

Title: The Meaning of Leadership and its Relationship to Organizational Effectiveness:
The Perspectives of Exemplary Leaders in Education and Athletics

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The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between leadership and organizational effectiveness. The study explored, clarified, and attempted to discover the meaning of leadership, how leaders inspire learning, and similarities between exemplary leaders in education and athletics.

Two groups of leaders were identified as being exemplary. The first consisted of three superintendents selected as “Superintendent of the Year” by the American Association of School Administrators. The second consisted of three nationally renowned coaches selected “Coach of the Year” by their peers or nationally recognized organizations. These coaches led teams to multiple national championships.

A semi-structured interview took place where the leaders expressed their beliefs, philosophies, and learnings. The interview was taped, transcribed, and analyzed for patterns, insights, values, and relationships.

A profile and narrative was developed. These narratives provided a framework to facilitate a better understanding of the meaning of leadership. These superintendents and coaches emphasized: teamwork, effort, trustworthiness, character, loyalty, empowerment, and belief in others and themselves. The leaders saw their role as teacher, coach, cheerleader, advisor, and taskmaster. They also possessed a keen sense of intuition,

knowing when to act in the appropriate role, as they built exemplary organizations. They developed organizational success by building relationships based on trust, understanding, cooperation, and by setting high expectations for everyone.

Four major themes emerged as the cornerstone for their achievements and accomplishments: The recognition of the critical importance of creating a shared vision within and throughout their organization; an understanding of the need to develop a strong sense of organizational and self-awareness; the ability to create and foster a positive and constructive climate and culture where learning and effectiveness will regenerate itself; and, an internal and external belief system based on faith and spiritual consciousness.

The findings of this study provide a framework for understanding personal, professional, and organizational effectiveness. Leadership is a process that evolves from within and thus develops into a mind-set. Self-confidence, vision, and focus are prerequisites and byproducts of this mind-set. The participants can clearly serve as role models to facilitate the learning process for all aspiring leaders.