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QUALITY MATTERS

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By Drs. ERIK VAN VEENENDAAL, Bonaire and EMMA GERRITSEN, Netherlands



EMMA GERRITSEN

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Emma Gerritsen (e.m.gerritsen@tilburguniversity.edu) is a PhD researcher at the Social Psychology department of Tilburg University. Her doctoral research focuses on understanding negative leadership behavior from the leaders' perspective. Emma presented her work at multiple Organizational Psychology conferences. She recently received the "Working community Labor- and Organizational Psychology" 2024 best paper award for the novel perspective that she takes in her academic contributions.



ERIK VAN VEENENDAAL

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Drs. Erik van Veenendaal (www.erikvanveenendaal.nl) is a leading international consultant and trainer from Improve IT Services BV, and a recognized expert in the area of software testing, quality and requirement engineering. He is the author of a number of books and papers within the profession, one of the core developers of the TMap testing methodology and the TMMi test improvement model. Erik is a frequent keynote and tutorial speaker at international testing and quality conferences. For his major contribution to the field of testing, Erik received the European Testing Excellence Award, the ISTQB International Testing Excellence Award and holds a roll of honor of the TMMi Foundation.

In the previous issue of Quality Matters, a paper was published on the importance of leadership. Leadership was also compared to management. Having received much feedback and many positive comments, we decided on a practical follow-up paper. At Tilburg University a leadership research project is currently being conducted. As part of the project, industry leaders have been interviewed for their view on various leadership topics. They were also asked to provide recommendations for leadership. The collective set of recommendations gives an insight view on the wisdom and experience of the interviewees. In this paper we summarize 10 important recommendations for leadership as they were conveyed by the leaders themselves. Of course these recommendations are also of importance to managers. Those who are willing to grow and want to become a better manager, and ultimately perhaps even a leader.

LEADERSHIP RESEARCH PROJECT

Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering employee well-being and driving organizational change and performance. It is therefore crucial to understand what contributes to both positive and negative leadership behaviors. As part of her PhD research at Tilburg University, Emma Gerritsen explores how negative leadership behaviors emerge, drawing on insights from leaders themselves. While the research focuses on the complexities and challenges that contribute to such behaviors, in-depth interviews also revealed a set of practical recommendations for effective and constructive leadership. The 10 recommendations presented in this paper are shared by leaders from various fields and hierarchical levels and reflect the collective wisdom of those who practice leadership every day. While these suggestions are not presented as definitive answers, they provide valuable guidance for those seeking to enhance their leadership approach.

1. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND FREQUENTLY



Ensure people clearly understand how processes work and what is expected from them. This is especially important when someone joins from a different culture or working environment where standards and values can be different. Open communication prevents misunderstandings.

2. BE HUMAN AND BUILD TRUST



Invest in strong relationships with your team members. Critical feedback is received much better when there is a foundation of trust and sincerity. Also show your emotions and be open and honest about the impact decisions have on yourself. This is appreciated and will strengthen the connection between you and your team members.

3. REMAIN CURIOUS TOWARDS YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR



Reflect regularly on how your leadership behavior influences others. Ask yourself the questions: "What do I do more or less automatically, and what effect does this have on my team?". Prevent blind spots and try to grow as a leader by actively asking team members for feedback and be open to other perspectives.

4. ORGANIZE YOUR OWN OPPOSITION



Create an environment wherein people have the courage and feel free to oppose your viewpoint. Surround yourself with people that have other knowledge and skills than yourself and are prepared to challenge you. This will ensure improved decision taking, better results and also prevent blind spots.

5. BE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT REGARDING OBJECTIVES



Formulate clear objectives for your team and communicate why these are important. In case you are still in doubt searching and not sure about the specific objectives, be open about this. Jointly discussing and thereafter deciding on objectives enhances the team spirit and ensures an increased level of commitment.

6. INVEST IN AN ENVIRONMENT FOR GROWTH



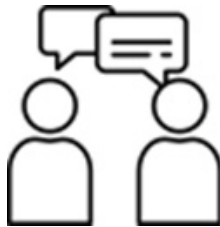
Build a system wherein people feel safe to grow. Create an environment wherein open and honest feedback is possible and appreciated, both for giving and receiving feedback. Create an atmosphere where people can make mistakes and learn, without having the fear of being blamed.

7. SHOW SINCERE INTEREST



Be approachable and show you really care about the people in your team, both on a professional and personal level. Know about their private lives, their hobbies, their interests and what drives them. An open-door policy, indicating that you are open to questions, complaints, suggestions, and concerns, increases trust and creates a positive working environment.

8. TAKE DECISIONS BASED ON TRUST AND GOOD INTENTIONS



Assume good intentions by the people in your team and provide them with space to work independently. Don't try to control everything that people are doing. Trust motivates and ensures that people perform their tasks with more dedication and responsibility.

9. COMBINE EMPATHY WITH CLEAR COMMUNICATION



Understand and respect the emotions of your team members, even when you do not fully agree with them. At the same time it is important to make expectations clear and communicate with them openly regarding objectives (including rationale), their responsibilities and expected results.

10. BE AUTHENTIC



Do not try to copy behavior that doesn't suit you. Authenticity is an essential characteristic to gain and keep respect and trust. People will very quickly know when you are not authentic. It is always good to acquire new skills, but only practice them when they match with who you really are.