

Growth Mindset Thinkers

Video: Leadership Skills and Abilities

(JIM FISHER:) One of the dreaded questions for me when I meet people who I haven't seen for a while and they say what are you doing, and I sort of say, you know, "I'm at the University and I'm teaching," and everything. Trying my best to avoid this thing where they finally say, "Well what are you teaching? Are you --?" I say, "Oh, just business stuff." "Well, what business stuff?" Finally I come down to it and I have to say, "Well, I teach leadership." Because the response from everyone my age is, "You can't teach that!" You know? You either are or you aren't. You either got the magic fairy dust or you didn't. You either have charisma and integrity and character and whatever. Whatever set of attributes they think you have to have. And if you don't have it you can't leader. You know? Leaders are born not made is, kind of, everybody of my generation believes that. But that's so patently not true. Because everybody, in some place in their life, leads. So it can't be that.

The other thing I do, I often do with classes of, let's say, people -- let's say people who are in their 40s or even getting into 50s. One of things I -- and I say, you know, I know what we're doing. We're here for -- we're going to do a session on leadership. But in the back of your mind, you know, you're saying, I'm going to listen to this and I'll appear polite, but fact is, come on. It's really about character and attributes and traits and all that kind of stuff. And you can't teach that. So we start there. And I say, "Okay, let's describe a leader. What are the attributes of a leader?" And I just go to the board and turn my back to them. And I take the board -- and I start writing the words. And in about five minutes, we'll have 30 words. So everybody has in their own mind: these are the attributes you need to be in order to be a leader.

First of all, I asked them if there were any words they don't agree with. "Is there any word up there you think is not associated with being a leader?" Pretty well, I don't ever get a response. Nobody has a word that they say, "No, no, no, no, no. Leaders aren't that." They're not empathetic or they're not good communicators. Or they're not whatever -- team builders, da, da, da, da, da. The long -- the list goes on and on. So I say, okay, that's the list. All right now, "Who knows anybody who has all those attributes?" And everybody -- silence in the room. I say, "Do you have those attributes?" Silence in the room. I said, "Well, that's it then. You're done." You know? You can't possibly be a leader because you've already said these are the attributes of leaders, and you don't have them. So, where do we go with that?

And so that, kind of, then lends -- leads onward into the discussion about how -- what's this interplay between attributes and what you do. Actually somebody, I didn't have this thought, but one -- somebody at one of my -- the classes say, "Yeah, but I have all of those things a little bit." And, I have all those things a little bit, and I have -- there's times when I have them more than at other times. Which is also true. So everyone does have communication skills which sometimes are better than they are in other situations. Some people are better team-builders in some situations than others. And it depends on the situation.

So then we go from the saying, "Well, nobody has them." We go to the other side and say, "No, everybody has them." Which is true. This is true. It's just -- all right, you've got them. So now what we say is, What do you do with them? What do you actually do with this? That you do have these attributes to a certain extent and you use them to a certain extent at different times, what do you do with that? Well, there's a sense that leaders, sort of, do two different kinds of things. Leaders provide direction. "This is where we're going to go for dinner." "This is who's going to play first base." "This is who's going to come on stage first in the play."

"This is ..." whatever. So we lead -- somebody does that. The other thing that leaders do, on the other side, is they motivate each other. So they say -- one side says, "This is where we're going to go to dinner." The other side says, "We're going to have so much fun at dinner. Let's all --" You know? Let's do this and, "Okay, who's going to have toppings? Are we going to do toppings? What are we going to do?" And we're getting everybody going. And you'd say -- you know, one person says, "Okay, this should be at first base." And the other one says, "Here's how we're going to play today so we can do something and so it'll be fun and we'll all get into it ..." and whatever.

So that there are these two sides. So you can start to think a little bit about how you use your skills and attributes, because you've got to provide direction or you're not leading. And then you've got to motivate people to follow, or you're not leading. So you have to do -- these are the two things you have to do. So you can start thinking about that. And then that becomes a way to get from saying, "Nobody has the attributes," to "Everybody has the attributes." Yes, they do. And then how do you use whatever attributes and strengths you have? What are the things you have to do? And I think if people put their mind around, "What do I have to accomplish as a leader?" then they can set themselves to do it with whatever skills and attributes they happen to have.