

## **Intentional Leadership**

The simplest way to define intentional leadership is to ask someone to describe the outcome he is trying to achieve. What exactly is he hoping to accomplish? The leader then needs to set the conditions that will lead to that outcome.

This sounds philosophical, so let me give you an example. A leader is supervising a group of people working on a complicated project with a firm deadline. What can the leader do to create an environment in which his team completes the project on time and to the standards that have been specified?

What is different with intentionality is that conscious choices are being made before action **is taken. If a leader is “just leading” then he is likely doing his thing and a situation** happens. The leader reacts and there is a result. Good leaders have many more good results than bad ones.

With intentional leadership, conscious choices are made before action is taken. The leader believes his action will have certain effects or results. The conscious action usually leads to the desired effect or result, unless some unknown pops up and changes the course of events.

Let me digress for a minute.

When I was in my first leadership role at Anheuser-Busch, I tried to build a leadership curriculum. I wanted to create this curriculum based on data, so I talked to leaders in different Anheuser- Busch businesses and at different levels of the various organizations. They had a beer company, a can company (Metal Container), a bread company (Campbell Taggart), theme parks (Sea World and Busch Gardens) and a snack company (Eagle Snacks).

I asked these leaders what skills they needed to be successful. The idea was simple - they would tell me the skills they acquired that new leaders would also need to acquire to be successful. The other option was they would tell me skills that they knew they still needed now in order to be more successful.

I knew the second option would require the people I spoke with to be self-aware. One leader I spoke with looked at me and said there was nothing - no skills as a leader - he needed, that the company would not have put him in that position if there was anything he was lacking.

It took me aback a little.

In any position I have ever held, I hope I was selected because I was the best candidate (i.e. brought more of the things that the job required than the other candidates). But I never assumed I walked into the job with 100 percent of the skills that would be needed.

The person I was speaking to was a first line manager. That is possibly the hardest transition a person can make. You move from doing the work yourself (individual contributor) to getting work done through other people who now report to you.

Giving clear direction, coordinating the work of others and explaining to someone how he needs to improve are not skills learned through osmosis. You try something, and maybe it works the first time but not the second. You make changes and keep trying. If you are lucky, you figure it out - but not the day you are appointed to the position. That is why that **leader's comment surprised me.**

**So, now let's go back to this idea of intentional leadership.**

In our earlier example, a leader is working with his team on a complicated project with a firm deadline. If the leader was being intentional he would consider the people, the task and the situation.

**Let's start with the situation** - firm deadline. That is going to restrict how we approach this project. We also know it is complicated. This implies it is not routine and somewhat **unfamiliar, another factor that will limit our options. The third consideration is people. Let's** assume the leader has a junior group with two or fewer years of experience.

All three factors are going to lead us in the direction of a leadership style requiring more direction.

The next step in intentional leadership is to think about the appropriate environment in which to accomplish your goals of a tight deadline on a complicated task with a junior team. The team members are going to need to know their specific roles, how each connects to the other roles and the performance targets and deadlines. The environment or climate you create for your people is going to require clear responsibilities, standards of performance and clarity about due dates and how the pieces fit together.

If you think of leadership styles that range from loose to tight, this situation is going to require more versus less direction. The leader is going to have to give a rationale for what he wants and why it is important. This will make this approach more palatable for people wanting to be more self-directed.

So, to come full circle - intentional leadership starts with the end in mind and works back to the style of leadership needed and the environment in which to achieve it.

### About the Author

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