

POWER OF PRIORITY SERIES: THE MOST PRECIOUS OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

A LEADER'S ATTENTION IS A PRECIOUS COMMODITY, PERHAPS THE MOST VALUABLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES.

Others compete for it and seek to direct it. Enormous quantities of information flow across a leader's desk. Changes in the external operating environment—emerging opportunities and threats—vie for a leader's time and energy. Leaders must decide what gets their attention among these many possible claimants.

A leader's effectiveness is a matter of what gets their attention—what's on their “radar screen.” A leader can focus this most precious of organizational resources on matters of vital necessity, or allow it to be diffused and overwhelmed in a sea of random stimuli, inconsequential minutia, or the merely novel and interesting—remember Gallienus.

Researcher and author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi notes the enormous importance of being able to focus and discipline our mental energy and attention. I quote from his book, *Flow*.

"At this point in our scientific knowledge we are on the verge of being able to estimate how much information the central nervous system is capable of processing. It seems we can manage at most seven bits of information—such as differentiated sounds, or visual stimuli, or recognizable nuances of emotion or thought—at any one time, and that the shortest time it takes to discriminate between one set of bits and another is about 1/18 of a second. By using these figures one concludes that it is possible to process at most 126 bits of information per second, or 7,560 per minute, or almost half a million per hour. Over a lifetime of seventy years, and counting sixteen hours of waking time each day, this amounts to about 185 billion bits of information. It is out of this total that everything in our life must come—every thought, memory, feeling, or action. It seems like a huge amount, but in reality it does not go that far."

It is also out of this total that everything in one's leadership must come. Consequently, the difference between focused and unfocused, disciplined and undisciplined passion is enormous. Passion does not automatically translate into progress over time.

PASSION MUST BE SHAPED BY A KEEN SENSE OF PRIORITIES IF IT IS TO BENEFIT THE LEADER AND ORGANIZATION EACH DAY AND OVER THE DECADES.

Nineteenth century American philosopher and psychologist William James observed,

"My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items that I notice shape my mind."

WHAT LEADERS PAY ATTENTION TO SENDS THE ORGANIZATION A POWERFUL MESSAGE AS TO WHAT IS ESSENTIAL AND WHAT IS EXPENDABLE, WHAT IS CENTRAL AND WHAT IS PERIPHERAL, WHAT IS NON-NEGOTIABLE AND WHAT IS OPTIONAL, WHAT MUST BE INVESTED IN AND WHAT CAN GO LACKING.

Consequently, what commands a leader's attention repeatedly, what he or she is consistently engaged in doing is a matter of utmost importance.

Leaders must stay vitally engaged with issues of vital importance to the welfare and progress of the organization. Toward this end, the Roles as depicted in the 4R Model of Leadership are helpful in organizing and regulating a leader's attention. Each Role highlights those aspects of organizational life, the activities, interactions and processes, important enough to merit not only the leader's attention, but also the investment of the organization's resources.

(You can learn more about the Roles of a leader in *The Art of Virtue Based Transformational Leadership*, available on this website.)

The Roles category of the 4R Model highlights four vital areas of organizational life that demand a leader's attention.

1. The Direction Setter Role deals with clarifying the organization's directional imperatives, its purpose, and mission and core values. Leaders must pay attention to the overall direction of the organization and regularly evaluate if every aspect of organizational life serves these imperatives.
2. The Change Agent Role deals with learning what the organization must learn to keep its promises to the world. Leaders must pay attention to the quality and progress of the organization's learning agenda.
3. The Coach Role deals with the challenge of identifying and developing the human talent to insure the long-term welfare and progress of the organization. Leaders must pay close attention to the development of new leaders to insure the organization has sufficient human resources to keep its promises to the world into the indefinite future.
4. The Ambassador Role deals with engaging with those the organization intends to benefit. Leaders must pay close attention to those the organization intends to serve, and evaluate whether the organization is indeed benefiting them.

What a leader pays attention to, and how intensely and how long he or she pays attention to it determines the effectiveness of his or her leadership.

What has your attention today?

What is on your radar screen this month?

Work with us
www.Lead2Transform/Education
info@lead2transform.com