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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 27: BOB WILLIAMS – LEADING VS. MANAGING

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. Are you a leader or a manager? Successful organizations need both, but the roles vary greatly, and each requires a particular skill set, mindset, and personality. Bob Williams spent much of his career in leadership positions with the DuPont Company, San Diego Gas and Electric, and Sharp health care. He teaches leadership and management to corporate clients, executives, and business school students at William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. He joins us on the podcast today to discuss the characteristics of leaders and managers and why both are important to organizations. Here's our conversation with Bob Williams on leading versus managing.

Ken White

Thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

Bob Williams

Thanks for asking me. Pleasure to be here.

Ken White

Leaders versus managers, we sometimes use the terms interchangeably. They're very different, aren't they?

Bob Williams

They're very different. And actually, you have to grow into both of those jobs. And generally, if you think of an organization as a pyramid, put that mental image in your mind. What you find is that managers inhabit our area below the line, which takes care of the operations of a business or an organization. And leaders spend an awful lot of time, if they're effective, trying to figure out not where they are where they need to go. And the managers maintain them where they are so they can have that luxury of thinking about the future.

Ken White

Is it safe to say most managers would like to move up to become leaders?

Bob Williams

Yeah, I think that's very safe to say. At least in the business experience, I have most people like to do that. But sometimes they like to do it for the wrong reasons. Lots of times, they do it obviously for monetary reasons, but to really make the transition effectively, you have to move from a thought process that singularly monetary. Now be realistic. We all want to make more money in whatever job that we have. But when you cross that invisible barrier that I spoke about as it relates to the triangle, when you move across that into the leadership realm, you have to have a pretty strong fixation about being selfless. You have to think about developing other people because you frankly have to have somebody to delegate to. So there is there's a selflessness, but there's also a very specific business purpose here because leaders, I could make a case for the fact that they, spend most of their time motivating and asking other people to do things that they think have value.

Ken White

Sure.

Bob Williams

And if they do that effectively, the people they're asking or delegating to will also think it has value.

Ken White

Right.

Bob Williams

So they can delegate more and more and more, and it's effective for an organization.

Ken White

So let's back up what are the characteristics of a manager.

Bob Williams

Well, there are several, and I don't mean this to be all of them, but I think managers, first of all, love process. They love the idea that if they knocked down A, B follows A, and then comes C after B, and they love that progression because it's predictable. Uncertainty is not their friend. Uncertainty is an enemy. So they dignify the status quo as a result of that. They also have a certain amount of enjoyment that they get from bureaucracy because you can also make a compelling case that bureaucracy is a group of people who are checkers or checking the checkers, which means again that you're dealing with many cases

certainty and double checking that everything you're doing is going to be right. So the other characteristic you see in a lot of managers is they are risk averse. They don't want to take a risk that changes the boundary conditions of what they know. Now if you're in a business that's relatively stable that has an environment externally that doesn't change that much. You're okay with that. I think what's happened since 2008 with the Great Recession is it's changed all these business models, and it's because all these pressures came to us externally and blew those business models up. That doesn't exclude the banks and some things that they did, but it was a contributor in the velocity of change is so much faster now. So that's why I say I think you need both. You need both leaders and managers in an organization. One is looking up the windshield, saying where do we need to be before the world gets there. That's the leader. And other people are essentially driving it from the present day and out of the rearview mirror. This is where we've been. This is my process. This is how I do this. I can't be wrong.

Ken White

Any other characteristics of leaders?

Bob Williams

Yeah, I think they have excellent communication skills. It's very important. They have to have a almost a marketing mentality where they sell what they believe has great value to people that, by their nature, don't like uncertainty. That takes a very persuasive communication capability. I think another one is that they're not risk averse, but they are rational risk. They aren't risk-crazy but given a certain level of uncertainty, it doesn't stop them from making the attempt to change something. They don't fear failure. Failure for them as a leader is something that is rational, and I'm gonna take the risk, and if it does fail, I'm going to do two things. I'm going to do something else, but I'm going to learn and not repeat that mistake. So it becomes a learning mechanism for them. For a lot of managers, it's a disaster. They just hate it, but for a leader they say okay, we did what made sense at the time we did it. Let's move on and let's learn from what we didn't put didn't work and try something else. And the driver for all that, Ken, I think, is that all of these things, their competitors, the external environment is in constant change. And if you're not changing with it or anticipating it, which is even stronger, you're in a lot of trouble.

Ken White

That has to take an incredible amount of passion.

Bob Williams

Yeah.

Ken White

To embrace the change to know the competitive landscape and all the communication, you got to be pretty passionate to be a leader then.

Bob Williams

You have to be passionate. You have to be competent. Both of those things have to be in there. What you don't want is somebody that's passionate and incompetent. I mean, that's the worst combination. That's like having energy but not knowing what you're doing because you'll just sink an organization under those scenarios. So who you pick to be a leader is one of the most critical jobs of the current leadership. That includes boards that includes people that are already in those leadership positions. One of the biggest mistakes that can be made is to pick the wrong people at the most senior levels of an organization because you cannot oftentimes correct the mistakes that they make because they have so many resources at their command. If they haven't thought it through and aren't agile about the way they think about the world, it'll bring a company down. So succession planning and picking the right people is absolutely critical.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Bob Williams on leading versus managing in just a minute. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. If you are looking to improve your leadership and business skills, the Center for Corporate Education has some terrific programs scheduled in the upcoming weeks. Finance for the non-financial manager, rapid cycle innovation for healthcare professionals, and a five-day certificate program in business management. All those programs are on the calendar. For more information, check out the center's website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with Bob Williams on leading versus managing.

Ken White

Some of our listeners are leaders. They want the big job. The big one. What should they be thinking about if an offer comes their way? What is it about the organization that is making the offer should they consider?

Bob Williams

First of all, I think they should start with the end in mind. I think they should say look, if I take this job, what would I do differently. Why does it have value? And who would I want to surround myself with? If I take this job to help me accomplish what I think has this. So one of the most important things is they have to always be thinking even while they're managers they have to learn from people that they are not led well by. There are things to be learned by people that run into managers that aren't just necessarily the best.

Ken White

You bet.

Bob Williams

And there are things to be learned, especially by people that seem to have the right mental set, and they should learn from them. But do your own independent thinking. What do you want this company or organization to be ultimately, and can you help them get there? And if the answer to those questions is I know what I want, and I think I can help them do it. You should take the job.

Ken White

You teach Maxwell.

Bob Williams

John Maxwell, yeah.

Ken White

Yeah. Can you share some of that with us?

Bob Williams

Yeah. The reason I like him is because he has this level five leadership concept, and I like that for two reasons. One is it is a nice five-step process which I was just saying managers dignify, and you're going to get most of your leaders coming out of that managerial class, so it's a nice transition. They love process, so the move to leadership having a process helps them measure. That's a good thing. And the other reason is there are characteristics for each of these levels. For example, a level one leader is one that is in that job because they've been appointed to that position. I want to follow you because of where you are in the hierarchy. If you've developed in that level one position, you get to the level two, and that's the permission level. Now that I have the position, you've earned enough trust so far in me that I want to follow you. There's something about your ability to communicate and do all those other things we talked about earlier that I like. The signal seems strong. I want to follow you. So you're a level two leader if you suddenly have to get a permission to say okay, I'm going to follow you. Level three, I follow you because you did great on level two, and you know what you're getting results. And I like to be able to get results because if you get results, that helps me too.

Ken White

Sure.

Bob Williams

So now your progression is to level three. Level four, you know what I want to develop in my job. I want to learn from you. You have been successful in one, two, and three. You're smart. You know what? You're competent. So now I'm going to take you and promote you. Notice I'm having the worker or the follower promote the leader. This is where servant leadership comes from.

Ken White

Right.

Bob Williams

So at level four, I'm saying, look, those first three levels, you were awesome. Now I want to learn from this, and I want to develop, and everybody wants to develop. I want to be better than I am today if you're motivated and ambitious. And finally, level five, which is the greatest of the five levels, is all those things that you've done for me, all those things that you've taught me, all those things that you moved through from position to get to level five. I'm at respect for you. Now that does not mean you have to be popular. Somebody said once that if you want to lead and you want to be popular, you should get a pet. And I think that's probably right because you're going to have to make choices, and that's what level five does. If you have respect for the person that's leading you. You follow them a lot on faith, they take you to a future that is not knowable, but you are totally confident that based on their past experience and your experience with them, they can get you there. So you proceed on faith because you respect them. That is the holy grail of leadership. That is where you have arrived when you have that. Because you can make bad choices, you can make good choices, you may take power from one place and put it in another place, somebody loses, somebody gains, but it's okay because I respect your decision-making.

Ken White

Right.

Bob Williams

And that's a great situation to be in.

Ken White

Some of our listeners want to be that ultimate leader want to be in charge. They have the passion. They can communicate. They're competent. They'll embrace risk. They've got it all. How do they get there? What advice do you have for them to get to that point where they have that opportunity to be the person?

Bob Williams

I think first of all you have to train somebody to take your place. And the reason that you have to train somebody to take your place, and this happens in a lot of organizations that are very hierarchical. They carry themselves and cover themselves with turf. They work in silos. One of the reasons they work in silos is they protect their turf. Well, if you're really good in your silo and you're protecting your turf, I'd be crazy to move you out of that.

Ken White

Right.

Bob Williams

So what they don't realize is that by not training someone to take their place, they shorten their career platform. Everybody plateaus at some point in any organization. You take the lid off that platform. If you are really adding to the value of the organization by training somebody. You're training your replacement. And if you do that, you can move up, but I'm not going to move you if you're really good at what you do and you've protected your turf to the degree that put me at risk if I lose you. So you've got to be able to do that. Now, what's a leader have to do in order to accomplish that? They have to hire, and they have to hire really well, and they have to have people that are competent that they can delegate to. If you've got that and you're smart, you can nurture a whole organization very quickly. Hire wrong, and you got a problem. The second thing is you have to ask as a leader is if I do these projects that we've never done before, will the customer really care? And if the answer is, the customer won't care. Save your money and do something else because that's the source of all revenue. And the third thing that you have to really be able to do is be introspective and recognize that you don't know all the answers. You have to be able to pull people together and be able to say I don't know. Can you think about the transference of value you give other people that report to you when you look them in the eye and say I don't know what do you think? That says humility. That says reality. That says grow with me. That's powerful, really powerful.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Bob Williams on leading versus managing, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you get to the next level in your career with business and leadership development programs that specifically fit your needs. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your organization, check out our website at wmleadership.com. That's wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guest this week Bob Williams and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.