YOUR LEADERSHIP

EDGE

LEAD ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

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CHAPTER 5

DIAGNOSE SITUATION

Identify Who Needs to Do the Work

A national fraternity with more than 100 years of history on more than 100 college campuses is facing a major cultural dilemma. Too many undergraduate brothers fail to live the fraternity's values and their actions threaten the long-term viability of the fraternity. The organization has grown from a network of college students into an international organization with a multimillion-dollar budget and more than 40 full-time employees. Without even realizing it, staff members can easily frame discussion about this challenge from their perspective. "What new policies do we need to implement?" "Should we hire more staff to focus on the problem chapters?" "Do we need to build stronger relationships with the undergraduates?" "Should we hold a listening session at the national convention to inform our discussions on this matter?"

Who needs to do the work?

As you attempt to understand this aspect of your own situation, sometimes the biggest realization is that who needs to do the work isn't you, or isn't just you, or isn't primarily you. Remember the principle: Leadership starts with you and must engage others. This is where the rubber of that principle hits the road.

Leadership on adaptive challenges is less about implementing solutions and more about creating the conditions for those with the problem to solve the problem.

Leadership is mobilizing others to make progress on daunting challenges. It's not a group project where one or two smart and organized people take on all the work while others happily defer. When doing adaptive work, the people with the problem have to solve the problem.

Technical work is different and can be done by experts and authorities.

EXAMPLES OF TECHNICAL CHALLENGES:

▶ The electrical grid goes down due to an ice storm. Who must do the work? The power company.

▶ A company's database is cumbersome and disorganized due to rapid growth. Who must do the work? A database specialist.

Stakeholders must do adaptive work. You can't do the work for them, but you can help them take up the work.

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES:

▶ A university president wants to create a culture of excellence throughout the university. Who must do the work? The president plays a role but needs deans, professors, administrators and staff to all work on a challenge as nebulous as "culture."

▶ A middle manager in the marketing department realizes the company's products aren't living up to their claims. Who must do the work? The manager is involved but a whole lot of others need to be involved too — product designers, senior managers, etc.

▶ A student wants to see less violence and bullying in her school. Who must do the work? The student can become a loud voice, but she is only one. Other students, teachers, administrators and parents must be engaged to make a lasting impact.

▶ A mother longs for her grown children to be more involved in each other's lives. Who must do the work? There is a limit to what the mother can do. Eventually the children themselves will need to "do the work."

The leadership in these examples is identifying and mobilizing others to take up the work and make it their own. It's a leadership failure if the only one believing in and working on the idea is the university president, middle manager, student or mother.

But who are these elusive "others"? A big part of exercising leadership is being able to answer this question for each adaptive challenge you face. Your answer will have a huge bearing on how you exercise leadership. Note that identifying who must do the work has a better chance of taking hold if you determine this as a group.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHO NEEDS TO DO THE WORK?
Read and use "The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook" by David Chrislip.

How do you identify who must do the work?

▶ MAKE A LIST OF ALL THE FACTIONS INVOLVED WITH YOUR ISSUE. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate each faction on how critical its support and help is for success. Those scoring high are who must do the work. You may find as you learn more and try new things that you will add or remove people along the way.

▶ If making an exhaustive list sounds overwhelming, you might just START WITH A SMALL LIST OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE FOR THE WORK. And remember, "most important people" means not just the people you typically engage with but those most necessary for the work to progress. People who are annoying or difficult to work with may be just the people you need to move forward.

▶ CREATE TWO COLUMNS AND LIST PEOPLE YOU NORMALLY INVITE TO BE INVOLVED IN THE FIRST COLUMN AND THOSE YOU HAVE NOT INVITED IN THE SECOND. For the people in column one ask yourself this: Why have you invited them? Why might they care? Are they the right people to do this work? For the people in column two ask yourself this: Why have they not been invited? Why might they care? Why might it be important to invite them? With those questions answered, re-evaluate the two columns to determine who is actually needed.

Lessons from History

Renowned chimpanzee researcher Jane Goodall founded the Jane Goodall Institute, a global nonprofit that empowers people to make a difference for all living things. Goodall spent years studying what it would take to improve global understanding and treatment for all living things. Much of her diagnosis focused on research, public education and advocacy. Ultimately, Goodall realized that to truly be effective, she must mobilize others around the globe to help. That led her "to identify who needs to do the work" by creating a worldwide network of young people who cared deeply for the human community, for all animals and for the environment, and who would take responsible action to care for them.

How do you know you identified the right people?

- People start to talk about the issue as "our issue."
- Momentum is building. Experiments lead to progress and increased energy.
- Everyone loses (and wins in the end). Stakeholders are willing to let go of something they value for the sake of the common good.
- Diverse opinions are being shared. No groupthink.
- People agree that no important individuals or groups are being excluded.

Why is this important?

Identifying who needs to do the work is important because you'll need to tailor your leadership efforts accordingly, shifting from doing the work yourself to mobilizing others.

Often the biggest realization
is simply that

"who"

needs to do the work isn't you,
or isn't just you,
or isn't primarily you.

MAKE IT REAL

Q & A

I recently completed my term as president of a fairly new organization. I know everything that needs to be done and how to do it to keep the group moving forward — you know, keep all the trains on schedule — so the group keeps coming to me for help. I enjoy being needed, but is my ongoing involvement in this way really what's best for the organization?

- PRESIDENT PATRICE

Dear Patrice,

No. Leave the work of running the organization to the new president. Everyone is replaceable. They'll learn what they need to learn. Instead, use your position as past president to "get up on the balcony" — creating the distance necessary for a different, more reflective perspective — and diagnose the adaptive issues facing the organization.

Your comment about being needed shows self-awareness. Most people are oblivious to how their own needs or perspective influence their behavior.

Onward!