

# Self-Leadership and Crucial Conversation

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De Pree, chairman of the board of directors of Herman Miller, Inc., compares leadership with a jazz band. The leader of a jazz band has the beautiful opportunity to perform the best out of the other musicians, but he or she must know how to combine the unpredictability of the future with the gifts of individuals (1992, p.9). In a similar way, there are various leadership components useful to conduct the best from any organization. I personally believe that "leadership begins with myself (self-leadership or 360 degree leadership) to influence the right people to use an effective process or system to accomplish a corporate mission or purpose." This definition includes the four key components and critical questions comprising leadership:

- Self-leadership (or 360 degree leadership): Who am I? By whom am I led? How do I develop myself? Do I have a personal development plan?
- Influencing people: How can I maximize my communication skills to influence right people as well as to build up healthy relationships with people in daily life?
- Using an effective process or system: Do we have a clear process or system in our organizations?
- Having a clear vision or purpose: Does your organization have a corporate mission and clear vision?

The more an organization, not to mention an individual, grows their capabilities in those components, the more organization tends to experience growth. In this article, I will briefly cover the first two components in the definition above.

John Maxwell, leadership guru, properly describes the close relation between self-leadership and organizational leadership. According to him, "an organization will never surpass the capabilities of its leaders. Namely, the level of the leader's own maturity, character and ability will define the level of effectiveness in your organizational life" (2007, p.1). Maxwell addresses the first key factor of effective leadership principles: Good leaders who desire to grow in their organizations will look for more opportunities to increase in their leadership capacities and continue to grow themselves. An American researcher once challenged how much time and energy the top leaders in US invested in these areas. The results of the research reveal:

1. 50%: Leading themselves (self-leadership)

2. 25%: Leading people over them (boss)
3. 20%: Leading people laterally (peers, friends and family)
4. 5%: Leading people under their care.

In contrast to the leaders in US, the researcher discovered that many Korean leaders invested more of their time and energy in controlling people under their care.

A leader's communication abilities that lead to positive change is the second key component that comprises effective leadership. In reality, poor communication is the number one cause of conflict in any human relationship. Many of us haven't learned how to use crucial conversation skills in handling critical issues and hot discussions. Rather, we may often select two non-productive ways: 1) threats and name-calling, and 2) silent fuming. For this reason, board meetings, particularly for many of non-profit organizations, tend to become a place of warfare with words among board members. In fact, simple techniques to handle crucial conversations can help leaders choose the third option that allows them to speak openly, honestly and respectfully. A crucial conversation is "a discussion between two or more people where stakes are high, opinions vary, emotions run strong, and the outcome greatly impacts their lives" (2002, p.3). Coaching for crucial conversations is designed to help people handle critical issues respectfully. Crucial conversations also begin with your own heart. Before engaging dialogue with others, stop and try to answer the following questions:

- What do I really want for myself, for others, and for this relationship?
- What is my communication style under stress?
- What is the mutual purpose or benefits in this relationship?

Answering these questions will help you master your internal stories and emotions. Once you master them, you can move into the second step of crucial conversation.

In summary, self-leadership is the most critical component that comprises effective leadership in organizational development. Kaizen is the Japanese word to describe small and continuous improvement. A good leader is one who looks for more opportunities to practice kaizen in daily life. Are you the leader who will practice kaizen today? It will make you and your organization differ from yesterday.