

From the Editor's Clipboard Volume 10, Number 1 – Winter 2011

All Leadership Programs are Not Created Equal

Has the word leadership become trite? Has its meaning become diluted through overuse and misuse? This is a “soapbox” item for me. Here is an example.

A faculty member from another department visited with several leadership faculty in my department last month. He was soliciting our support for a certificate program the dean had tasked him with developing. The certificate was being developed for graduate students seeking a focus in the equine industry. The 15 hour program was titled the *Equine Industry Management and Leadership Certificate*. It consisted of a core of equine courses, three management electives, and one leadership course. We suggested dropping “leadership” from the title due to the minimal leadership content in the program.

There is a tendency to slap the “leadership” label on programs that are not grounded in leadership theory or leadership development. An example is From The Top's *Arts Leadership Program* based in Boston. This program encourages young musicians to “work with community partners to take their music beyond the concert hall, making a difference and inspiring others to do the same.” The Arts Leadership Abilene's website describes art leadership as:

1. Getting to know other young musicians and creating a connection
2. Sharing your talent and giving back
3. Inspiring others

Another example is the *Tending the Fire Leadership Program* of the Munsee Delaware Nation. “Course requirements included making fire using flint, fashioning a bow and arrow, and healing work, some of which involves behavioral modification. Traditional ceremonies such as the sweat lodge are part of the culture-based curriculum.”

While these are marvelous programs that help their participants grow and strive towards their potential, they are not “leadership” programs. They contain little or no purposeful effort to develop leadership skills in participants.

Richard Greenwald (2010), Dean of Graduate Studies at Drew University, thinks that part of the problem is that leadership is an amorphous term. As Stogdill noted, “[There are] almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (1974, p.259). I'm not sure that the

plethora of definitions is the issue as much as that many people simply have never tried to define leadership; therefore, any type of self-improvement falls under the leadership umbrella.

Blogger Brian Hendricks (2010) noted that much of the problem is that people use the word leadership when describing management practices. Such was the case of the faculty member seeking support for the equine certificate. When asked what he thought the graduates of his program would be able to do, he described management behaviors such as staffing, planning, and budgeting. Bennis and others have clearly delineated the difference between leadership and management behaviors (Northouse, 2010).

When self-improvement programs use the leadership label, this further dilutes the meaning of the word. With such a dearth of ethical leadership today, there is a need for leadership education/ development programs at every level of society, from youth to business executives. As Whitney and D'Andrea (2007) note, being an effective leader is not something that one arrives at, but is a process that one emerges from. As a leadership profession, what is our role in separating true leadership programs from the wannabes? As authors and reviewers, let us be guardians of the "leadership" label.

References

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Research and Theory Features

The Intersection Between Soft Skill Development and Leadership Education

Research reported by Christie Brungardt indicates the need for college graduates entering the workforce to have soft skill development such as communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills. A survey of graduates with varying levels of leadership education was conducted to determine soft skill development and the
