In These Challenging Times, Leadership Necessary ... More Than Ever
By Gary Izumo

Another long workday is done. You are drained, exhausted. And as you make your way home, you wonder if it is worth it. You have not been able to make the contribution you had hoped to. You feel empty. You feel powerless.

Unfortunately in these difficult times, all too many people feel this way.

Do you have to feel like this? Is there something you can do? The answer is yes. You are not powerless. You can do something. And that something is leadership.

Leadership is vision, values and inspiration in action. Critical to leadership are the development of a deep understanding of mission, clarification of core values and then the translation of these into a vision so that all can see the path and the meaning for what we do.

Despite the understanding of its importance, leadership is a concept that is widely misunderstood. Here are a couple of leadership myths:

Myth 1: Managing means leadership. Although leading is an essential component of managing, managers are not always leaders. You can manage and accomplish the expected. You can get tasks done without a vision. Decisions can be made by using rules.

But do you inspire your employees to achieve more than required? Can you detect and seize opportunities that fit the vision? Do your employees remain motivated even when the inevitable obstacles emerge? That's right, managing is not the same as leadership. Leadership achieves purpose and not just tasks.

Myth 2: All leaders demonstrate leadership. Being a leader is a position of power and responsibility. Leadership is a process that earns trust and respect.

"Leader" is often confused with titles such as manager or supervisor, designated positions of authority. Or "leader" is used when "lead person" or "in charge" might be better descriptions. We know that just because someone is a manager, that person is not necessarily a leader. Trust and respect are not granted. They are earned.

Myth 3: Leadership is the responsibility only of managers. We all have a colleague or a friend whom we deeply trust and respect. The person is always helping others, even if it makes life more difficult for her. She is honest and communicates in a forthright manner. She has the courage to do the right thing, even if there are possible adverse consequences. And if this person asks us for help, we are more than willing to give it, whether this person has authority over us or not. This person has power. This person is a leader. And this person does not need a position of authority to demonstrate leadership.

Unfortunately, too many employees, including managers, view themselves as powerless. We are not leaves floating down a river with no say as to where we will land. We have the potential to swim.
We all can demonstrate leadership. We all have power to shape our work environments. Trust and respect are what count. We don't have to be a boss to be a leader.

More specifically, what can we do to demonstrate leadership?

* Create a practical vision so that direction and values are clear for all to understand. Constantly communicate the vision to all levels of employees to deepen understanding. Connect with your employees. This is hard work . . . but this work brings meaning, inspiration and opportunity.

* Values are an integral part of leadership. Clarify organizational values. Having values guide behaviors when it is difficult, and not just easy, is one of the hallmarks of leadership.

Leaders understand that the ends do not justify the means. Leadership requires holding fast to values in the face of organizational and personal pressures to achieve. Leaders walk the talk. A manager can achieve organizational goals and objectives--but if the mission or integrity of the organization is compromised in the process, that person is not a leader.

* Build a culture, an environment, that creates energy and inspires commitment. Learn that working to translate organizational values into work behavior can create a motivating environment. By doing so, you not only create an external motivating force, but by buying in to these values, everyone in the organization--employees and managers--can develop their own powerful source of internal motivation.

On a daily basis, be on the lookout for opportunities to reinforce these workplace values. And leave no doubt that you will defend these values when they are consciously abused.

* Have courage and be bold. Leading means change and, as a result, it can be lonely and costly. Some people do not like change. Others may become jealous. Still others may be threatened. Leaders are change agents. And change agents need courage.

* Be passionate and relentless in the pursuit of mission. Outstanding leaders love what they do and demonstrate this in how they work. This love and tenacity is the source of organizational energy.

Let's be mission-driven and passionate in the achievement of purpose. Let's be a source and not just a user of organizational energy. Let's demonstrate leadership and not just go to work.