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### Buyer Beware: How Do You Define Leadership?

We all know what leadership is, right? It is pretty straightforward isn't it? It is those who occupy the senior positions, THE Leadership! It is that magical quality that enthralls us with a desire to follow, no matter the destination. It is that ability to manipulate people to do what the leader needs them to do even though that leader's behavior is marked by multiple inconsistencies. It is the 101 special traits a person has from birth that makes him or her stand out from the rest?

Or perhaps it is something different. Perhaps it is the ability to bring people with diverse talents and skills together into a creative force for change ready to take on the difficult and complex challenges of the day?

The great American philosopher, Yogi Berra, is attributed with saying, that if you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace you don't want to be. If you are in the market for leadership development services because your organization is starting, revising or reinvigorating a program, you might want to first consider where you want to be when the leadership development effort is completed. To do that it might be wise to consider how vendors define the term leadership and whether or not that definition fits the need of your organization in the complex environment of the 21st Century.

Consider this, there are estimated to be over 300 different definitions of leadership? In 1991, Dr. Joseph Rost actually performed a count for his book, *Leadership for the 21st Century*. Rost found 221 different definitions in 587 books and articles. Did I say straightforward?

While there are a lot of definitions most fit within two different overarching perspectives that have gained popularity over the past 20 years. They are referred to as the industrial and post-industrial definitions or perspectives. The industrial definitions of leadership were born out of the industrial revolution and became very popular following World War II.

Attributes of industrial models include: hierarchical (the leader is the only important actor), top-down power, positional, a factory or machine-like mindset, people are followers, people must be compliant, generally oriented towards physical labor and reactive in nature to issues and challenges as they become known. In the industrial mindset, leadership and management are interchangeable terms. Industrial perspectives of leadership remain very popular today because most organizations are unaware of the shifting nature of leadership in the 21st century.

On the other hand, post-industrial perspectives see leadership as an influence relationship where leaders are consistent in their actions, collaborative in nature; and where people are partners and fully involved in the leadership dynamic. Additionally, people are encouraged to be creative; it is oriented towards knowledge workers and the idea economy and is proactive in nature in relation to the issues and challenges faced.

Moreover, the principal leadership development efforts of the industrial perspective were directed towards two areas: the leader or the individual person and leading, the activities or

skills a leader needed to perform. One of the most significant criticisms of this approach is that too often these development efforts had no real connection to the real world issues organizations faced. In the post-industrial perspective leadership development efforts now include a third element referred to as leadership practice.

Leadership practices are those activities a leader performs in real world contexts that are impacted each day by culture, systems, technologies, and processes. Ask yourself this question; if you had to go to a hospital would you rather have a doctor that had only learned surgery from a book and watching videos or one that had been given the opportunity to actually practice his or her craft in an operating room?

In the post-industrial perspective, leadership is about real or transforming change and management is about incremental change. They are different but complementary processes.

The postindustrial perspectives are becoming more and more popular as organizations are finding that the complex, ever changing, information rich environment of today does not lend itself to a machine like, steady state type of existence. Additionally, the post-industrial perspective is more inline with the generational shifts in the workforce as younger people seek a greater level of individual and personal freedom in most everything they do.

When presented with a number of choices about leadership development it is vitally important that the organizational buyer make clear distinctions about what is being offered especially in this ever changing, complex and information rich world in which we live. To do otherwise may result in a mismatch whose consequences result in today's talent being equipped with yesterday's news. In the end the choice remains with you. My advice, Choose Wisely!

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