Castle or Crumb?

This ragged entrepre-
neurial leader is so
focused on his fish
(his future)—
his belief so firm
and resolute—that
he opts to pass by the
beautiful castle of present
and proximate opportunity
and press on until he finds
fulfillment of his aim
and ambition.

Needs-Based Leaders

They gain competitive advantage.

by Marie R. Miyashiro

EFFECTIVE LEADERS understand personal, team, and organizational needs and can distinguish needs from strategies. Fluency in understanding the needs can be called *empathy*. Many people think empathy is solely about listening to others and understanding their *feelings*. However, they often don't realize the value of *feelings* as *accessible indicators of needs.*

A so-called *negative* feeling indicates an unmet need; a *positive* feeling indicates a met need. At its most effective level, *empathy requires honestly assessing your own feelings and needs and then connecting with the feelings and needs of others.* When both happen, you increase the likelihood of meeting more needs.

In meeting needs, you decrease the likelihood of conflict and improve productivity—and with higher productivity come greater profits.
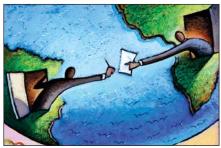
Empathy on Three Levels

Effective leaders are skilled in empathy on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational levels.

1. Intrapersonal level. Needs-based leadership first involves being *the leader of your own mind*. It calls for being *self-connected*, with a sense of *personal needs* and *values*. For example, you may have a need for *integrity, progress, meaning,* or *making a contribution*. Steve Jobs needed to *make a difference in the world* with Apple. *Needs* run far deeper than *wishes, wants,* or *requests*. They're powerful motivators. A needs- or values-based perspective helps you *achieve more* in an innovative way. When you become the leader of your own mind, you're less triggered by what you hear or see around you. You have a steady reference point within yourself—a compass by which to navigate change.

Consider **Bill Gore**, founder of W. L. Gore & Associates, creators of Gore-Tex® waterproof material and other technology-driven innovations. Gore held the values of *relationships* and *employee autonomy and cooperation*, a *vision* evident in its website, www.gore.com. For years, W. L. Gore & Associates was considered one of the best places to work.

When you are the leader of your own mind, you can maintain your inner clarity, which your team and organization can then mirror. Take the example of **Nick Swinmurn**, later joined by **Tony Hsieh**, who built Zappos, an online shoe company, into an organization so successful it was bought by Amazon in 2009 and allowed to run as an independent entity. These leaders had a need to *enjoy* their work as well as be financially successful. This led to a culture that not only embraces and drives change, but is known for its fun.

When you become aware of your feelings, you can begin to discern the needs they indicate. When you understand your needs—such as *consistency, clarity, honesty, individuality, consideration, order*—you can make requests of yourself or others to meet those needs, and

when needs are met, productivity rises.

2. Interpersonal level. The interpersonal aspect of empathy is how leaders *engage* with their team. What qualities do people want most from their leaders. Rather than wanting vision, purpose, drive, or wisdom from their leaders, people most wanted trust, compassion, stability, hope, honesty, integrity, respect, and empathy.

Connecting with others and seeing what's going on for them and being (as well as being perceived as) someone who cares about the human side of the equation are attributes of authentic leaders. People want and expect it.

As a leader, you can help bring out and meet the needs of others, which in turn, increases productivity and leads to collaboration and a sense of being connected to others and to a shared purpose. Needs involved in interaction between leader and team include *trust, respect,* and *collaboration*. Those three are enhanced and encouraged by *empathic connections*. Team leaders who can discern the feelings and needs (values)

beneath what is said can create mutual respect and trust with their team members. Failure to do so is much more likely to foster misunderstandings.

3. Organizational level. The leader's role is to facilitate a shared understanding of six basic organizational needs: the three Source needs of *Identity, Life-Affirming Purpose,* and *Direction*, and the three Leveraging needs of *Structure, Energy,* and *Expression*.

Zappos began as an online purveyor of quality shoes and since expanded its line of products, thus morphing its *Identity* while maintaining its promise of quality. Clearly, the *core value* that drives the company is *over-the-top customer service*. Because of the company's clarity and consistency about this core value of its *Identity* and *Life-Affirming Purpose*, its growth has been *exponential*.

An organization's *Identity* and *Life-Affirming Purpose* (why it exists) must be guided by its *Direction* (where it's going). These needs are supported by its *Structure*, driven by its *Energy* (profit, morale, and technology), and manifest through its *Expression* (unique position in the marketplace and world).

Needs Versus Strategies

In every interaction, the empathic approach is: *Connect-Think-Act*. In the *Connect* phase, you discover your values/needs; in the *Think* phase, you plan strategies based on your needs; in the *Act* phase, *you implement your strategies*.

Followers tend to work from a *strategy-based perspective*, skipping the *Connect* phase; true *leaders* work from a needs-based perspective. This is beneficial since conflict occurs only at the strategy level, not at the needs level.

When leaders coalesce people around needs, they decrease the odds of conflict and increase productivity.

Leaders facilitate the creation of a system that leads to more empathic connection with the customer—a way to systematically track and understand the customer's needs. The information is gathered from and shared with *the entire organization*. This is how your efforts can lead to system change.

Your *needs-based approach* to leadership can effectively drive strategy, team productivity, marketing, product and program development, and sales since it facilitates collaboration, innovation, and managing changes in the market and workplace. The approach is based on the *Nonviolent Communication Process*. **LE**

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ACTION: Become a needs-based leader.