Diligence is a key component of a three-step ongoing process for developing as a leader consisting of two questions and an attitude. A leader doing a thorough assessment of “where am I?” in life is the first step in the journey of personal development and is facilitated by establishing a clear vision and statement of purpose. The next step, determining “who am I?” consists of conscientiously operating with a prioritized set of core values to guide not only where that journey is destined to go, but also how it can be virtuously completed. The third step and key to making the process meaningful is a “here I am” attitude exhibited through consistent goals to take action. The objective is dynamic growth from persistent effort that encompasses a transcendent cause. Leaders applying diligence in this three-step process not only are working at a job or completing an objective, but also fulfilling a calling.

Diligence in the Oxford American Dictionary (Abate, 2006) is defined as careful or persistent work or effort. Roget’s Thesaurus (Roget, 1911) list of synonymous terms includes – conscientiousness, thoroughness, persistence, commitment, tirelessness, hard work, effort, and perseverance. King Solomon describes diligence as man’s precious possession and that it makes one’s soul rich (Proverbs 12:27; 13:4 NKJV). Applying diligence in whatever capacity does not necessarily exhibit leadership, but all authentically leading display diligence in order to be followed to achieve results.

Clarifying the role of diligence to ensure it applies to achieving a desired result is what distinguishes a leader from a manager. Diligence without discernment can be detrimental. The leader uses discernment as to what to apply diligence to. What, from the outside, may look like failure at one moment can in fact be the prelude to success at another, and this success can in turn translate into rigidity, escalation of commitment and subsequent failure (Kisfalvi, 2011). Choosing when to persist is the key.

How much value is destroyed as a leader when people are made to feel as though reversing direction and cutting losses are things to be ashamed of? An organizational climate that makes admitting and learning from mistakes as valued as persistence and perseverance exhibits true leadership (Roberto, 2009). Managers are diligent to follow a rigid system, whereas leaders are not afraid to alter or abandon the system allowing team members to make appropriate adjustments. A paradox occurs when it appears that diligence is not of value in select situations.
Diligence is not abandoned when an objective is no longer pursued, but merely redirected. The overall objective may be profit or productivity that requires the pursuit of subgoals to achieve. Eliminating or altering some or all of those subgoals is still exhibiting diligence to achieve the overall desired outcome. Prudent redirection of effort does not diminish, but augments commitment to a leader.

Perseverance or diligence is considered one of the top five attributes of leadership in a study done with CEOs (Aoki, 1993). The other attributes are self-awareness, vision, communication and trust. Another study (Golder, 1996) suggests five similar factors that drive the superior performance of early leaders of newly introduced products: a vision of the mass market, managerial persistence, financial commitment, relentless innovation, and asset leverage. The pioneers’ lack of diligence in implementing these factors often leads to product failure.

Diligence being an attribute of leadership along with driving superior performance is a key component for short and long-term growth as a leader. Assessing “where you are” requires a close look at current circumstances and setting apart time to clarify strengths and areas that need improvement. Knowing “where you are” leads to making projections for the future. Next, the question to be asked is “who are you?” to determine if a willingness exists to diligently put forth the required time and effort to achieve the desired outcome.

Many managers have answered the two questions with success and have risen to high positions. Top leaders come to the realization that a job is not only a task to be accomplished, but also a calling to fulfill. The “here I am” attitude is one of service to subordinates and the customer. Followers of these leaders understand various forms of power such as coercive, reward and legitimate that can be abused, but choose to attribute referent and expert power (French & Raven, 1960) to this person in a positive sense.

The two questions and an attitude process requires diligence to implement. Many leaders get by using all the aforementioned facets of power, but earning the honor of receiving positive referent power involves a transcendent cause accentuated by a “here I am attitude.” The components of the two questions and an attitude process are intended to be sequential, but stand alone as well when adjustments are needed in the leadership journey. Following is some clarification for each component and how accompanying diligence is required for implementation.

**Where Are You?**

The first question posed to mankind in the Garden of Eden was “where are you?” A rhetorical query from an omniscient God prompts Adam to face the facts and do an assessment after disobeying a direct command. A key question as well for developing as a leader is to diligently do a periodic personal assessment by asking the question *where am I?* Where a person is spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and physically has everything to do with applying sound leadership in both normal and difficult circumstances.

All aspects of life going well is the ideal, but rarely do leaders have that luxury. The vicissitudes of life and business ensure challenges that can be addressed courageously or fled from or ignored with the latter two options usually resulting in a much bigger problem occurring sooner than later. A major factor that separates strong from mediocre leadership is the diligent application of core principles when difficulties arise. The principled responses identify whether a difficult problem is to continue to be addressed or abandoned.
Structuring for a systematic approach consists of the components of having a vision, statement of purpose, core values and detailed goals. A vision and statement of purpose fit well with the question “where are you”. Where a person or organization is has a lot to do with the past. Having a vision and statement of purpose in place serve as a metric to measure current status. The vision and statement of purpose are either being implemented or ignored.

Part of this problem is that many vision and purpose statements are officially written, but have no spirit. The writing can literally be “on the wall”, but nobody pays any attention to the meaningless words. Attempts to measure achievement apart from profit-loss statements fall short, but that is all some companies and leaders are interested in. Profits are important, but why not make this part of a transcendent cause that energizes employees beyond a nine to five job?

Vision and purpose diligently implemented clarify a desired outcome that has meaning (Ellsworth, 2002). Leaders report the numbers to the employees, but with a clear vision and statement of purpose, chances are the employees already know “where the company is” in regards to performance. Everyone knowing “where the company is” aligns employees and leadership and encourages ownership of and enhanced cooperation for future projections.

**Who Are You?**

In order to pursue any worthwhile endeavor, it is necessary to determine if the character of the person or organization is present to go forward. Leaders step forward to accept the challenge. In reference to charismatic leaders, Raelin (2011) states,

“Often, such individuals have heroic qualities because they're thought to persist in spite of the odds against them. They're also thought to possess particular heroic characteristics, such as courage and persistence, to face and prevail against those who would resist their noble efforts.”

Diligent leaders answer the question “who are you?” by adhering to a set of core values.

What drives a person to persevere to accomplish great things without regrets despite great opposition? Many factors play a role, but in order for this to occur in a virtuous manner, a strong set of core values is foundational. As Roy Disney so aptly stated, “It’s not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.” Adhering to core values may not be expeditious at times, but being diligent to make principled decisions has long-term benefits.

Values are the ideas and beliefs that influence and direct choices and actions (Al Gini, 1998). Whether right or wrong, good or bad, values, both consciously and unconsciously, mobilize and guide how decisions are made. Scholar Mary Jo Hatch (1997) posits that values are the social principles, goals, and standards held within a culture to have intrinsic worth. Values constitute the basis for making judgments about what is right and wrong, which is a reason for also being referred to as a moral or ethical code. Values are often associated with strong emotions and used as standards for making moral judgments.

So far based on these definitions, values are something that everybody has, good or bad that influence decisions and are considered normal or abnormal by fitting into societal expectations. What distinguishes one person’s behavior from another’s is based on core values that are prioritized in a unique fashion and diligently applied. Values are *core values* when their influence on what people do supersedes that of most other values in a personal value system (Pant & Lachman, 1998). Core values are part of a system and when isolated, rarely have an
affect on people. A value system consists of an arrangement of personal preference rankings (Verplanken & Holland, 2002).

The role of diligence as a virtue is consistently applying core values. Diligently applying prioritized values monitors the proper balance of a leader’s emotional and intellectual decisions (Kisfalvi, 2011). Eliminating short cuts and quick fixes at the expense of violating core values is not an option. True leaders can look in the mirror and answer the question “who are you” without regrets. Once uncompromised character is exhibited in making principled decisions, serving others with a “here I am” attitude is the next step.

Here I Am Attitude

Once the big picture of a vision, statement of purpose and core values are established, the next step is setting effective goals that define the action steps of a “here I am” attitude. Leaders that have only answered the questions “where are you” and “who are you” can be very successful, but more than likely miss out on making a difference in the world through serving others. A “here I am” attitude is much more than goal setting with the key being what type of objectives are being pursued. The following explanation of the goal setting process is presented in the context of leaders pursuing meaningful objectives.

In Making a Good Brain Great by Daniel G. Amen (2005), observations reveal that over time, the prefrontal cortex section of the brain matches behavior with set goals. Leaders’ diligently aligning goals with the purpose of serving both employees and the customer is an art to be desired and hopefully mastered. The goal properties of being specific, challenging, and defined time-wise determine how strongly committed a person becomes in any given endeavor (Locke et al., 1981; Schunk, 1990). Studies also show that a ping of dopamine is released every time a person gets something right (Halpern, 2008). Dopamine is generated in the brain when pleasure or satisfaction is experienced and reinforces the goal setting process.

People’s goals affect their achievement, social relationships, and feelings of wellbeing (Dweck, 1999). How much more enhanced is that well being when leaders are diligent in making the work environment a place where a “here I am” attitude of service is rewarded. Most people admit goal setting is beneficial, but rarely experience that benefit. An environment with a leader diligently applying a “here I am” attitude makes the advantages of goal setting apparent in a practical way.

Writing down goals is a priority that needs to be scheduled personally and in the workplace. Choosing to gain skills, become more productive, expand one’s horizons and live a significant life does not happen randomly. In the acquisition of competencies, goals help to build a sense of efficacy by structuring activities (Bandura, 1997). Cantor and Fleeson (1991) posited, “Accomplishing personal goals is fundamental to an adaptive life” (p. 327). As self-efficacy is increased, the operation of goals is affected so that motivation and accomplishment are a product of reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1997). Boekaerts et al. (2000), Mone (1994), and Zimmerman (2000) also all concluded in studies that self-efficacy and goals reciprocally affect each other.

Reviewing the previous statements, the more that is accomplished, the more motivated a person becomes. Highly motivated people likewise accomplish more. Setting some simple goals to complete will build self-efficacy which in turn motivates to set more challenging goals. None of
this happens unless that first goal is written down. A leader diligently encouraging this process with a “here I am” attitude turns a mediocre organization into a great one.

Summary

Diligence is a key component of a three-step ongoing process for developing leaders consisting of two questions and an attitude. A leader doing a thorough assessment of “where am I?” in life is the first step in the journey of personal development. By diligently implementing a vision and statement of purpose, a meaningful pursuit of a desired outcome is clarified.

A leader answering the question “who am I?” consists of conscientiously operating within the parameters of a set vision and statement of purpose aligned with a prioritized set of values. Diligently following established core values guides decision-making that is ethical and moral.

The third step and key to enhancing the growth of a leader is incorporating a “here I am” attitude. The result is dynamic growth from a persistent effort of goal setting that encompasses a transcendent cause. Leaders applying diligence in this three-step process not only are working at a job or completing an objective, but also fulfilling a calling.

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