



(U) Leadership: Your View of People (repost)

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(U//FOUO) For today's lead article, we plucked from the SIDtoday archives some thoughts on leadership from Charles Berlin. At the time this was originally posted (Aug 21, 2003), Mr Berlin was SID's Chief of Staff. -- the editor

(U) Leadership is about working with people and it really starts with how you look at them -- how you judge their motivation and their basic qualities. It comes down to how do you take the measure of a person. Effective leadership depends on getting this right, so listen up!

(U) Here's the first lesson: people are wonderful. They are, in general, good and true. They can be trusted and will constantly amaze and surprise you with their imagination and capacity for innovative thought. Shakespeare: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason. How infinite in faculty! In form and movement how expressive and admirable. The beauty of the world; the paragon of animals." Wow!

- (U) *First related revelation: this does not emanate from social background, education, or ability to say "Down 'na ocean" correctly. It is the natural state of human kind. This trait allows us to live in large clusters and cooperate and generally make giant leaps that we could never make alone. Of course, this doesn't mean we aren't competitive. I saw riding lawn mower races on TV last week. Jeesh! We'll race anything that moves! But we will have rules and demand that they are adhered to even as we do our best to beat out the other guy. It is a pretty good combination to have basic goodness and a competitive spirit. Naturally, there needs to be balance in this (like so many things). When these get out of balance, things do not go well. Leadership plays a role in keeping that balance for the leader as well as the "led."*

(U) Second lesson: people are not perfect. Yeah, I know this is not news, but why then do we have so much trouble accepting people as imperfect and forgiving honest mistakes? The fact is that, overall, people have a very low bit error rate. We make thousands of decisions every day and put in tons of honest effort and rarely make many mistakes. Even when we do, there are lots of external factors helping to share the blame. The really good news is that we are almost always working in a team environment where one mistake can be easily made up for by the rest of the team. The likelihood of the whole team all making a mistake simultaneously is just about absolute zero. Even just two people teaming up bring the chances of a major screw up to somewhere around nil.

- (U) *Second related revelation: we have to find a way to flexibly try out new ideas, and team up to prevent the stinkers from having too much of an effect. By the way, making a mistake is an active notion. Doing nothing is the only surefire way to avoid mistakes. I like the concept of an engaged, active person trying out new ideas and occasionally making a mistake, more than the potted plant that never makes one. Leaders create an atmosphere where the active person constantly innovates safely. Leaders constantly foster the notion of mutual support. Excellence is having a stake in someone else's success.*

(U) Third lesson: not all the people are doing well. Unlike Lake Wobegone where all the women are strong, the men are good looking and the children are all above average, there are some people who are not performing well. Yes, it really is true. The good news is that the ratio is not too bad. My experience is that around 95% of the people are doing well and meet the standards for performance and conduct. This is a very good thing. About half of the last 5% are not performing well but don't know it. A leader can easily salvage these folks with mentoring,

honest feedback and corrective training. This also is a very good thing. Sad to say, however, there remain a few percentage points of people who are not performing well and know it -- and some who actually are screwing up on purpose. A leader supports all the others by quickly and professionally moving these people on to another career, somewhere else.

(U) Here's the last lesson: you work with and around the best people in the world -- they have courage, heart and compassion. Consider yourself lucky, cherish this idea and remember it is a privilege to lead Americans with a mission like ours. As a leader you will necessarily have to judge performance and behavior, but you need not judge your teammates as people -- it has already been established: they're the best.

(U) What is the foundation of your leadership? Do you think people are basically good? Why would you want to lead? Can you really make a difference?

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