

What happens without a leader?

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Leadership expert John Maxwell coined the phrase “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” And I’ve learned that it really does. If you think otherwise, just put together a group of people without a leader and watch them. They will drift away from each other in their thoughts and actions. When there is no good leader on a team, in a department, at the top of an organization, or heading a family, then the following results are inevitable:

Without a leader, vision is lost. If a team starts out with a vision but without a leader, it is in trouble. Why? Because the vision will dissipate and the team will drift until it has no sense of direction. Good leaders have vision of where they’re heading and provide their teams with direction in their actions.

Without a leader, decisions are delayed. Quite often if you don’t make your own decisions, somebody else will make them for you. The same holds true for a team. If someone isn’t making timely decisions, then final decisions are stalled and things don’t get done. It has been said that not all good decision makers are leaders, but all good leaders are decision makers. Often it takes a leader to make decisions or to help others make them more quickly.

Without a leader, agendas are multiplied. When a team of people come together and no one is clearly the leader, then individuals begin to follow

their own agendas. And before long, all the people are doing their own thing. Teams need leadership to provide a unifying voice.

Without a leader, conflicts are extended. One of the most important roles of a leader is conflict resolution. In the absence of clear leadership, conflicts always last longer and inflict more damage. Often it takes a leader to step up, step in, and bring everyone to the table to work things out. When you lead others, you should always be ready to do what it takes to help your people resolve their conflicts.

Without a leader, morale is low. Napoleon Bonaparte said, “Leaders are dealers in hope.” When leaders are not present, people often lose hope and morale plummets. This happens because morale is closely tied to people’s faith in the leader at the top.

Without a leader, production is reduced. An important quality of a leader is the ability to make things happen. When production stalls, a leader finds creative ways to get in moving again. Sometimes it means laying out a challenge (like a friendly competition on which team can produce the most). Sometimes it means providing people additional training. Sometimes it means encouraging or putting up incentives. If the same thing worked for every person in every situation, then there would be no need for leaders. Because every person is different and circumstances are constantly changing, it takes a leader

to figure out what’s needed and to put that solution into action.

Without a leader, success is difficult. Many people want to dismiss the importance of leadership when it comes to organizational success. They don’t see it--and in some cases they don’t want to see it. That was the case for Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*. He did not want to include leadership in the study that formed the foundation of the book. He gave the research team explicit instruction to downplay the role of top executives so that they could avoid the simplistic “credit the leader” or “blame the leader” thinking that is often common. So early in the project, he kept insisting, “Ignore the executives,” but the research team kept pushing back. Finally, as should always be the case, the data won. Collins ended up with a description of what he called Level Five leaders--leaders who exhibit both a strong will and great humility--and how every great company they studied was led by one such leader.

As you can see, leadership comes into play, even when you don’t want it to. Your organization will not function the same without strong leaders in every department or division. Take the time to find, train, and appoint leaders. If a leader you appoint is ineffective, replace them as soon as you possibly can. Remember: everything rises and falls on leadership.

~ The End ~