The most important things a leader can bring to an organization are passion, conviction, and confidence in others. Too often managers announce a plan, launch a task force, and then simply hope that people find the answers -- instead of offering a dream, stretching their horizons, and encouraging people to do the same.

Effective leadership can facilitate valuable change within organizations by creating listening posts, opening lines of communication, articulating a set of explicit, shared goals, building coalitions, acknowledging others -- are key to creating effective partnerships and sustaining high performance, not just to managing change. They build the trust and commitment necessary to succeed in good times or in bad.

Leaders set the direction, define the context, and help produce coherence for their organizations. Leaders manage the culture, or at least the vehicles through which that culture is expressed. They set the boundaries for collaboration, autonomy, and the sharing of knowledge and ideas, and give meaning to events that otherwise appear random and chaotic. And they inspire voluntary behavior -- the degree of effort, innovation, and entrepreneurship with which employees serve customers and seek opportunities.

In their seminal book on leadership, “The Leadership Challenge,” James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner have identified five key leadership practices and ten key commitments for leadership success. Use them as a guidepost for enhancing your effectiveness as a leader.

1. CHALLENGE THE PROCESS

Effective leaders search for opportunities to change the status quo, and look for innovative ways to improve the organization. The effective leader asks “What can we learn?” and/or lets others take appropriate risks. And because they know that risk taking involves mistakes and failures, they accept the inevitable disappointments as learning opportunities, and demonstrate the courage to continue the quest despite opposition and setbacks.

A leader who Challenges the Process is one who seeks a challenge; keeps current; initiates experiments; continually looks for innovative ways to improve the organization. In doing so, the leader experiments and takes risks.

- Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow and improve the organization
- Experiment and take appropriate risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes

2. INSPIRE A SHARED VISION

Effective leaders passionately believe that they can make a difference. They envision the future, creating an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become. But visions seen only by the leader are insufficient to mobilize and energize. Leaders enlist others in this vision by appealing to shared aspirations, and get people to see exciting possibilities about the future. They breathe life into ideal and unique images of the future, and get people to see how their own dreams can be realized through a common vision.

A leader who Inspires a Shared Vision is one who looks ahead and communicates the future; is an upbeat and positive communicator; finds common ground; communicates purpose and meaning; and/or is enthusiastic about the possibilities.

- Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities
- Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations
3. ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT

Effective leaders foster collaboration and build spirited teams. They actively involve others. Leaders understand that mutual respect is what sustains extraordinary efforts, and they strive to create an atmosphere of trust and human dignity. They also strengthen others by sharing power and providing choice, making each person feel competent and confident.

A leader who **Enables Others to Act** is someone who includes others in the planning; treats others with respect; supports decisions of others; fosters cooperative relationships; provides freedom and choice; and/or lets others lead.

- Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust
- Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion

4. ENCOURAGE THE HEART

Accomplishing extraordinary things in organizations is hard work. To keep hope and determination alive, effective leaders **recognize contributions that individuals make**. In every winning team, the members need to share in the rewards of their efforts, so effective leaders **celebrate accomplishments of individuals, and of the team** by creating a spirit of community. They make people feel like heroes, and that it is their efforts which make the organization succeed.

A leader who **Encourages the Heart** is one who encourages other people; recognizes people's contributions; praises people for a job well done; gives support and appreciation; finds ways to publicly celebrate; tells others about the group’s good work.

- Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual and team excellence
- Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community

5. MODEL THE WAY

Effective leaders **set the example** by aligning their personal actions and behaviors with shared values. When constituents know that leaders have the courage of their convictions, they become willingly engaged in following that example. **Credibility is the foundation of effective leadership.** The leader's behaviors and actions form the basis of the leader’s credibility, and credibility is based on the principle, “Do what you say you will do.” Or “DWYSYWD.”

Effective leaders establish principles concerning the way people (constituents, colleagues, and customers alike) should be treated and the way goals should be pursued. They create standards of excellence and then **set an example for others to follow**. Because the prospect of complex change can overwhelm people and stifle action, they set interim goals so that people can achieve small wins as they work toward larger objectives. They unravel bureaucracy when it impedes action; they put up signposts when people are unsure of where to go or how to get there; and they **create opportunities for victory and success**.

A leader who **Models the Way** is one who shares beliefs about leading; breaks projects into steps; sets personal example; talks about guiding values; follows through on promises; sets clear goals and plans.

- Find your voice by clarifying your personal values, and express those values in your leadership style
- Set the example by aligning your personal actions with shared values

**LEARN AND PRACTICE THESE LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

Effective leaders have many common qualities. Making the effort to practice and learn the skills it takes to be an effective leader will enable you to use the style of leadership necessary to motivate your people to give their best performance in the work unit that you lead.