

The Organic Leader

Everywhere I look I see signs suggesting “going green” and eating organic is better for us. Everyone it seems is focused on living a healthier lifestyle. Reusable grocery and shopping bags recycle bins ... green friendly cleaning products are becoming common items being widely used. More and more attention is now being given to protecting the environment while more and more grocery shelves are stocked with better organic food choices. So what does “going green” and being more “organic” have to do with leadership and how leaders lead?

Given the seeming toxic nature in so many organizations, having leaders that see themselves and their organizations as living systems may make the difference in how teams and organizations reach the pinnacle of success. Organic leaders are our best hope for exerting a concentrated effort to “green up” some of these noxious cultures called organizations. So ... are you an organic leader ... better yet ... do you need to be?

In the past, task driven organizations required a simple, predictable and mechanistic approach to leading and managing. Today, leaders have to daily deal with so many more layers of complexity. Never in the history of organizations has any single decision been capable of creating a tidal wave of change as it is in today's world of work. The rate of change in our world is unprecedented, unending and moving at a mind-boggling speed. What is so different now?

Technology, it seems, is at the heart of what is so different about our organizations today. Technological advances have changed how we do business and with whom we do business. Social networks, real-time communication across the globe, information under and overload are but a drop in the bucket of challenges facing leaders today. Generational differences pull teams apart while cultural and social changes continue to impact how we communicate with each other. Knowledge is now sovereign. There is no single leadership style that will meet every demand of every organization or every team.

In my upcoming book: *Navigating the Leadership Corridor™*, I discuss varying leader competencies and abilities: The Likeable Leader, the Transformational Leader, the Inspirational

Leader, the Communicative Leader, the Competent Leader, the Customer-Focused Leader, the Ethical and Moral Leader and the Courageous Leader. In truth, all of these leader skills are required to guide organizations to their peak of performance and profitability. I see all of these leadership skills integrated into the Organic Leader as more and more leaders seek answers that will satisfy the challenges of the new psychological contract with their employees. Fear, isolation and coercion are out – healthy relationships, mentoring and knowledge are in.

The mechanistic versus the organic organization: a snapshot of the two

Let's take a quick look at the difference between a mechanistic and organic organization. The mechanistic organization is hierarchical, has standard processes and policies, and is more centralized and formal, have higher control needs in how they use authority and are mostly task driven. Strong mechanistic cultures tend to see outliers as negative deviants as this type of organization wants and needs predictable outcomes in order to maintain the stability they desire. Generally deviants do not conform to "traditional standards" so they often feel unwelcome in this type of organization.

In the organic organization, there are fewer layers overseeing self-organizing, informal, knowledge based teams. In the organic organization, conditions change frequently and the network of communication flows up, down, across the decentralized organization in order to satisfy the need to know. Deviants in the organic organization are seen as positive contributors as there is less constraint on innovation and creativity in this type of learning organization. So where does the organic leader fit in?

How the organic leader leads

It is probably safe to say there are few pure mechanistic or organic organizations. These two structures are on a continuum and each has some characteristics of the other. That said, I describe the organic leader as flexible, emotionally competent, intellectually gifted, people savvy and is generally focused on delivering a high level of satisfaction to customers, employees and all stakeholders in the organization. Relationships are very important as the organic leader understands their role is to help those they lead sift through all the complexity of change in order to understand how everyone fits into the grand plan. Organic leaders make it healthy and safe for everyone to contribute. Since change always generates some chaos, the organic leader

understands living with uncertainty is a way forward through the unpredictable space of complexity.

So what is required of the organic leader?

So much of what the organic leader does revolves around helping the organization understand and fulfill its purpose. The organic leader must consistently deal with the push and pull of uncertainty. They cannot fear an imaginary loss of control as most realize they don't have much "real" control in the first place. For this type of leader, communication flows freely in all directions and they do not fear intellectualism or deep expertise and knowledge. These dynamic leaders are able to focus on satisfaction, survival and simplicity as a way to the next level of success.

When the organic leader is clear in his or her purpose, they are able to lead from a place of personal knowledge, wisdom and experience. When stakeholders know what to expect and how they may contribute, they then use their abilities to support organizational goals at a high level of performance. Finally, the organic leader realizes the impact of organic thinking on the organization.

Why does this matter?

Just as eating more natural and organic foods seem to be healthier over the long term, being an organic leader means being able to look beyond the horizon. Why ... because the organic leader's purpose is clear. They are able to develop healthy relationships and make healthier choices for the organization's future. The organic leader does not run from complexity but rather embraces the possibilities new challenges bring. Change, now more than ever, opens the door to unlimited possibilities for everyone and organic leaders realize this and know how to navigate their organization there through the chaos.

Do you need to be an organic leader?

Given the state of the world economy, the global marketplace and the extreme competitiveness for top talent, I do not see how being an organic leader could NOT be beneficial to either the mechanistic or the organic organization. Both organization types need

some flexibility and some degree of unpredictability to create responses to challenging solutions. As an organic leader the focus on satisfaction and healthy relationships potentially lead to inclusive work environments where everyone is expected and encouraged to bring their best talents and skills to work every day knowing they will be valued and appreciated.

Organic leaders understand how complexity and social networks bring renewal and freshness to their product line. They also understand and appreciate what creative disruption and unpredictability offers and they have learned how to manage this condition artfully. Being an organic leader doesn't mean you must know how to do everything but it does mean everything done is connected to purpose as they create the future.

Are you an organic leader ... Do you need to be?

For more information on **HOW** to become an organic leader, call me at (937) 866-7511 or email me at Linda@DrBurrs.com.

About the author: Dr. Linda Burrs is the CEO and Principal Consultant of the *Step Up to Success!* consulting firm that focuses on leadership and inclusion strategies. For more than 25 years, Dr. Burrs has brought her rich dynamic approach to the corporate and professional training arena. The breadth of her experience crosses all walks of social and organizational life including law firms, technology organizations, educators, business professionals, leadership groups and non-profit groups.

Dr. Burrs is the author of the book: *The Fruits of Inclusion™: A Smart Business Guide to Creating a Sustainable Diversity and Inclusion Program*. She is also the designer of the *Second Generation Diversity Training™* program series. Dr. Burrs is an often sought after public speaker and presenter for her deep expertise and engaging programs.

