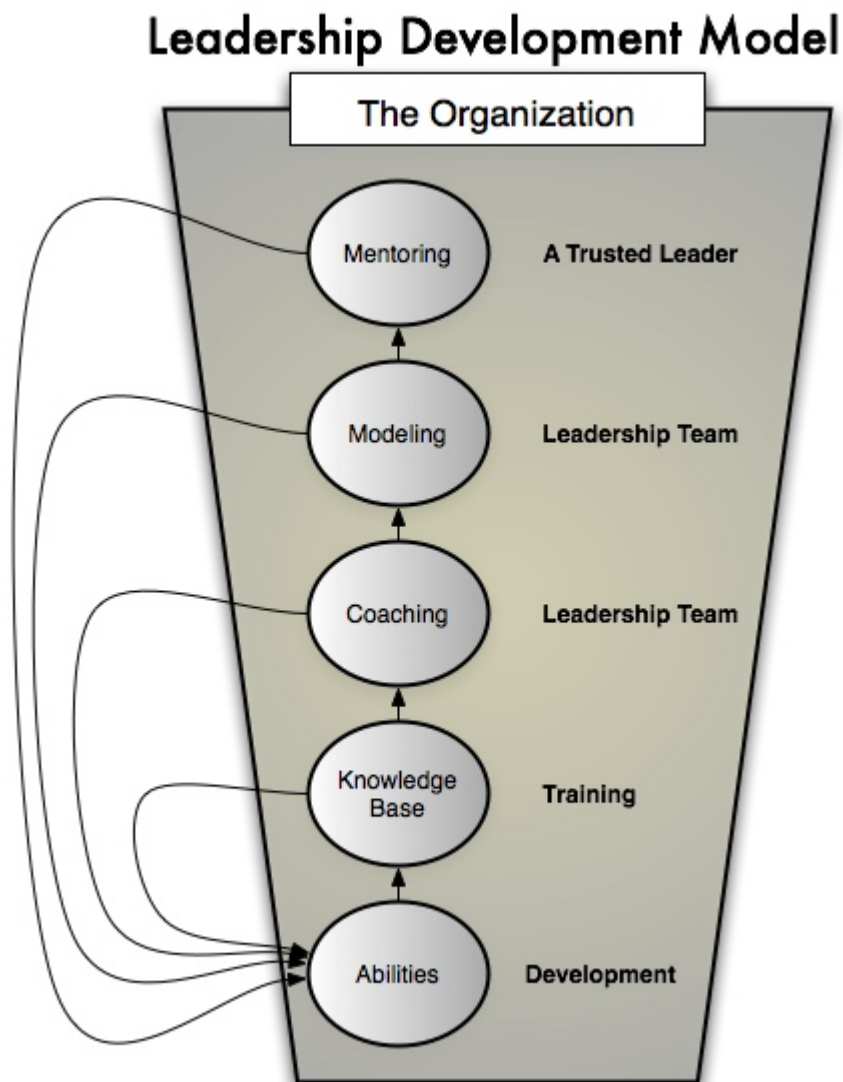

Leadership Development Model

Fig. 1

Level One: Developing Abilities. In this stage the leader the "leader's" motivation is often selfish in the attainment of a personnel goal to climb the ladder.

- You develop dependent subordinates, not followers and certainly not self-leaders
- People do what you say because you occupy a position.
- Your influence does not extend beyond the lines of your job description.
- The longer you stay here, the higher the turnover and lower the morale

Level two: Acquiring and sharing of knowledge. This is where leadership skills start to be applied. The leader is now more concerned about the success of the followers.

- Leadership by permission - you command, not demand.
- People want to follow - confer leadership on you.
- People will follow you beyond your stated authority.
- You begin developing followers into self-leaders.

Level three: Developing others. The leader not only starts to share knowledge but also mentors followers to develop their own skills. Others see the leader as someone who produces results through the application and sharing of information.

- People follow because of what you do for the organization.
- This is where success is sensed by most people.
- They like you and what you are doing.
- Problems are fixed with very little effort because of momentum.

Level four: Modeling behaviors for the benefit of the team, often seen as 'leading by example'. This is where a successful tough, caring, leadership approach works best. Leadership is conferred because the motivation is selfless, other-centered.

- People follow because of what you stand for.
- Your values are seen as those necessary for success.
- People are empowered to take action because of your example.
- Self leaders are developed based on your actions.

Level five: Creating a legacy. This is the level we all strive for, however it is easy to fall from this level. Credibility is the key to success as a failure to maintain values results in a lack of trust from those around you.

- People follow because of what you do for them.
- This is where long-range growth occurs.
- Your commitment to developing leaders will insure ongoing growth to the organization and to people.

Summary

As we have discussed, leaders are not born, nor is greatness instilled upon them. Leadership is not conferred by title or position. Rather, leadership is about being. It's a discipline that comes from within. **Safety leaders that are successful practice (and reinforce) basic principles to ensure their** ability to inspire trust, loyalty and commitment among team members. Credibility in leadership comes from competence (what you do), character (who you are), and connection (your relationship with followers). These skills can be learned.

A safety leader is anyone who influences a group toward obtaining a particular result. It is not dependant on title or formal authority. Leaders are recognized by their capacity for caring for others, clear communication, and a commitment to persist. [12] An individual who is appointed to a managerial position has the right to enforce obedience by the authority of the position. However, the individual must possess personal attributes to match the authority. In the absence of sufficient competence, a (safety) managers decisions may be challenged and his role in the organization reduced to that of a figurehead, even though formal sanctions may be able to be imposed (discipline).

It also follows that whoever demonstrates personal influence can really only use this by gaining a formal position in the organization with the related authority. [13] Safety conscious front line employees in positions where formal authority is not conveyed often have to find a champion to help them assert their influence. The champion (safety manager) would use leadership skills to recognize this ability to influence coworkers. He also has the authority to harness this capability for the good of the business while developing willing followers. As such, leadership can be defined as one's ability to get others to willingly follow by setting a clear example. For safety to really become a core value every organization needs to develop leaders at every level. [14]

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