

Can Anyone Be a Leader?

I was listening to an after dinner speaker a few years ago discuss the subject of leadership with all managers of an insurance company. At the beginning of his presentation the speaker asked the question: *How many leaders do you need in your organization?*

The quick response from a middle level manager was... “Five! The CEO and four divisional managers!”

This manager, like many others, sees leadership as a role, and therefore that the leaders in an organization are those who have a *leadership role*. The sad part of his response was that he was in a leadership role himself... but didn’t see himself as a leader.

That is the problem with seeing leadership as a role. The people who are in leadership roles think they need to lead all the time, and those not in those roles wait for them to take the lead.

Dr Miriam Kragness, an industrial and organizational psychologist broke new ground with her research into organizational leadership by redefining *leadership as an act*, not a role. When you see someone as a leader it is because they are performing an *act of leadership*.

An *act of leadership* is an Out-In-Out process. It occurs when:

Out: You see something that needs changing, fixing or improving, or just isn’t right.

In: You process your thoughts, feelings and opinions on how to respond to this situation.

Out: You respond with action.

Here is an example from a packaging company I worked with in Sydney Australia several years ago.

Out: A young production line worker notices over a period of time that the excess packing material is just going into a waste bin and is thrown out. Nobody else has said anything, and the waste is handled the same way on all machines.

In: She thinks about the problem of the waste material for some time and comes up with an idea for reusing some of it.

Out: She takes her idea to her supervisor, then to the quality manager with her supervisors support. The idea is implemented and saves the company \$30,000 per year on each machine.

What made this *act of leadership* successful was that it was supported; in this case by the supervisor. The organization had created a culture in which the people in leadership roles encouraged and supported *acts of leadership* from all employees.

What would happen in your organization if all employees spoke up when they saw something that would improve customer satisfaction, reduce costs, increase productivity or increase their own engagement and commitment?

It will only happen when the people in leadership roles understand the power of everyone being able to perform *acts of leadership*.

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