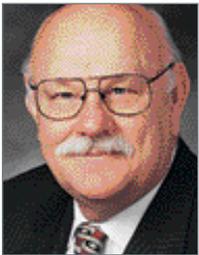


# What Kind of Leader Do You See in the Mirror?



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A recent *Time* magazine column suggested that there are probably more books on leadership than there are true leaders in society. If that is true, then we have an overabundance of words on the subject and a minimal capacity to deliver on those words. The same thing could be said about the concept of leadership within the fire service. There are lots of books about it. However, there seems to be a paucity of people who are willing to stick their neck out too far for fear of getting it chopped off.

This phenomenon is very clearly spelled out in a book I recently read called *The Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*. Its numerous authors hoped to discover some thread of continuity that sews leadership theory together. Unfortunately, the editors and contributors could not come up with a definitive theory of leadership to which everyone agreed.

In this book, the editors indicated that they believe that the vast majority of research and so-called theory regarding leadership has been abandoned by the academic community and relinquished to popular writers and management consultants. Go to any bookstore, and you'll quickly see the truthfulness of this statement. Many of these books are nothing more than regurgitations of personality styles. Most of them are named after someone. They have titles along the lines of *Lincoln on Leadership*, *Mahatma Gandhi on Leadership*, *Attila the Hun on Leadership*, and so forth.

If you wish to define the style of leadership you possess, you need to know about such theories. While reading about leadership doesn't make you into a leader, believing that you want to be one is a good starting point. Leadership also consists of having a really clear-cut understanding of human behavior and its relationship to your personal skill set. Instead of worrying about which theory of leadership you are following, worry about who is following you.

One of the texts I read discussed "The Charismatic Leader," i.e., the person that seemingly everybody wants to follow. But there are numerous other types of leader that people also follow. Once you deter-

mine what type of leader you are, then the next logical question should be: is anybody following where I am trying to go? If the answer is "no," then you need to start thinking about whether you understand what it takes to galvanize other human beings.

Probably the best answer I can recall receiving to the question, "What is your leadership style?" came from a young captain who responded "an effective one." When asked what he meant by that statement, he said that he was strongly driven by a passion to influence the outcome of the organization and was able to get his subordinates to buy into the concept of being the best company in the department. He questioned himself from time to time to determine whether people were accepting his beliefs and made necessary adjustments to continue to communicate and obtain their support. But the watchword for him was "effective." And he was known within his organization as being someone to go to when something need to be done. Isn't that what leaders are?

So, I pose the question: What kind of leader are you? If you answer it with a textbook answer, then you are probably a theoretical leader. If you answer it with something that emerges from your heart and head at the same time, something that tends toward making things happen, then perhaps you have a better-than-average perception of your leadership style.

If you can't answer this question without resorting to theory, then it is time to reassess what you are doing with your time. A strong sense of self-awareness and an intense desire to improve your ability to affect the work ethic of the people who work for you might be part of your career-development process in the very near future.

In the final stages of your leadership opportunities, you will probably have the ability to look in the mirror and tell yourself whether you made a difference. Hopefully the face you see looking back at you will not be diluted by any sense of false achievement, but rather will be reflected in the fact that others carry on where you have left off. ■