

Leadership and Values

I recently read a newspaper headline, which said: "... asks students to develop their leadership skills." My first reaction on seeing this headline was—what do people think of when they hear the phrase 'leadership skills'? How does one improve leadership skills? But more importantly, what is leadership?



Let me get to the core of leadership. It has been my belief that people are intrinsically good and it is only circumstances, that take them down the wrong path. Recently I read a speech by Nelson Mandela, which slightly changed and defined my belief better. I now believe that there are three types of people—One, those who have developed a very strong internal sense of what is right and wrong and they will not compromise their integrity for anything. Two, those, who for some reason, are drawn to committing wrongs and have no empathy for other people in general, and three, the rest who don't see themselves as leaders and whose sense of right and wrong, and behavior, changes depending on the others around. The people in category one are the leaders. There have been people from category two, who have wielded power temporarily, but they have always been defeated and have never left a lasting legacy. People in the third category are the followers.

Getting to be a leader is primarily about gaining confidence in your beliefs. Some people are fortunate

that they gain this confidence early; for others it may be triggered much later. Leaders speak their mind and are ready to debate on their ideas and beliefs. The great leaders can maintain their strong beliefs while keeping an open mind to new ideas that may reshape their beliefs or even completely change them. They are constantly evaluating the evidence around them to see if it is consistent with their beliefs. There is no space for blind dogma.

How does one become a leader? Start talking about your values with everybody. If you find that your company does not share your values—leave and start searching for one that does.

Take this leadership test: Identify the values you strongly believe in. Then ask yourself if you are willing to talk about them openly in your interview with your employer or your customer? If the answer is "no", or "it depends", then these values do not qualify you as a leader. Leaders will openly talk about their beliefs and debate them with anybody. More importantly, leaders live their values. If their lives reflect only their intention to be true to their "values", then these are not their values. These are only values that they aspire to because it sounds good to them.

We need leaders today who can help change our environment. How does one become a leader? Start talking about your values with everybody. If you find that your company does not share your values—leave and start searching for one that does. Make sure that every step you take is an experiment that can help you strengthen your beliefs and values. Do not compromise them, because you lack the confidence today. This will become the biggest disservice you can do to your future and the potential that resides within you. If it feels right in your heart, persevere. You can become the beacon to inspire others to do the same.