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Focus

A Newsletter published for clients and friends of Wagner Consulting Group

SEP 2005

VOL. IX, NO. 3

Leadership Crucible

cru-ci-ble, *noun*, a severe test

Extraordinary times are the crucible from which extraordinary leaders are forged. As our nation recovers from Katrina, observe the behaviors of those entrusted with authority to see how some people rise to the challenge and others fail miserably. Some successes and failures are already apparent.

Especially when facing a crisis like the destruction caused by Katrina, good leaders cause people to want to be actively involved in solving the problems, both immediate and long term. This helps replace despair with hope. Moreover, people gain a personal satisfaction from their contributions. For example, those who conserve scarce resources and offer words of kindness and comfort play a important role in recovery, just like the more visible public safety and utility personnel.

When evaluating a leader's effectiveness, use the three elements of leadership:

1. **The ability to articulate and share a compelling vision.** The vision helps focus people's efforts, and charts a path from today to a brighter future.
2. **Inspiring followers to want to be a part of achieving the vision.** The followers yearn for a better future and want to be part of a winning team. A good leader is highly visible and out among the people.
3. **Keeping efforts on track by continuously aligning goals and efforts.** The leader should make certain everyone has appropriate flexibility and clear "line of sight goals" so they can avoid wasting time and resources. Followers often design novel solutions and get more done without micromanagement.

Finally, notice that great leaders are what Warren Bennis calls a "curious mix of determination and humility." They possess the courage to make tough decisions promptly and move ahead. But they also display the genuine humility to recognize their limitations and praise the contributions of others.

Tom Wagner

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