

# National Restaurant Search

EXECUTIVE RECRUITERS

*Serving the hospitality industry Since 1981*



July 2011 NEWSLETTER

## National Restaurant Search LLC

National Restaurant Search has remained the food industry's most respected executive search firm for nearly three decades. Over the years we have built relationships, credibility and reputation by establishing an exceptional level of trust with both our clients and candidates. With offices in Chicago, Atlanta, and Minneapolis, and opening in Dallas in 2011, we offer a full range of search and consulting services to national and international corporations, early stage entrepreneurial companies, private equity and venture capital firms.

Our profession is an art, not a science. The quality of creative thinking the recruiter brings to his art, the judgment he uses in assessing prospects against client requirements, and the skill to close in a manner beneficial to the client and candidate come only from experience. There is simply no substitute for experience. Our search consultants all have executive level management experience within the hospitality industry, which makes us uniquely positioned to bring our clients valuable organizational perspective, while helping them to capitalize on the brightest talent and best performing candidates in the marketplace.

National Restaurant Search continually monitors the hospitality industry and keeps abreast of economic trends that affect our clients. We are also acutely aware that the shortage of talent, already evident before the recession, is reasserting itself strongly. Companies have begun to think strategically again, and in looking for growth are seeking out those managers and executives who can offer both operational strength but also practical leadership in taking organizations and teams forward. We see this as a challenging but exciting time to be partnering with clients to help them build and strengthen their management teams as they seek new growth in a much changed world.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how National Restaurant Search can be of service to you and your organization.

Sincerely,

Ron Stockman  
President  
National Restaurant Search  
[Ron@Restaurantheadhunter.com](mailto:Ron@Restaurantheadhunter.com)  
[www.RestaurantHeadhunter.com](http://www.RestaurantHeadhunter.com)  
[www.linkedin.com/in/ronstockman](http://www.linkedin.com/in/ronstockman)

National Headquarters  
National Restaurant Search  
700 E Diehl Road  
Suite 130  
Naperville, IL 60563  
Phone 630-482-2900  
Fax 630-482-2922

For more information visit [www.RestaurantHeadhunter.com](http://www.RestaurantHeadhunter.com)

## Articles

1: Restaurant Finance Monitor Article on National Restaurant Search

2: *Pondering the Poach* by Deborah L. Cohen

# The Ideal Leader

by Mitch McCrimmon

## Leadership

*Leadership, an act or series of acts that moves people in a certain direction can no longer be displayed by a lone, heroic individual. Instead, as this author writes, we need to recognize that leadership can come from anyone who displays leadership as an occasional, discrete act of influence. Yes a leader must provide direction, but the person at the top isn't the only person who can provide it.*

The ideal leader has vision, charisma, integrity, emotional intelligence, an inspiring delivery and sterling character. But if there are leaders who don't fit this image, then we cannot use our ideal to define leadership in general.

Here are some leaders who don't match our ideal:

- The teenage gang leader who has "street cred", is tough and prepared to defy the law, even if it means shooting his way out of trouble.
- Stalin, admired by some Russians who like tough leaders, even if ruthless.
- Technical leaders, whose new product ideas induce change even if they have no vision, an abrasive style and little emotional intelligence.
- Leaders in scientific or professional functions who exert quiet influence based on hard evidence but who are personally uninspiring.

If these are genuine examples of leadership, then our image of the ideal leader can't be about leadership in general. Our ideal is biased in two ways: first it is culturally relative, and second,

we narrowly focus on larger-than-life characters such as chief executives and heads of state, the heroic, glamorous end of the spectrum.

Idealizing leadership blinds us to its real essence. We need to stop viewing the leader as a type of person in charge of a group. Instead, we need to see how leadership can come from anyone who shows it as in an occasional, discrete act of influence. Leadership must be better aligned with a world that is too complex and fast changing for one person to provide all the answers. If crowds are wiser than individuals, then the lone, heroic, ideal leader is a liability.

The argument for this contention consists of four steps:

1. Why we are in love with the ideal leader
2. Why providing direction is the real essence of leadership
3. Why direction today can come from anywhere
4. Why leadership must be discrete acts of influence.

## **1. Why we are in love with the notion of the ideal leader.**

Why is the glamorous CEO or head of state our paradigm case of leadership rather than front-line supervisors? Does our fascination with the larger-than-life leader reveal the essence of leadership or does it really say more about us, the followers?

We expect great insights from everyone we admire: pop musicians, movie stars and attractive, tall people. Anyone with charisma or a commanding presence, we assume, must have some unique power that we ordinary people lack.

We want leaders who transport us with their charm and dazzling wit, who exude confidence and seem impervious to anxiety. We feel brighter when their light shines on us, taking us out of the dull, cool shade we normally occupy. At the extreme, it doesn't much matter what direction they advocate as long as they seem to know what they are doing.

Surely our need for the ideal leader reflects an acute need within us that only such a person can fill. Otherwise, why wouldn't we see front-line supervisors as paradigmatic examples of what leadership means?

The needs that we want leaders to fill include: (1) a need for a dream, a cause or purpose to believe in, to give our lives meaning, (2) a need to belong, to be part of something, a group with which we can identify and (3) a need to calm our fear that we will fail or be rejected, feelings that generate dependency.

It is not just that we search for particular leaders to meet these needs; we actually define leadership in terms of our own needs. But, is this concept of leadership valid for modern, knowledge-intensive businesses or is providing direction more important?

## **2. Why providing direction is the real essence of leadership.**

Why is having and articulating a vision so critical for leadership? Well, if we are being taken on a journey, we want to know that the person leading has a destination in mind.

Kouzes and Posner's model of leadership is based on the *metaphor of a journey*. Leaders, they claim, inspire us with their vision of a destination and help us get there.

But would we follow a charismatic leader with no idea where to go or how to get there? Conversely, if we were certain that a leader could get us to a desirable destination, the lack of charisma, character and emotional intelligence would not matter.

Suppose you were pursuing an escaped convict in a remote forest. After apprehending him, you discover that you are lost and your mobile phone is out of range. Now, if your convict knows the way out of the forest, you would follow him, even though you did not admire or like him. With only minimal trust, you would watch closely where he led you.

While we ideally want an all-singing-all-dancing leader, the only essential requirement in crunch situations is for the leader to know where to go and how to get there. If you were in a theatre that suddenly caught fire, who would you listen to, the charismatic figure who leaps onto the stage and tells you not to panic or the uninspiring fireman who appears in a doorway and calls out: "This way"? Again, the ability to provide direction is critical.

If you could vote on who should be the next CEO in your company, would you put your own needs first or those of the business? You might say the latter but a lot of "research" on the meaning of leadership asks employees what *they* want in a leader, thus focusing on *their* needs, not those of the business.

Employees care less about the organization's direction than whether it enables them to pursue their dreams and identify with leaders who they admire. That is, they put their own needs first in deciding the sort of employer or leader they want.

But if we put the business first, then leaders must be able to move it in a direction that generates sustainable prosperity. This is why direction is critical. This is easiest to see in crisis situations, like being lost in a forest or caught in a burning building, because we *deeply care about our own safety*. But it's only managers, and not all of them, who care this much about the direction of a business where they are not the owners.

In trying to decide the relative importance for leadership of providing direction versus being charismatic, emotionally intelligent and nurturing, etc., we need to think of the business's needs, not our own.

### 3. Why direction today can come from anywhere.

Finding direction in simple situations, like the way out of a burning building, is a lot easier than in a complex, fast-changing business, where it is hard enough to do so without the unforeseeable actions of competitors and the shifting whims of consumers.

Pursing a direction or vision in a fast changing, complex business is like being in a boat race, where the destination is constantly shifting, where competitors are trying to sink your boat or outwit you with clever moves that you can't anticipate.

How do modern CEOs show leadership in the midst of so much ambiguity and rapid change? Meeting this challenge adequately is why CEOs' visions are often little more than vague motherhood statements.

Management thinkers like Henry Mintzberg talk about *emergent strategy*. Wherever it is hard to be definitive about where to go in advance of starting a journey, strategy emerges en route.

So-called learning organizations learn by experimenting with new products and services, only deciding what direction to pursue based on what works. Direction in fast changing contexts can only be *discovered* through trial and error rather than definitively set in advance.

If CEOs struggle to offer concrete direction, we then have two choices: (1) we can say that they no longer provide all of the leadership that an organization needs or, (2) we can change our definition of leadership so that providing direction is not so central to it.

Guess what? Thanks to our deep need to idealize the CEO as leader, we have chosen the second option. Leadership is now widely regarded as a facilitative, enabling function that encourages employees to find their own direction or help the organization find one. "Level 5" leaders draw ideas for new directions out of team members rather than provide them themselves. But choosing this option abandons the real potential that leadership has to offer, just when we need it more than ever.

#### 4. Why leadership must be discrete acts of influence.

Suppose we choose the first option, in which a CEO no longer provides all the direction an organization needs. Thus, all employees can show leadership, not just to team members, but to the whole business when they promote a better way. The crucial difference is that employees can only influence the organization's direction, not *decide* it.

We can still say that we need CEOs to keep the ship afloat in the storm, help us keep our spirits up and encourage us to give our best. However, this is not leadership, but management upgraded to an engaging, supportive, nurturing, coaching function<sup>1</sup>. This is how we want CEOs to behave; we just need to stop calling it leadership.

Thus, providing direction is still the core meaning of leadership. However, CEOs can provide only some of it. Leadership can also be provided by other employees, where its meaning shifts from *deciding* new directions to *influencing* others to accept a new direction.

Innovation is a critical source of new directions. It was once carried out exclusively in-house. But today, some businesses are either outsourcing innovation or simply looking for new ideas wherever they can find them.

Providing direction means showing the way for others either by example or by explicitly promoting a better way. This is what Martin Luther King did by campaigning for justice for African Americans. Green leaders who promote a better way can have a leadership impact on communities all over the world. When a front-line innovator promotes a new product to management, leadership is shown bottom-up.

Leadership shown by outsiders or bottom-up does not entail occupying a particular role, being a certain type of person or using positional authority to make decisions. It simply influences us to accept a new direction. This is the leadership that innovation-driven businesses need. It sells the tickets for the journey, not to take us to the destination. We need to get there ourselves or with the help of facilitators and coaches operating as managers upgraded<sup>2</sup>.

If leadership simply means convincing others to take a trip they wouldn't otherwise take, then all the usual traits required of leaders are situational. This is why a front-line innovator with zero emotional intelligence might be able to convince management to adopt a new product.

CEOs need to be emotionally intelligent, but showing leadership only requires it in certain situations. Where the content of a new idea is sufficiently compelling or can be backed by hard evidence, it doesn't matter what the person who is promoting it is like. Here, content trumps style.

This is like the fireman pointing to the exit in a burning building. We don't care if he has zero charisma because he knows what direction to pursue. Also, this is an isolated act of leading, which doesn't mean joining a group headed by the fireman. He simply demonstrates leadership without being our leader in a role-based sense.

The move to discrete acts of leadership means giving up the idea that being a leader involves being in charge of a group. We can maintain this fiction in simple groups like street gangs and politics, but not in complex, fast changing businesses. If leadership can come from outside the organization or bottom up, then execution must be a separate, managerial phase.

## From Statics to Dynamics

This discussion has shifted from a *person to a process*. We started with the ideal person, who can be a leader where leadership is an internal, top-down, static role. This perspective encourages talk about style rather than content, which is why direction has been supplanted by behaviour, the need for a leader to be a certain sort of person.

But switching the focus back to direction (content) has huge implications, because new content can come from anywhere. Microsoft copied Apple's graphical user interface when it shifted from DOS to Windows. It also followed Netscape by introducing Internet Explorer.

Microsoft thus regularly follows the lead of competitors. Such leadership is quite clearly not manifested by a person nor a role. Rather, leadership-as-influence is fragmented into discrete impacts that induce a change in direction and which can come from outside or bottom-up.

In our postmodern world there are no ultimate authorities. Positional leadership suited the industrial age of static hierarchy. But today leadership is fragmented into discrete acts and impacts that can come from anywhere. This is a massive change of perspective but one that is essential for innovation-driven businesses.. Such leadership can only influence us to think or act differently. It can't make decisions for us, look after us, or take us on any journeys.

It is time to give up the myth of the ideal leader. Leadership is not a role or type of person.

## Whither our dreams?

Defining leadership according to the needs of the business rather than our own need for a dream, or to identify with admirable people, doesn't mean we have to sacrifice our dreams. Our ideal leader just becomes our ideal CEO. With so much power, this is an important role. We just need to see that a CEO can only *show* leadership rather than *be* a leader. It's not just that we

should stop calling CEOs leaders. We should stop talking about leaders altogether, at least in large, complex businesses.

If leadership is indeed an *influence process*, then to be consistent we should focus on that process and forget about what sort of person is showing it. If we can buy a product on eBay without knowing the seller, then, clearly, influence is at work regardless of the type of person who influences us. Wherever the need for rapid innovation is essential, all employees must be encouraged to promote new ideas, thereby to show leadership without taking charge of those who follow.

In summary, we have moved through the following four steps:

1. Why we are in love with the ideal leader.
2. Why providing direction is the real essence of leadership.
3. Why direction today can come from anywhere.
4. Why leadership must be discrete acts of influence.

Our fascination with the ideal leader says more about us— the followers— than it does about leadership. Businesses need leadership that provides direction, which is hard for one person to do in an age of rampant change, complexity and the greater wisdom of crowds. We need to find direction regardless of its origin. Anyone with a better idea can influence change. Leadership is now a discrete act of influence that is independent of a role, or any character or personality traits.

- <sup>1</sup> Reinventing Leadership and Management, Mitch McCrimmon, Ivey Business Journal, May/June, 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> A New Role for Management in Today's Post Industrial Organization, Mitch McCrimmon, Ivey Business Journal, July/August, 2010.

## The Author: Mitch McCrimmon

Mitch McCrimmon is Principal, Self Renewal Group, an executive assessment and coaching consultancy. He can be reached at [www.leadersdirect.com](http://www.leadersdirect.com).



Become a Fan



Join Us on LinkedIn

visit [www.RestaurantHeadhunter.com](http://www.RestaurantHeadhunter.com) for more information