



Dave Fleck, President and Principal Consultant

Lee Iacocca's "Nine Cs of Leadership"

Lee Iacocca's begins his new book entitled *Where Have All The Leaders Gone?* (Simon & Schuster; 2007) with what he believes are the essential qualities of a true leader. In Iacocca's "straight-shooting" style, where he clearly shows his disappointment with the lack of leadership he sees in the nation today, he lays out his "Nine Cs of Leadership". Although Iacocca applies the nine "Cs" qualities to our current Government leaders, I find that the qualities he identifies are also very applicable to the attributes we need in corporate leaders. I'll quote Iacocca to briefly describe each one of the nine "Cs" and then give some of my reflections based on our experiences developing corporate leaders.

1. CURIOSITY - "[A Leader] has to listen to people outside of the "Yes, sir" crowd in his inner circle. He has to read voraciously, because the world is a big, complicated place." Inquiry is the foundation for innovation. How do we practice this in the corporate workplace? First, by leaders acknowledging that they don't have all the answers and that the answers will come through dialogue and listening to people in the organization. The best leaders make a habit of face-to-face involvement and active listening with those on their team and with their customers. They ask open ended questions and stir peoples' imagination to address challenges. In addition to getting a clear picture of how employees are seeing their world and generating potential fixes, this visibility and dialogue also forms a bond between the leader and those on the work team. Iacocca goes on to say ... "If a leader never steps outside his comfort zone to hear different ideas, he grows stale. If he doesn't put his beliefs to the test, how does he know he's right? The inability to listen is a form of arrogance. It means either you think you already know it all, or you just don't care." As John F. Kennedy stated ... "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other".

2. CREATIVE - "A leader has to be CREATIVE, go out on a limb, [and] be willing to try something different. You know, think outside the box. Leadership is all about managing change—whether you're leading a company or leading a country. Things change, and you get creative. You adapt." Leadership is about staying ahead of the change curve; more than just keeping pace and adjusting. It is anticipating and thinking outside of your habitual ways of responding. Many of our clients have faced resource reductions and downsizings. We work with them to examine priorities, renegotiate levels of service and move to create a workplace that is more innovative and inspiring. As Einstein stated ... "The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them."



Dave Fleck, President and Principal Consultant

3. COMMUNICATE – “A leader has to COMMUNICATE. I’m not talking about running off at the mouth or spouting sound bites. I’m talking about facing reality and telling the truth. Communication has to start with telling the truth, even when it’s painful.” The best leaders we have worked with over the years are the ones who increased their visibility and personally met with employees during the toughest times. They were involved and they cared. They communicated what they could and if they did not know the answer they would say so. They were upfront. As a result, people trusted them and believed what they said. Employees felt a certain level of security knowing that information would be shared if at all possible. They did not have to wonder what they might be missing or what kind of information was being withheld. They felt secure in the knowledge that they would be kept in the loop. A great piece of advice comes from a quote by William Butler Yeats ... “Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people”.

4. CHARACTER - “That means knowing the difference between right and wrong and having the guts to do the right thing. Abraham Lincoln once said, ‘If you want to test a man’s character, give him power’.” Abigail van Buren (i.e. Dear Abbey) defines character as ... “(a) how he (or she) treats people who can't do him any good, and (b) how he (or she) treats people who can't fight back.” Corporate leaders who are admired amongst employees are those who treat everyone, regardless of level, as an important part of the organization.

5. COURAGE - “Swagger isn’t courage. Tough talk isn’t courage. Courage is a commitment to sit down at the negotiating table and talk. It is meeting with employees face-to-face even though you know there will be tension and you may not have all the answers.” As Mark Twain stated ... “Courage is ... mastery of fear - not absence of fear.” In my experience during times of change most corporate leaders shy away from meeting with employees until everything is “ticked and tied” (as my Finance friends say) and they can face employees with all the answers. Most of the time this means that a leader doesn’t meet with employees and is not visible as seldom is everything “buttoned up”. The answer is for leaders to consistently meet with employees ESPECIALLY when they don’t have all the answers. It takes courage and confidence to do this. It also takes belief that the process of meeting and talking is important and will lead to improved relations and positive results.



Dave Fleck, President and Principal Consultant

6. CONVICTION – “To be a leader you’ve got to have CONVICTION—a fire in your belly. You’ve got to have passion. You’ve got to really want to get something done.” As we work with corporations, I find Gandhi’s words very appropriate ... “‘No’ uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a ‘Yes’ merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble”. Conviction is speaking what you believe. True leadership is speaking what you believe while at the same time listening to and appreciating the convictions of others. A truthful and honest discussion leads to acknowledgement of critical issues. It also creates a climate that enables others to become involved in the solution.

7. CHARISMA – “A leader should have CHARISMA. I’m not talking about being flashy. Charisma is the quality that makes people want to follow you. It’s the ability to inspire. People follow a leader because they trust him. That’s my definition of charisma.” And, I would add, this trust is based upon being authentic. I am authentic when who I am and how I come across to others matches. People can trust that I will be consistent. Wikipedia proposes that, “charismatic individuals generally project unusual calmness, confidence, assertiveness, dominance, authenticity, and focus, and almost always possess superb communication and/or oratorical skills”. I have found that leaders with charisma project not only confidence, assertiveness and focus but also their belief in people and their ability to succeed.

8. COMPETENT - “A leader has to be COMPETENT. That seems obvious, doesn’t it? You’ve got to know what you’re doing. More important than that, you’ve got to surround yourself with people who know what they’re doing. A leader has to be a problem solver ...” Leadership competence is demonstrated in effectively leading the people of an organization to accomplish their objectives in pursuit of their vision. This concept is reinforced in Wikipedia ... “management competency includes the traits of systems thinking and emotional intelligence, and skills in influence and negotiation.” Competent corporate leaders see through the complexity to the big picture and have the interpersonal skills needed to draw the best out of people while accomplishing the goals of the organization.



Dave Fleck, President and Principal Consultant

9. COMMON SENSE - “You can’t be a leader if you don’t have COMMON SENSE. I call this Charlie Beacham’s rule. When I was a young guy just starting out in the car business, one of my first jobs was as Ford’s zone manager in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. My boss was a guy named Charlie Beacham, who was the East Coast regional manager. Charlie was a big Southerner, with a warm drawl, a huge smile, and a core of steel. Charlie used to tell me, ‘Remember, Lee, the only thing you’ve got going for you as a human being is your ability to reason and your common sense. If you don’t know a dip of [-----] from a dip of vanilla ice cream, you’ll never make it’.” A quote by Calvin Ellis Stowe sums up common sense ... “Common sense is the knack of seeing things as they are, and doing things as they ought to be done.” Common sense is important as I find ... “One pound of learning requires ten pounds of common sense to apply it” (Persian Proverb).

Lee Iacocca’s nine “Cs” provide an excellent framework for a corporate leader to succeed in today’s challenging business environment. The nine “Cs” also provide a valuable template to assess leadership effectiveness. I highly recommend using the framework in assessing your own leadership competency. A self assessment is an important first step of your own leadership development and will put you on the path to become a truly great leader.

