

Future Lessons From Future Leaders

Our mission: To go beyond what we fear by Rhea Blanken

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Often the study of leadership looks to history for established role models who have demonstrated particular leadership qualities. Time and again we look for those whose track record showcases their ability to guide, direct or influence others. We weigh their successes and failures to determine if they are worthy of imitating. There seems to be some undefined criteria determining the leadership qualities that were manifested, misapplied, or neglected. We use quotes to present their leadership attributes and draw parallels and comparisons before laying them over present day situations.

Using past leadership lessons is a tried and true practice. It's a valid emulation methodology. But as we continue to look out into the future with environmental scanning and scenario building practices, wouldn't it also be appropriate to look into the future for our leadership models? What if we could learn leadership lessons from the future not just from the past?

'Star Trek'...science fiction or fact

Consider the many captains of the Starship Enterprise as future leader role models. Yes, even science fiction characters count when searching the galaxy for demonstrations of leadership. Of them all, Capt. Jean-Luc Picard embodies all that is best in a leader whose responsibility is to go daily into an unknown future with a team of professionals committed to using all their expertise and other resources in forwarding their mission...to boldly go where no man has gone before. Not unlike the volunteer and staff leaders of today's associations.

If one followed Picard around to observe and analyze his actions, what behaviors would we see modeled to apply to present-day leaders, volunteer or staff? He consistently:

- stayed focused on the mission and made sure his staff knew what they were committed to and up against;
- knew the meaning of urgency and when to engage his crew accordingly, never adding unnecessary fire drills or inserting tension;

- encouraged his team to take the initiative with "permission granted" being the code words identifying which crew members were in charge moving forward;
- had staff disagreements move into solution-directed dialogues with communication more than a two-way street;
- gathered together diverse perspectives in order to design one plan of action that everyone then followed;
- created mission accountability with clear roles, aligned resources and cross training of responsibilities;
- demonstrated that results come from committed actions and open communication by disallowing gossip and complaining, which leaves "I'll try" no room to manifest; and
- gave his staff timely and appropriate recognition and acknowledgment for accomplishing their objectives.

Capt. Picard is not science fiction – he is great leadership and management in action. He built an extraordinary crew by trusting, listening and empowering them to collect and analyze information into organizational knowledge. He let them make recommendations after diligent peer collaboration, and supported them to act on those recommendations. In the end, he would instruct his staff to "Make it so," meaning that everyone had a role in making the future happen. After a course of action was determined he would say, "Engage," meaning it was time to get the job done.

Deciding your 5-year mission

In the reality of this science fiction television series, trepidation was conquered and the unknown was not feared, but that's not how we live. The Enterprise crew held fear as a resource to advance their mission not as a barrier to action. This allowed them to learn and adapt in the moment...except for the nameless junior grade officer always filled with foreboding who is eaten by the alien monster on the GYX40 outpost in the Alpha Quadrant.

The question is not which or whether, but rather how are Picard's lessons of leadership applicable in today's circumstances? That's the work in front of us – to harvest these lessons in our own fashion and translate them into our organizations.

The only way we can fail is not to make the effort, not to take the first step. Anything we attempt will be to our advantage as a foothold into our future. Learning and modifying as we go...having our words and our deeds be our legacy.

“A man’s learning, experiences and wisdom need not die with him, but may live forever if recorded as his legacy.”□- Admiral Andrea Brand, Superintendent, Starfleet Academy

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