

## **Lead by Example, Not by Extortion!**

I got a short message in my mobile phone today morning which says, " **If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.**" This is the famous quote from former American President, **John Quincy Adams**. What a simple way of defining a "leader"! When we zoom in, it takes us to an interesting topic, "leading by example".

As leaders, we have a choice either to lead by example or by extortion. Leadership by its nature bestows us with powers and many of us lead by enforcing the powers and influence we have. But we forget the fact that leadership by extortion doesn't make people to follow us but probably chase them away from us. When we set a good example through values, we illustrate the behavior we expect from others as they interact with each other and conduct their business.

We all have read the saying, "**Practice what you preach, and do not preach what you do not practice**". The statement explains it all when it comes to effectively leading by example. If we want to be efficient leaders, we need to "walk the talk" and not only "talk the talk". Interestingly, there are two types of leaders: Those that lead by their words, and those who lead by their actions. The ones who lead by their actions are leaders who lead by example, or getting people to follow them based on what they do, and not what they tell others to do.

Let me share with you today an inspiring true story from the life of **Mahatma Gandhi** which tells us how important it is to lead by example. The story is about Mahatma Gandhi trying to counsel a child for removing a bad habit.

One day a lady came to Mahatma Gandhi with her 10 year old son. She told Gandhiji, "My son has a bad habit of eating a lot of jaggery (a special kind of Indian sweet). I have been telling him to reduce eating jaggery but he does not listen to me. Mahatma ji, the whole nation listens to you and you are a revered personality. I am sure my son too will follow your advice. Please tell him not to eat too much of jaggery."

Mahatma Gandhi thought for a while and asked the lady to bring her son again after a week. After a week, the lady again took her son to Mahatma. Mahatma Gandhi put his hand on the head of the boy and told him, "My dear child, don't eat jaggery too much. It can be harmful".

The conversation ended. The puzzled lady asked Mahatma, "Bappu, this was simple. You could have told him the same thing last week itself!! Why you made us come

again after a week?" Mahatma told the lady," I myself used to take jaggery till last week. I needed a weeks' time to quit eating jaggery so that I could counsel your son with **conviction**".

That's Mahatma Gandhi! No wonder, he lead millions and walked our country to independence with his simple leadership style - leading by example! Many great leaders of the past walk the talk. Another example is **Winston Churchill**, who led his country to victory by uniting and inspiring the whole of Britain. The truth is, effective leadership does not come easy. An effective leader is someone who earns respect, not someone who demands it.

**Paramahansa Sri Nithyananda** says, Leadership is not a quality. It is an experience that an individual who has undergone personal growth and transformation radiates. He says, Leadership is a state not a status. Most of us achieve the status of a leader, but not the state. State is totally different from status. Status comes from society. When he uses the word 'state' he means our inner space. Our inner space should be matured enough to handle the responsibility, which we assume.

The question is, how do we most effectively lead by example? No doubt, leading by example boosts morale, and it helps us gain a sense of control over those we are managing. When we are willing to get our hands dirty to show others what has to be done, we are not only making people respect us, but we are helping others learn skills that they will need to be better employees as well.

Let me take you through some simple tips which can help us to lead by example.

**1) Think before we talk:** Think before we speak or act. As a leader, our words and actions will be looked upon and criticized or emulated by others. People want to believe in their leaders.

**2) Believe in ourselves:** Believe in what we do and do what we love. If we don't believe in our goals, then convincing others that they should work towards them will be very hard.

**3) Be fair & honest:** Treat others as we would like them to treat us. If we treat others fairly and justly, we can expect that they will treat us the same. If we treat them unjustly, expect that they will treat us unfavorably. A good leader is honest and respectful.

**4) Be pro-active:** Create chances and be pro-active. Don't wait for opportunities to come to us. Being pro-active instead of reactive enables us to be ready for difficult situations and take advantage of positive circumstances.

**5) Give our ears:** Listen to others. Listening is a key communication tool. Showing others that we are interested in what they have to say will help gain their respect. If they don't respect us, they won't want to follow our lead.

**6) Decision making:** Stay firm in our decisions. If we aren't committed to our decisions, we can't expect others to be committed to theirs.

**7) Be a team player:** Stand behind our team. If a team member makes a mistake, take the blame for the mistake. Don't point fingers. Figure out why the mistake was made and how it could be prevented in the future.

**8) Be a role model:** We have to speak the part, dress the part, act the part, smile, be appropriate and do not complain. Sounds difficult, but we have to build up our reputation as a strong and well balanced leader that others will want to emulate.

**9) Be Positive:** Be consistent and do so with a positive attitude. Being fair with everyone and *if someone needs to be corrected for something then do so in private.*

**10) Take care of ourselves:** Of course to be productive as a leader, we must take care of ourselves and find a healthy balance. That balance differs from one person to the next, so finding our own will be up to us. *Take care of our mind, body and soul to create a positive person.*

It is said that, great leadership takes strength of character and a firm commitment to do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason. Which means, doing what we say, when we say it. If our team can't trust us, we'll probably never lead them to greatness. I am sure, leading - and living - by example isn't as hard as it might sound. It's really the easiest path. If our team knows that we'll also do whatever we expect from them, they'll likely work hard to help us achieve our goals.

Remember, great leaders model how they want to be, to their people thus developing a level of relationship which is truly astounding - be ourselves, be natural and enjoy our work and our life - and be prepared to show it!

How about making our organization filled up with **"inspired people"** in an **"inspiring atmosphere"** led by an **"inspirational leader"**? Let's be a leader who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way- A leader who leads by example not by extortion!