

The Economic Development Leader: How to pick one – How to be one

*« Our problem is one of management, not lack of resources »
Muhammad Yunnus, Nobel Prize winning founder of Grameen Bank.*

When the board of an economic development organization is looking to hire a leader to manage its organization, here are some elements one should look for and consider:

- Look at their strengths, not what they are poor at. You can only perform with strengths.
- Match it to the key challenges of the organization – is it rebuilding morale? Redefining the mission? etc.
- Look for somebody who can be an example
- Mediocrity in non profit EDO shows up very quickly, more quickly than in government or business.
- The leader will not only deal with one determinant for success but a combination of bottom lines for performance.
- The leader won't have the luxury of dealing with one constituency; he will have a multiple as reflected in the board, the business community, mayors, other elected officials, etc.
- The leader have a constituency role and you have to do really well since you are also working for a cause (prosperity for the community).
- You want people who take their role seriously but not themselves seriously.
- Your leader will ask these very important questions: What needs to be done? What can I contribute? What is our mission? How can we effectively deliver our mission?
- In this position if your leader thinks he is the best invention since sliced bread he will not last long and he will kill the EDO.
- Remember it's not about leadership traits or characteristics – it is a behaviour- psychologists love personality profiles but I've encountered many different types of effective leaders, some very boring and some very

entertaining. It's what they accomplish that counts. In my experience, the best ones were those who were not afraid of strengths in the organization, the ones that were secure intellectually, welcomed open debates and made decisions.

- You need a leader who will lead regardless of the situation, be it routine or challenging times.

When a manager is already in an EDO's leadership position or is considering such a position, here are some elements one should look for and consider:

- Leaders don't have much time to prove themselves (a year maybe)
- So beforehand, one should think hard about the following: the role has to fit you; the role has to fit the task; the role has to fit expectations
- It is true that in these organizations, performance is not directly rewarded by money but good intentions are not either.
- You will have mainly 2 things to build on: the quality of your people and the new demands made on them.
- You will need to be effective and be concern about the effectiveness of your staff (knowledge workers). These workers can not depend on the utility derived, for example, from a physical output (shoes for example) they produce. They must provide effectiveness and that will be achieved by your staff working first, on the right things (that's the mission) and second, by the fact that another person has indeed used the information/ideas produced to improve their situation (contribution).
- You will need the following basic competences (good for the board as well): Listening skills – it's not that difficult – it can be learned you just need to shut up. Communicate – leaders think that what they do is obvious. It's not. You need to spend time explaining to be understood.
- Realize how unimportant you are compare to the task. You need detachment. The task is bigger than you. That's a problem I've seen with many CEOs especially in small businesses – the company and them become the same thing – it's an ego enterprise – let alone that judgement is seriously impaired when you operate like this – those companies usually last as long as the "founder" is there (if ever) and no succession is in place. I know many staff engineers in small manufacturing companies (who do miraculously well under the circumstances) that go to great length to keep the CEO from the work they are doing or attending meetings with clients as he will completely wreck everything, so infatuated he is with himself.
- When you put the task first – you build great team

- Willingness to make yourself competent in the task that's needed is the true mark of a leader
- There are challenges: balancing the big picture and the little details. Seeing only the big picture – going to cocktails and conferences - but forgetting to tend to the performance of your organization and business community. Being a prisoner of operations – much harder to avoid – you have to force yourself to get out of it – put yourself in situations where you will see stuff from another angle.