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Leadership is an Art

This information is based on the book “Leadership is an Art” by Max DePree (CEO at Herman Miller). The book is interesting and has some good ideas and concepts. It is a bit rambling and takes a very very humanistic point of view. The forward explains why the Herman Miller approach is worth looking at - profitability, productivity, innovation, integrity and trusting the strength of employees. There are some similarities between the HP Way and the ‘HM Way’.

## Participation

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The basis of the Herman Miller approach is the Scanlon plan - when workers suggest ways to improve productivity, they are cut into the financial gains that result from their contributions. So, leaders should liberate people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible. To do this you must understand the diversity of people’s talents/skills/gifts. This is based on the concept of participation. Everyone has the right and the duty to influence decision-making and to understand the results, but it isn’t democratic - having a say is different from having a vote. To have this participation requires high quality, effective relationships:

- respect people
- what we believe precedes policy and practice
- agree on the rights of work
- understand the role/relationship of contracts and covenants
- relationships count more than structure

## Contracts/Covenants

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There is a distributed discussion of contracts versus covenants. This is a cornerstone of the book. Contracts limit you to what you are supposed to do, not what you are capable of. Covenants are a person to person promise or pledge - an enabler - not a limiter.

<b>Contracts involve:</b>	<b>Covenants involve:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• objectives/expectations</li><li>• compensation</li><li>• working conditions</li><li>• constraints</li><li>• schedules</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• goals/ideas</li><li>• shared rewards/risks</li><li>• values</li><li>• shared commitment</li><li>• approaches/processes</li></ul>

A covenantal relationship depends on shared commitment to ideas, issues, values, goals and processes.

## Leadership

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There is also a distributed discussion of what is leadership and what makes a good leader. The author takes the stance that a leader should be more of a steward than an owner. Leadership is a condition of being indebted - a leader borrows resources (money, space, equipment) from the company and loans it to his/her team. In conjunction, the leader takes or makes a vision and tries to make the team become its owner. An extraction of this leadership discussion says:

- Define reality (the goal/vision and the strategy to achieve it).
- Have a broadly understood, clear statement of values.

- Get resources.
- Ensure the team is doing the right thing.
- Say thank you (give rewards).

For a leader, the best communication of values is behavior - actions speak louder than words. A case was made about the difference between hierarchical and roving leaders. The point is that nobody is an expert at everything. Sometimes, you need to let someone else take control or assign roving leaders. The marks of elegance are the ability of a leader to think beyond the whole and to reach for completeness.

Characteristics of a leader include:

- consistent and dependable integrity
- cherishes heterogeneity and diversity
- searches out competence
- is open to contrary opinion
- communicates easily at all levels
- understands and advocates the concept of equity
- leads through serving
- is vulnerable to the skills and talents of others
- is intimate with the organization and its work
- is able to see the big picture
- is a spokesperson and diplomat
- tells why rather than how
- have vision
- should understand and speak for the corporate value system
- must review their people's performance.

## Working together

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The key elements of working together are learning how to deal with change and conflict and how to reach people's potential. A start at intimacy is shared values:

- What is our business?
- Who are we and how do we relate?
- How do we deal with conflict and change?
- What is the vision of the future?
- What do we want to become?

Working together implies intimacy. Enemies of intimacy are: politics, short term measures, arrogance, superficiality, orientation toward self.

The author has the view that there are some fundamental work rights:

- right to be needed (can I use my gifts)
- right to be involved
- right to understand (to understand the goals)
- right to affect one's own destiny
- right to be accountable
- right to appeal
- right to make a commitment

## Deterioration

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Watch out for deterioration:

- tendency toward superficiality
- a dark tension between key people
- no time for celebration and ritual
- sense that rewards and goals are the same
- no tribal story-telling
- recurring effort by some to convince others that business is simple
- different understandings of words like responsibility, service, trust
- problem makers outnumber problem solvers
- when folks confuse heroes and celebrities
- leaders who seek to control rather than liberate
- daily pressure pushes aside concern for vision and risk
- orientation toward MBA-ish rules versus contribution, spirit,...
- when customers are an imposition
- manuals (of rules and regulations)
- urge to quantify history and future (quota predictions)
- urge to establish ratios
- leaders who rely on structures rather than people
- loss of confidence in judgement, experience and wisdom
- loss of grace style and civility