

INSPIRE

On Leadership

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Accidental Leadership

"His employees are miserable; They despise him."

"He is the best machinist we have ever had in our facility."

"As a leader, he is intolerant. As a person, he is one of the nicest guys I know."



These are just a few of the comments shared with me by an HR Manager during a one-hour conversation about a struggling leader - a plant superintendent with 15 direct reports. She went on to explain, "With the company for over 30 years, there is no one in the facility who knows the equipment better than him - how to run it or how to fix it."

Later that same day, during my conversation with this leader, he said to me, "Why would I ask anyone's opinion when I know all of the answers?" He also shared, "Listen, essentially these people willingly sign on to show up every day under a dictatorship for eight hours. We've got a lot of work to do, so I tell them what to do, and they do it."

I asked him a number of questions: "How do you feel about being a leader? What are your strengths? Your weaknesses? What does it mean to be a leader? How do you believe you affect these people?" He said to me, "You are asking me questions I have never even thought about. No one has ever asked me questions like this."

What is happening here (and you already know the answer)? This organization promoted its best guy. Then everyone assumed he would be a great leader, just as he has been a great machinist. It very seldom works to promote someone into leadership....then just leave them alone to figure it out. He is, as we refer, an accidental leader.

Considering the 1000's of leaders we have worked with over the past 15 years, the most common feeling of these leaders (when being intentionally developed) is Gratitude. We often hear them say, "For the first time, I feel confident. I'm so appreciative."

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