The Simplicity of Being a Leader

It is amazing that Stephen Covey has to write a book to teach us basic principles of living, loving and leading. The fact remains that he has captured the essence very well and has done a fabulous job of articulating & conceptualizing seven habits and now the eighth. It is one of the most useful books on tools and techniques for any aspiring learner. In today's world, leadership development has become so jargonized, it is not funny. Leadership Styles, Systems Thinking, Emotional Intelligence, Spiritual Intelligence, Spatial Intelligence and there are endless models to teach leadership or give a view on leadership.

The question arises what is the core of leadership development? And why has it become so complex? Typically, people go through a Leadership Development program, learn a few skills and go back to work and start doing exactly what they have been doing before for years. What they learn in these workshops are some skills. Perhaps the core within and the intent remains unaffected.

Attrition, which is a burning issue especially in the IT and ITES sector, is something every HR manager struggles with. Is it an external (environment, profiles, competition) issue or an internal (manager's maturity and attitude) issue? As a participant and an observer's lens for over a decade, I observed that under the same set of external circumstances, which means, the same products, the same markets, the same profiles, two manager's attrition levels could be very different even to the tune of ratio of 1:4. That leads us to think that attrition is after all not a phenomenon which is purely dependent on external factors. Some of these managers were doing few things that were creating stickiness in their environment for their team members. They were perhaps not even aware of it since they were doing it so naturally.

A child needs unconditional nurturing and nourishing by the parents in her formative years. Similarly when one becomes a manager in an organization and becomes responsible for other people, one's focus needs to shift to them in the team.

No amount of skilling can help if the person is inherently insecure. That person may learn some tricks here and there to get the job done and perhaps look good. However, if he/she has to grow as a leader, she has to do more than that and that requires a paradigm shift from within.

I had a friend who used to work in NIIT in 'golden days' of computer education Industry. He used to quote his CEO Rajendra Pawar as saying quite often, *'My only job is to take care of my people, to ensure 100% employee happiness. I am not worried about customer satisfaction. My employees take care of them.'* This statement has remained with me over the years.

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Any statement has the danger of becoming useless if overused and abused and then it remains as a clichéd statement. To really internalize, imbibe and bring it alive in our lives is yet another story.

While executing one of my research assignments, I happened to meet some senior people from across the industries ranging from IT and ITES, government sector and manufacturing industries. It was rather interesting and uncanny to observe how these people share some common qualities. I attempt to enlist these commonalities below:

1. Their high energy to the point of being restless coupled with a HUGE BIAS for ACTION. I noticed that all these people have almost intuitive sense of judgement and once they decide something, they quickly act on it.
2. Second is their integrity. These people are respected by their people for honoring their word. It was amazing to observe how they would remember every single commitment they make and keep it.
3. Third common thing is their immense trust in people, almost to the point of being naïve sometimes. As a result, they enable and empower their people wholeheartedly, while also holding them accountable for results at the same time.

It seems so simple…and I ask myself, why do we have to make it so complicated!! Perhaps, we humans admire complexity even though we don't understand it.

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"The leader is one who, out of the clutter, brings simplicity… out of discord, harmony… and out of difficulty, opportunity."

Albert Einstein

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