Aspiring Engineers Today, Great Leaders Tomorrow!

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In today's ultra-competitive world, tommorrow's great leaders are more likely to require much more different skills than their predecessors to succeed. Young engineers who aspire to be the best, would therefore need to be 'different'.

As the world evolves, engineers in particular are increasingly called upon to act in important managerial roles, which normally require a particular set of skills. And it is always paramount that we differentiate between 'leadership' and 'management'. Leadership is all about setting a new direction or vision for a group that they follow; whilst management controls or directs people, resources in a group according to principles or values that have already been established. In simple terms, leaders tend to think drastically, while managers think incrementally. As the famous phrase goes 'Managers do things right, leaders do the right things.' In other words, a leader knows what's best to do, while a manager knows how best to do it.

Generally categorised, great leaders or managers, regardless of past or present, tend to have all or some of the same traits: they are highly motivated to succeed, have planned out their career in advance, have high energy levels, ambition directed, smart and confident, and last but not least, are able to differentiate between significant and insignificant issues or matters.

In today's age of rapid changes, it is also imperative to note one of the main resources that most of us would have taken for granted, i.e. the human factor. To be successful, it is essential for a leader to have 100% support of his/her staff or employees. They need to share the same visions, values or objectives that have been set. The leader should therefore generate a working environment which would enable his/her staff to reach their full potential, i.e. a sound and competitive business environment. We must remember that successful leaders always recognise the worth of their people and inspire them to perform to the best of their abilities by providing them a clear path to success.

So, engineers could also be leaders! When we talk about the science and technology industries, all companies need engineers with great leadership qualities to run them; certainly not only accountants or lawyers. Throughout the centuries, there have been countless briliant engineers who have gone on to become great leaders. They were Robert Stephenson, Samuel Allan Armstrong & Ralph M. Parsons, just to name a few. As time goes by, business leaders have had to adjust their styles and strategies to attain successes.

In the 21st century, successes are normally achieved through multi-disciplined teams. Often, the leaders do not need to understand every aspect of each team member's role, but instead the need to appreciate the role that each member plays in the system is imperative. Thus, the leadership style becomes sort of a benevolent dictatorship.

No doubt, in today's technology-driven world, we have to agree that change is the only thing that is constant. To be sustainable and grow further, today's young engineers face the challenges of planning, initialising, realising, controlling and stabilising all the change processes on both corporate and personal levels. Globalisation has shrunk the world to such an extent that markets are no longer localised. Companies are operating everywhere and anywhere; employees and clients are all global. In short, the benchmark of business and leadership excellence is borderless.

So, where do we, all the young aspiring engineers, stand? What will our roles be? How can we shape the future of our country? We must not only aspire, but inspire ourselves to be great leaders of the future; to be the drivers of Malaysia's economy. To be tomorrow's leaders, we need to exploit the approaches best suited to the needs of the situation. In tackling the many complex inter-linked issues that we would be facing in the future, we would definitely have to produce adaptive leadership styles that would enable us to be flexible in responding to changes in the global environment.

In short, it is important to remember that it is better to make a decision and correct it if it is wrong, than to make no decision at all. As such, we at the Graduate & Student Section (G&S) strive not only to set objectives and goals, we also aim to achieve them, i.e. to help all young engineers to improve, both personally and professionally. We wish you and all young engineers out there good luck and have a great year ahead! ■