

The Value of Leadership BY MARGARET REYNOLDS

Not everyone would immediately include leadership skills as critical to the success of a consulting practice. After all, who do you lead? Consulting services are provided to leaders of organizations. It is generally understood that effective consultants have state of the art business management skills, but the ability to develop strong relationships is equally important.



Margaret Reynolds
Managing Principal of
Reynolds Consulting
CCL alumna

In fact, the consulting business is built on relationships—with clients and their teams. Leadership skills are an essential ingredient in developing relationships and delivering results effectively. In some ways, leadership in a client-consultant relationship faces an additional challenge. Leadership from a consultant is, by role definition, leadership by influence instead of leadership by authority. That opportunity to influence must be granted, never assumed. So how does one develop an effective leadership style and learn to adapt it as necessary in different organizations and cultures?

Fortunately for me, my first in-depth exposure to the value of effective leadership was sixteen years ago as a participant in CCL's leadership workshop for executive women. Along with 18 other women, I learned about *effective leadership styles; my leadership style; and the underlying value system of my leadership style*. At the time, it felt like a great seminar. Today, upon reflection, it is an experience that has helped me feel confident leading change in all kinds of organization settings.

First, the class provided familiarity with *various leadership styles* and what makes them effective. That knowledge creates a foundation for designing work processes for the team that maximizes output by understanding others' strengths and respecting their most productive work and interaction styles. It helps leaders with different tendencies work together, set common goals and become a team that exceeds the "sum of its parts". It also ensures the development of strong relationships and avoids derailment due to misunderstandings.

Second, the evaluation and assessment component of the class gave me an *awareness of my leadership style*—my strengths and challenges—and provided insight on how to maximize my effectiveness by drawing on my unique strengths. Sixteen years later, as I work with clients in my consulting practice, this self knowledge allows me to subtly lead diverse teams to achieve breakthrough innovation. While sometimes comfort zones need to be challenged to achieve breakthroughs, understanding leadership styles, mine and others, allows for that to occur in a manner acceptable to all parties.

While understanding leadership style is essential in consulting, perhaps even more important to me personally was

the underlying clarification of my own value system that drives my leadership style. The CCL class helped me understand why I tended to prefer a certain set of behaviors and how to adapt without losing sight of the values that are important to me. A strategist by nature, I believe in having a clear sense of purpose to guide day to day decisions. I appreciate having the basic principles that guide my choices well defined. In any fast changing environment, a leader is faced with new, varied and sometimes pressure-filled situations. Having a good understanding of one's values is often critical in assuring that a speedy decision is, upon reflection, a sound one.

Finally, relationships matter and one of the essential ingredients to retaining so much applicable knowledge from leadership training are those *who you share the experience with*. CCL's reputation attracts top notch people and in my class there were women from all over the country who represented some of the finest organizations. All talented people, with genuine interest in learning from each other as well as from the course facilitators. We gained immeasurably from the insights shared by others, and the class format wisely encouraged a lot of discussion and interaction time for just that reason. Michele Janson, one of my class mates and the Executive Director of the Helzberg Entrepreneurial Mentoring Program described the value similarly. She said, "It was such a group of phenomenal people, from the participants to the teachers who actually produced the research on which the class was based".

The importance of effective leadership in career success, at any level of an organization, is well documented. Exposure to state of the art wisdom on leadership is, in my opinion, essential for business people today. CCL is at the forefront, providing "thought leadership" on leadership. I am glad that my first major exposure to leadership was through CCL, not only for the learning gained at the time, but for the relationship with the Center that was forged. The relationship I established with CCL sixteen years ago remains today. When I started my consulting practice, I turned to CCL for advice and information. Staying in touch with "best practice" is always important, but even more so when you are in a position to be guiding others about their management effectiveness. CCL provides its alumni with wonderful resources through the newsletter, library and alumni gatherings that help you stay in touch and keep learning. For me, CCL is an ongoing relationship that I value very much.

Margaret Reynolds is managing principal of Reynolds Consulting, LLC a firm that specializes in helping companies identify and develop market based growth opportunities. Services provided include strategic planning, brand development and marketing. She can be reached at mreynolds@reynolds-consulting.com.

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