

Discerning leaders are effective leaders

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Are you a discerning leader? When faced with complex issues, can you readily identify the heart of the matter? Are you able to see root causes of difficult problems without having to get every bit of information? Do you trust your intuition and rely on it as much as you do your intellect and experience? If not, you will need to develop your ability to discern, which will involve nontraditional thinking while embracing change, ambiguity, and uncertainty.

Discernment is an indispensable quality for any leader who desires to maximize effectiveness. It helps to do several important things:

1. *Discover the root issues.* Leaders of large organizations must cope with tremendous chaos and complexity every day. They are never able to gather enough information to get a complete picture of just about anything. As a result, they have to rely on discernment. Researcher Henry Mintzberg stated, “Organizational effectiveness does not lie in that narrow-minded concept called rationality. It lies in the blend of clearheaded logic and powerful

intuition.” Discernment enables a leader to see a partial picture, fill in the missing pieces intuitively, and find the real heart of the matter.

2. *Enhance your problem solving.* If you can see the root issue of a problem, you can solve it. The closer a leader is to his or her area of gifting, the stronger their intuition and ability to see root causes. If you want to tap into your discernment potential, work in your areas of strength.

3. *Evaluate your option for maximum impact.* Management consultant Robert Heller has this advice: “Never ignore a gut feeling, but never believe that it’s enough.” Discernment isn’t relying on intuition alone, nor is it relying only on intellect. Discernment enables you to use both your gut and your head to find the best option for your people and your organization.

4. *Multiply your opportunities.* People who lack discernment are seldom in the right place at the right time. Although great leaders often appear to be lucky to some observers, I believe they create their own luck through their ability to discern. They use their experience and follow their instincts.

To improve your ability to discern, do the following:

* *Analyze past successes.* Look at some problems you solved successfully in the past. What was the root issue in each problem? What enabled you to succeed? If you can capture the heart of the matter in a few words, you can probably learn to do it with future issues.

* *Learn how others think.* Which great leaders do you admire? Pick some whose profession or gifting is similar to yours and read their biographies. By learning how other discerning leaders think, you can become more discerning.

* *Listen to your gut.* Try to recall times when your intuition spoke to you and was correct (you may or may not have listened to it at the time). What do those experiences have in common? Look for a pattern that may give you insight into your intuitive ability.

If you want to lead effectively, your ability to discern will get people moving earlier and faster. If a missing piece you speculated about is wrong, then adjust your strategy as necessary. Columnist Molly Ivins said: “The first rule of holes: When you’re in one, stop digging.”

~ The End ~