

CREATING EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS

**Volume 3, Letter 7
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Prerequisite Characteristics of Individual Members – Part 1

I write this letter for those pioneers who want to move beyond the ordinary to the Extraordinary in creating business organizations.

Welcome to Letter 3-7 of Creating Extraordinary Organizations. In this letter I am returning to looking at the issues one must deal with in creating or shifting to an EO. Although there are quite a number of these, there are at least two that are make or break issues. The first is the ability of those in power to give it up. The second is making sure that every individual has certain prerequisite characteristics. These must be present before one tries to deal with power. Therefore, this letter looks at some of them.

Necessary characteristics

My wife and I were in Athens two weeks ago touring the Acropolis. We discussed democracy at great length with our very knowledgeable guide. At one point he made a statement that makes a perfect introduction to this letter. He said that you cannot have democracy unless each individual has self-consciousness or knowledge and self-respect. Since an EO is a democracy, these are absolutely essential. However, they are only two of a number of necessary characteristics. Six of the most important are:

1. A high level of self-knowledge
2. A high level of self-respect
3. The ability to be autonomous
4. The ability to work closely with others
5. The ability to seek, accept and handle responsibility
6. A high level of capability in one or more of the functions the organization needs.

Self-knowledge

The first of the five core beliefs says the organization and enterprise exist to enable members to fulfill their needs and aspirations. This of course means that an individual has to know himself well enough to know what his needs and aspirations are. This may seem obvious, but many individuals, if not most, are not in touch with their own inner needs and aspirations. If they cannot define them then they cannot take an active part in developing the organization and enterprise in ways that will fulfill them.

Self-knowledge is the path to one's *being*, which I discussed in the last letter. I pointed out in that letter that changing to or creating an EO is a *being* issue. Therefore, the level of self-knowledge that each member has will determine in great part his ability to contribute to and therefore the quality of the organization.

Self-respect

For an organization of equals to function, each person must respect every other person. In order for a person to respect another she must first respect herself. We cannot give to others what we do not have for ourselves. The second great commandment is to love thy neighbor as *thyself*. How can I love another if I do not first love or respect myself.

As in the case of self-knowledge, you probably think we could easily find this characteristic. That is not so. One of the first tasks in any kind of personal development is to accept who we are as we are. That does not mean we are as we would like to be, but we do have to understand and accept our starting point in order to develop.

Autonomous

One of the primary needs every individual has is autonomy — that is” in control of their own life. Unfortunately, parents, school, and those in command and control organizations train us to give up our autonomy. In return, we look for acceptance and approval from those above.

In a non-hierarchical organization there is no one above. Therefore, each person must be able to act on his own. Often this means giving up the sense of security we think comes from others telling us how to act. Although sometimes difficult, the rewards for doing so are significant.

Work with others

The flip side of being able to be autonomous is the ability to work with others. We must learn how to give up some of our autonomy in order to build an effective organization. This relates to the core belief in freedom. We can be autonomous only to the extent that it does not interfere with the autonomy of others.

However, this does not mean we give up our *being* to the group. For any team to work effectively its members must be willing to stand up for what they believe, even if in the end they do not get it. It also means they have to be completely honest about their beliefs and feelings. I am sure you know from vast experience how seldom groups function like this.

Responsibility

In order to function both as an autonomous person and a team player, we must be able to handle responsibility. With no hierarchy there is no one to take responsibility or to dole it out. There are two aspects of responsibility.

First, an individual must be willing to ask for and fulfill responsibilities. She must recognize the need for something and assume or ask for the responsibility to meet it. Second, she must be willing to accept responsibility when others make a reasonable request.

One has to view taking on or accepting responsibility as a personal commitment. Others must be able to trust that you will meet your responsibility. If you find that for some reason you cannot, you must let the others know so that together you can work out a new commitment. An individual needs to see fulfilling a responsibility as an absolute must.

A command and control hierarchy uses positions to define the structure of the organization. However, the organization chart tells you the power structure, not necessarily who is responsible for what takes. I see the way people take and distribute responsibility as the true way to understand the structure. Therefore, I define structure through a “responsibility configuration.” Rather than showing who is in “charge,” it shows who has committed to what activities.

Capability

This is obviously an essential individual characteristic. However, it is not always easy to fill. First, it requires defining what capability a particular responsibility needs. Then it requires the ability to accurately identify whether a person has it. This requires complete honesty by all as to whether a person does or does not possess it. It harms both the person and the organization if individuals take on responsibilities for which they do not have the requisite capability.

For the organization to continue to evolve and become more effective, each individual must continue to evolve and increase in capability. This requires something from both the individual and the organization as a whole. The individual must commit to continuously learn. The organization must develop ways to provide support for doing so.

Conclusion

This letter has discussed the first issue we must address if we are to create an Extraordinary Organization. I have looked at some of the characteristics each individual must develop if she is to have the capability to become an effective EO member. There are more such characteristics, but these are six of the most important. However, just defining the necessary characteristics does not completely deal with this first issue. We must next look at some possibilities for ways individuals can develop them.

Until next time

In the next letter I will look at some possible ways individuals might develop the necessary characteristics. It will also look at how the organization at a whole can support each individual in this task.

Be Well, and
Be Extraordinary!

Don Yates
Extraordinary Organizations

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