Values-Based Leadership

Introduction

What is values-based leadership? In simple terms, values-based leadership is leading by staying true to one’s values. It means to lead others by remaining consistent with the leader’s beliefs and never swaying from one’s fundamental values. You may be wondering, does this mean a values-based leader never changes his or her principles? The answer is no. The leader may change his or her strategy, tactics, or approach given the situation, but the leader never changes his or her underlying values, beliefs, or principles.

Values-based leadership is based on the notion that personal and organizational values are aligned. A company’s mission, vision, strategy, performance measures, incentive programs, procedures, and values are all a representation of the leader’s ethics and values. This approach to leadership assumes that managers’ and workers’ core principles are the same; therefore, little time is spent on office conflict. This also means that employees and managers behave in a way that is conducive to the productivity, profitability, sustainability, and integrity of the business.

This reading will identify and analyze the key qualities for values-based leadership and provide examples of past and present values-based leaders.

Key Qualities for Values-Based Leaders

Whether a person is striving to be a CEO or leader of a school band, the person must apply certain qualities for values-based leadership. Adopted from Harry Jensen Kramer Jr.’s book, From Values to Action: The Four Principles of Values-Based Leadership, there are four essential qualities of a values-based leader. A description of each quality is provided below.

1. Self-reflection is a trait required for a person to identify and evaluate his or her fundamental values. A person must be aware of how his or her experiences, education, priorities, beliefs, and values affect how he or she makes decisions, leads others, and handles conflict. Self-reflection improves a person’s understanding of himself or herself.

2. Balance refers to a person’s ability to view a situation from different perspectives. A person should remain open minded and consider all opinions before making
decisions or evaluating a situation. This trait also means to achieve a healthy work/life balance example for others to follow.

3. **Self-confidence** is essential for leaders to truly believe in themselves. Leaders should be able to identify areas of strength and weakness while continuing to improve their abilities. Leaders with self-confidence are able to ask for help when needed and use their strengths to help others.

4. **Humility** is a trait that keeps a person grounded and keeps life in perspective. Humility supports a person’s ability to respect others and value others’ opinions. A person should never assume that he or she knows more or knows what is best; rather, a person should remain humble in his or her assessment of the situation.

Regardless of position, level, gender, age, or ethnicity, a person can apply each of these qualities. A leader does not have to wait until he or she reaches a high-ranking position before becoming a values-based leader. He or she just needs to know what kind of leader that he or she wants to be and begin.

**Examples of Values-Based Leaders**

In order to solidify how leaders can apply the values-based leadership model, it may be easiest to look at some examples of well-known values-based leaders throughout history.

- Mahatma Gandhi – Gandhi never wavered from his ultimate belief to use non-violent practices to achieve independence.

- Mother Teresa – Known for her unwavering vow to help the world’s needy, Mother Teresa fought for the poor, the sick, the orphaned, and the dying.

- Martin Luther King, Jr. – Martin Luther King Jr. led the civil rights movement based on his belief of racial equality through peaceful measures.

- Nelson Mandela – A former President of South Africa, Mandela fought to end Apartheid and bring democracy to South Africa.

Values-based leadership is a leadership model that has not only been followed by leaders in the past. In today’s modern society, there are several good examples of leaders who have embraced values-based leadership.
• Robert Galvin – Son of Motorola’s founder and ex-CEO of Motorola, Galvin stayed true to his values to instill exceptional quality and excellence throughout the company and community.

• Linda Mason – Founder of Bright Horizons, a child care and education company, Mason demonstrates her passion to help young children get the right start in life in both her professional and personal life.

• Howard Schultz – Operating as Starbuck’s current CEO, Schultz remains determined to build a profitable and sustainable future for Starbuck’s without forgoing his belief in humanity.

• John Mackey – As co-CEO of Whole Foods Market, Mackey has built a thriving grocery store conglomerate without sacrificing his higher purpose of authentic caring for people around the world.

All of these leaders have unique characteristics that define them as values-based leaders. For instance, power, money, status, and fame did not motivate these leaders. They were motivated by the needs of others, commonly known as servant-leadership. They demonstrated selflessness in their actions by providing a voice for other people in need who were unable to be heard on their own. These leaders did not try to change their followers’ goals and ambitions, but these leaders helped their followers realize and fulfill their true goals. Of singular importance, these leaders remained consistent and clear on their values, never once wavering from their beliefs.

Summary:

• Values-based leadership means to lead by aligning the leader’s values with the organization’s values.
• In this leadership style, leaders never change their fundamental principles and values, only their approach or strategy in a situation.
• There are four key qualities of a values-based leader including self-reflection, balance, self-confidence, and humility.
• A person can be a values-based leader in any position or level by applying the four key qualities of values-based leadership.
• Some historical examples of values-based leaders are Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela.
• Present examples of values-based leaders include Robert Galvin, Linda Mason, Howard Schultz, and John Mackey.

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Values-based leaders are selfless and driven by the needs of others instead of being motivated by power, money, status, or fame.