

The Role Of Leadership

Leadership is a human accomplishment that results in purposes being formed, and directions being taken or advanced. These directions and purposes may not always be fulfilled in the sense of an impact on events, but the acts of leadership are always attempts to shape matters. Leadership is normally not all that associated with compelling events to occur, but rather with influencing events, such that specific outcomes are achieved.

Change involves mobilizing people to perceive their world differently and to eventually act in new ways. This is rarely achieved overnight, though pressures may build for years towards changes that seemingly happen quite rapidly. Leadership is the actions taken to achieve direction and purpose, thereby helping to bring about change that takes on a particular intended order. Change without established direction would simply be volatility, and might not have any enduring effect.

It is not uncommon, at any given moment, that there would be considerable differences of view as to which directions should be taken, and this may bring with it disputes of all kinds with all of their attendant tensions and divisions. Such divergences of view will often be expressed as competing messages offered by various factions. These differences will be the sources for competing leadership claims, each attempting to prevail in the dispute through the acquiring of greater levels of support than their rivals. Supporters, for their part, will test leaders and their claims in order to better gauge whether, and to what degree, they should provide a given leadership hopeful their support and allegiance. Consequently, the purposes and directions of change will be contested and eventually resolved through the gaining or losing of support within the key constituencies in play.

The Role Of Alliances In The Change Process

If a leader is to gain sufficient support so as to settle the direction of change, he/she will need to form alliances with supporters that ensure that they will act in accord with the purposes and directions being advocated. Alliances are common to all change processes because they help the people and interests at work to either accelerate or withstand the pressures for change.

Alliances occur when there is a convergence of interests between people and groups such that cooperation and mutual assistance for each other is seen by both as beneficial, and thus becomes more likely. These alliances become more probable when the parties share common values, ideologies, purposes and vested interests. Alliances make strengthened collective leadership more possible, just as leaders without allies are likely to be isolated and unable to gain a viable mandate.

Alliances are ultimately forged by individuals, and these will link groups, organizations and institutions in ways of collaborating that might have not otherwise occurred. These “alliance-makers” and alliances can be found and forged at any level, and may occur in ways that transcend formal organizational boundaries and pathways, since they can often initially emerge informally, and in unsolicited and unapproved ways as long as there is advantage seen in pursuing them. As they say “politics can make

strange bedfellows”.

It is also important to recognize that not all alliances are for good things, and that alliances directed to malevolent purposes will have perverse fruits. It is undoubtedly true that a “deal with the Devil” is most certainly possible, so good leadership and discernment will always be needed to assess the moral character of oneself and one’s apparent allies.

The Possible Benefits of Alliances

Alliances would not be pursued if they did not bring advantages and benefits. While some of these benefits relate to the support they engender for various purposes and directions, there are many other gains that can be obtained that contribute to the well being of the parties. These gains are not always automatically present, but they do tend to accompany strengthened and expanded alliances. These include examples such as the following;

➤ Broader And More Diverse Base Of Support

The extending of alliances typically helps expand the base of supporters and may add greater diversity in this base. Additionally, a broader base of support will help attract and influence prospective allies.

➤ Strength In Numbers

It is often said that people are weaker when divided and disunited, and that their ability to prevail increases with the degree to which they act as one. It is alliances that make this coordination possible with their resultant massing of strength.

➤ Greater Number Of Resources To Draw Upon

Expanded and growing alliances tend to bring with them an increase in the resources that they mutually can draw upon. Whether these will eventually be used well does not in any way diminish the fact that they are available in greater amounts in human and financial terms.

➤ Greater Possibilities For Further Growth And Expansion Of The Effort

With greater resources come ever greater possibilities for generating yet more resources and expanding whatever efforts are already underway. Resources, properly used, beget ever more resources. With growth will come other opportunities that can be pursued.

➤ Greater Potential Supply Of Innovators And Leaders

Innovators and leaders can be important because they are the sorts of people who can help serve as catalysts to advance many important purposes. Having a greater pool of these is like any other asset, it brings with it an advantage.

➤ Opportunities For The Coalescence Of Leadership

It is when leaders join forces that a new scope of possibilities emerge as well as it can provide the mutual stimulation of leaders to grow and develop in their vision and capacities. What one leader lacks, the other may possess.

➤ **Greater Resilience In The Face Of Adversity**

The presence of layers of alliances provides greater “depth”, insulation and robustness in the ability of the people and groups involved to withstand the many costs and difficulties involved in tackling problems that may bring adversity with them.

➤ **Greater Array And Density Of “Connections”**

The ability to connect in diverse ways with a large variety of people due to many relationship pathways is in many ways an “asset” as it opens up possibilities for all manner of ways for people to collaborate and to make advantageous new forms of cooperation.

➤ **Greater Likelihood Of Challenge And Open Ended Thinking**

Alliances tend to bring into contact people that might not otherwise have cooperated before. It also makes them more likely to have to incorporate thinking and perspectives that are broader than might be the case in more insular settings and associations.

Some Of The More Important Implications Of The Link Between Alliances And Leadership

There would be many implications of this recognition that successful leadership and alliances are linked, but here are a few of the more important ones.

- Leadership is not solely about the leader but rather the relationship of the leader to others who he/she may have to rely on for support if they are to accomplish what they hope to.
- Leadership arises out of shared purposes and interests, and helping people see and understand these other interests creates a platform for forging strong alliances.
- Leadership is needed for change because it is a catalyst to help orient people to needed purposes and directions, particularly where they may be failing to address key concerns and interests.
- Sound leadership can be held back by the weaknesses of followers to properly perceive the need for change, thereby denying such leadership the mandate for change.
- Change cannot easily be imposed upon people, or compelled by leaders, as it more typically comes about through negotiation with constituents.
- Constructive change is impossible if there is no vision provided by leaders to unite, challenge and inspire both other leaders and supporters.
- Enduring change will require that both leaders and supporters to be in favor of investment in “people building” and personal transformation if it is to be authentically embraced.
- The more demanding and costly the process of change, the more that the support base of leaders will be tested, and the greater the value of commitment.