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# Reliable Leadership The Influence of Details

By PAUL VITALE

“It’s all in the details,” or at least that is what I have been told my entire life. It is not the mountain; it’s the tiny grains of earth that make up the mountain that really count. When exercising a Google search for examples that speak to the significance of details, you are likely to find pages and pages of interesting dialogue. Hemingway coined a quote that is quite resounding, “Every man’s life ends the same way. It is only the details of how he lived and how he died that distinguish one man from another.” In a world where everyone seems to be looking for the next “big thing,” it’s the smaller happenings that are so often overlooked.

Recently, I had the distinct pleasure of presenting during a “Year Beginning Meeting” to associates at Walmart. Prior to arriving in Bentonville, Arkansas, I sat down with the book, *Made in America*, written by the company’s founder, Sam Walton. A wealth of sound knowledge and intriguing history was shared throughout, but I found myself most engrossed in Sam’s ten rules for building a business. Traits including commitment, communication, motivation, and sharing were all at the forefront of this remarkable man’s philosophy. When dissecting all ten, it was quite obvious that a detailed approach, along with reliable follow through, made the rules more than just a handful of slogans; they were methods on how to prevail for the long-term. They were strategies of a reliable leader.

Regardless of whether it is the founder of the world’s largest employer, an assembly line employee who works countless overtime hours, an elementary schoolteacher who tutors students on weekends, or a carpenter building homes in the next subdivision; possessing the ability to be depended on to handle details consistently is a key attribute in steadfast leaders.

Reliable leadership today is just that—individuals who can be counted on under routine circumstances as well as during unfavorable or unexpected situations. When asked, “What is Reliability?”, Kendra Cherry, author of *The Everything Psychology Book*, gives this answer: “Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. *The Research Methods Knowledge Base* supports this response in its own theory of reliability. In research, the term

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reliability means ‘repeatability’ or ‘consistency.’ A measure is considered reliable if it would give us the same result over and over again; assuming that what we are measuring is unchanged.”

Seven behaviors are easily identifiable and worth considering in the quest to become a reliable leader.

**Trustworthiness**—*Do you consider yourself a trustworthy person?* Many criticize political leaders, news commentators, our children’s teachers, and so on, for lacking trustworthiness. Despite the area of life, dedicated leaders model the words they speak again and again. A loyal devotion is part of their makeup, and approachability is a direct result of the fact that they can be trusted with matters of large or small proportion.

**Dependability**—Those who lead others well exercise one critical action: They show up. Not only once in a while, but all the time. Their names are often called because others can depend on them. *Why is dependability so crucial and do you consider yourself dependable?* Businessman Floy L. Bennett once remarked, “Dependability is more important than talent. Dependability is a talent, and it is a talent all can have. It makes no difference how much ability is possessed if we are not responsible and dependable.”

**Commitment**—No other word means as much in the realm of leadership. Commitment is defined as simply being dedicated to a cause or activity. From warriors, coaches, and parents, to presidents and prime ministers, the utterance of the word commitment spells “gut-check” time. Regardless of where the commitment lies, ask yourself: Is it sound or does it waver; is it built on truth or is it pretentious? Even though they often find themselves stretched too thin, influential people are faithful to a cause and see it through, start to finish. *When you commit, do you bring your best?*

**Empowerment**—Negativity is often one of the primary culprits that burden individuals at home, within their communities, and in the workplace. Empowering others with the choice to find the optimism in any given situation is a practice that is employed by strong leaders. Through a sincere and steady approach, those in charge communicate empowerment by encouraging people, both verbally and nonverbally. *Are you willing to be the lightning rod for others?*

**Respectfulness**—Countless examples of disrespect can be seen in any corner of the world. According to the American Psychological Association, incivility is a growing problem, and one of the places where it becomes “toxic” is at work. *Is*

*extending respect to others part of your daily routine?* Researcher Jennie Trudel of Indiana Wesleyan University-Marion discovered that 75 to 80 percent of people have experienced a lack of respect from a fellow colleague at some time. Forty-one states now have anti-bullying laws due to the fact that 71 percent of American students report incidents of bullying as a problem in their schools (National Education Association). Those who lead strong live strong; and respectfulness toward others plays a major part in positive outcomes. What begins at home spreads throughout the landscapes of everyday life, and leaders who influence others realize how habit-forming home practices can become, especially in regard to respect.

**Flexibility**—Making any type of modification can feel uncomfortable and awkward; yet, being able to implement this strategy is essential to overall achievement. *Is adaptability one of your strengths?* When asked about the significance of change in his own life, Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, once said, “For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: ‘If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?’ And whenever the answer has been ‘No’ for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.” Through their inherent ability to listen and learn, those who lead others to new heights do so by making the necessary adjustments when a change is required.

**Accuracy**—*When your name is called, can you be counted on for your accuracy?* The responsibility that is shouldered by the masses is of great weight. Nonetheless, accuracy as it relates to all areas of life is monumental. From being on time for a parent-teacher conference, to making a sales pitch without any errors, accuracy is another characteristic that breeds confidence in the minds of those being lead. Much

like dependability, the experience of effective leaders is maximized when things must be accomplished in a timely and accurate manner, and when the ability to avoid errors is of the essence.

If you ask me, the speed of each passing day has only increased. Practicing reliable leadership is more important today than ever before. At a time in our history when technology continues to be amped up, lawmakers are struggling to find compromise, the economic recovery isn't yet where we hope it to be, gun violence is prevalent on the streets, and common courtesy is lacking in our schools; reliable leaders are imperative.

A leader establishes his or her steadiness in the details. Each time trustworthiness, dependability, commitment, and empowerment are exercised, along with respectfulness, flexibility, and accuracy; the foundation of reliability grows stronger.

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden once said, “It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen.” In the end, it's the basic fundamentals that separate the reliable from the unreliable...the influence of details.

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