

Becoming Not Normal

Success in leadership is about acting and reacting unlike the crowd. Leaders must have direct and sometimes uncomfortable conversations. They must make decisions and not just react or editorialize about others' decisions. Leaders must walk the walk, talk the talk, and stay above the fray. Leadership is not normal. Those who excel in leadership, too, are not normal. Normal people don't want the stress and responsibility of leadership. Leaders need to remember that people don't act like them, think like them, and work like them. Leaders aren't normal!

Pages upon pages of management advice has been written to guide and coach the effective manager. A quick google search of management advice yields far too many cites to even narrow the search or categorize the advice. The bottom line for managers; there is no one clear path to management success. Managers must clear their own path by embracing the role of leadership. All too often, individuals are promoted through the ranks by their individual subject matter expertise. These subject matter experts excel because they are the front line on delivering products, services, or making the wheels of an organization turn. They are so good at what they do, they often get promoted to the next level and become a supervisor, lead, or manager. This concept is often referred to as the Peter Principle formulated by Laurence J. Peter.

The Peter Principle proclaims that individuals rise to their level of incompetence. When we promote subject matter experts into leadership roles, we assume their skills that made them the expert are transferable to leadership. An entry level marketing person uses their creativity, project management skills, and knowledge of their product or service to position and communicate the advantages and uses of the target product. When our marketing expert gets promoted to be the marketing manager, a new set of skills is necessary. While the expert uses her creativity to position products, the supervisor must now develop a new set of skills that focus on engaging, motivating, and managing workflow and employees. Often the time management and organizational skills assist in the transition, however, the new challenge will be to change our supervisor's focus from individual contributor to a team contributor and facilitator. Just because someone is creative and organized, doesn't mean they can translate those skills to leadership. Those who are not normal survive the challenge and adapt to the new role and responsibilities; many fail.

Once our new supervisor masters the art of working with others and managing a team, her success may lead to the next promotion; department manager. This new function will require skills of managing managers, communicating up the hierarchical chain, across the organization with peers outside the department, and of course within the department. Skills of greater communication, political and organizational savvy, resource allocation, budgeting, and an array of new challenges face our new director. Success will not come to the general population; those that are not normal will succeed. What happens when our supervisor does not transition to director and does not succeed in this new role? According to the Peter Principle, our supervisor stays put; thus she has risen to her level of incompetence. Once you no longer develop the skills to be successful in a particular role, you are destined to stay put!

Successful organizations plan and develop leaders. However, it is a rare organization that has the resources and the insight to monitor and address the needs of developing leaders. Success often de-

depends upon the individual motivation and commitment of the rising leader. The “not normal” prevail. How do we avoid the trap of reaching our level of incompetence? Follow these steps:

1. Continually engage in understanding your strengths and weaknesses. We all have them. Knowing yours allows you to build a team with varying skillsets that address blind spots. Never be afraid of admitting your weaknesses.
2. Find a mentor. Seek the guidance of someone that has successfully made the transition.
3. Become a mentor. Everyone has something to offer. Often times teaching someone the ropes is the best review of skills that need sharpening
4. Read, write, listen. Read articles on management and leadership. Write down your goals, write down your successes and failures. Listen to others' experiences, listen to your staff, your peers, your supervisors. Copy what works, and learn from others' mistakes.

Entering the realm of leadership is not for everyone. The big title and the big chair look good from the outside, but leadership is a difficult task to master. Those who are successful are not normal. Working your craft as a leader is not normal. Many leaders fail. Succeeding is not normal.

Be not normal, be different, be successful.

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