

PASSION SERIES: A LEADER'S MOST VALUABLE ASSET

PASSION BORN OF NOBLE PURPOSE IS THE FIRST QUALITY OF THE LEADER, THE PRIMAL SOURCE OF SUSTAINED, EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP.

The Global Leadership Forecast 2011 identifies passion as a key measure of leadership effectiveness. The term is used to describe leaders who are committed to and enjoy their leadership roles for the right reasons, and who work hard to help the company, team and each individual succeed. While I am glad they list passion as a leadership prerequisite, I don't think they have done justice to the term (see previous two blogs). Passion—the kind grounded in noble, higher purpose—is not just one of many important leadership qualities. It is, I believe, fundamental, necessary and primary to effective leadership. Here's why.

The first obligation of the leader is to identify and sustain his or her passion. Russian Poet Boris Pasternak put it well in verse.

"It's not revolutions and upheavals that clear the road to new and better days...but someone's soul inspired and ablaze."

Twentieth century American clergyman Kenneth Hildebrand stated it in eloquent prose.

"Strong lives are motivated by dynamic purposes; lesser ones exist on wishes and inclinations. The most glowing successes are but reflections of an inner fire."

As the organization stands in the gap between the promise of a better tomorrow and the harsh realities of today, as they face down insurmountable obstacles, as they take on mountains of need, as they consider the cost of sacrificial service, members will not ask their leaders what interests them, or what they prefer to do.

THE FIRST QUESTION POSED TO THE LEADER DURING THE TOUGH TIMES IS NOT WHETHER HIS OR HER STYLE OR GIFT MIX WILL SEE THEM THROUGH, OR EVEN IF THEIR COMPETENCE CAN CARRY THE DAY.

At the point of crisis, no one cares about the leader's interests or preferences, style or gifting, or even competence level. While these are important, they are never the primary issue.

The organization and its members want to know what the leader hungers and thirsts for, and so what they will do no matter what; what and whom the leader cares about deeply and so will suffer and sacrifice for willingly, even joyfully. They want to know what the leader must do, whose interests they must protect. They want to know if the leader has an inner fire, a soul inspired and ablaze.

DURING DIFFICULT TIMES, PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW AND SEE THE LEADER'S PASSION BORN OF "DYNAMIC PURPOSE."

The second obligation of the leader is to ignite passion in others. James MacGregor Burns reflected,

"Where nothing is felt, nothing matters.... The leader's fundamental act is to induce people to be aware or conscious of what they feel—to feel their true needs so strongly, to define their values so meaningfully, that they can be moved to purposeful action."

British evangelist and founder of the Methodist church John Wesley vividly described this fundamental act.

When you set yourself on fire, people will love to come and watch you burn."

INDIFFERENCE AND COMPLACENCY ARE THE MORTAL ENEMIES OF PASSION, AND CONSEQUENTLY THE GREATEST CHALLENGE TO EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP.

The French have a word for inappropriate superficiality in the face of a situation calling for a passionate, engaged response. It is *insouciance*, meaning a careless disregard or indifference; a dispassionate, carefree attitude inappropriate in light of the gravity of the occasion.

The ancient idea of sloth picks up on this careless indifferent attitude toward the consequential challenges and opportunities put before the leader and the organization. Sloth is one of the "seven deadly sins," specifically a sin against the virtue of zeal. Zeal is an energetic, passionate response to the challenges put before us. Sloth is the disinclination to work, engage and exert oneself. Sloth should not be confused with mere physical laziness. It is much worse. It is spiritual, moral and relational laziness, a sickness of the soul, a spiritual malaise and deadly superficiality that weakens the will, and blinds us to the gravity of the situation before us, and the consequential decisions we must make to address it. If a leader is in the grip of sloth, or operates with an attitude of *insouciance*, they will likely flee from need and suffering, ignore opportunity, and instead walk in the way of comfort and ease to the detriment of the organization and those it serves.

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EFFECTIVE LEADERS ARE ANIMATED BY PASSION BORN OF NOBLE PURPOSE.

Wishes and inclinations, preferences and interests, even gifting and competence won't suffice.

AN EFFECTIVE LEADER'S MOST VALUABLE ASSET IS A SOUL INSPIRED AND ABLAZE, AN INNER FIRE THAT SPURS THEM ON AND ENERGIZES THOSE AROUND THEM TO ENDURE IN DIFFICULTY AND PURSUE THE NOBLE PURPOSE PUT BEFORE THEM.

Lacking passion, a leader may easily succumb to indifference and complacency, placing their leadership, as well as the mission of the organization at risk.

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