

Leadership and Virtues—Patience

By Joe Whitefield

Patience is certainly a virtue. For many people, it may be the most elusive virtue of them all.

Impatience is infectious, contagious, and epidemic. Whether encountered in our personal or professional life, it inflicts most of its damage on relationships. That makes patience, in all of its many facets, especially applicable to organizational leadership. Most of these facets are differentiated somewhat by their names: temperance, self-control, forbearance, tolerance, etc. Although they all are worthy of consideration, let's focus on the star—patience itself.



“A patient leader is one who first recognizes the link between success and grit.”

FINDING TIME FOR PATIENCE

I have a colleague and friend who occasionally reminds me that we work in a place where “instant gratification takes too long.” To his point, customer expectations do seem to be running at an all-time high, with delivery speed becoming an increasingly important factor. Speed has long been a part of the service triad that includes quality and cost. The difference is that now the elements of the triad are no longer seen as trade-offs where you only get to

choose two of the three. The emerging paradigm is “everything, all the time.” With this uncompromising mentality, it might seem that leaders should simply abandon any expression of the old-fashioned cardinal virtue of patience. Patience is a luxury and there is, literally, no time for it. The purpose of this article is to take a new look at this old virtue and see if it still has anything to offer us in the area of leadership.

This need for speed is definitely affecting organizations. How can it not? Schedule demands challenge the status quo and drive organizational innovation and change. It is no small accomplishment for today's facilities managers to deliver high-quality service, on time and under budget. Effective leaders must understand and work both sides of the economic equation: marketplace demands and organizational service delivery. Legendary basketball coach John Wooden well understood this concept as it related to success on the court. He was known to tell his players to “be quick, but don't hurry.” This concept has been translated into leadership training for business leaders many times. It's a great lesson, but, organizationally speaking, what does it mean and how can it be done?

NEVER GIVING UP IS A SKILL

Angela Duckworth is a psychologist, professor, and consultant who has studied the traits of achievers—people who attain great accomplishments in extremely challenging environments. From everyday students to award-winning musicians, writers, and actors to Army Special Forces personnel, she has looked for the secret to outstanding achievement. In her book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, she reveals that grit is the personal quality most strongly indicative of future achievement. More than talent, more than IQ, it is grit, a dogged determination accompanied by a strong sense of direction, that is the driver of success in difficult situations. So what does grit have to do with patience, and why should a leader be concerned about it?

The gritty process that Duckworth describes requires a never-give-up attitude applied over and over

until a goal is accomplished. Try, fail, get up, revise, and try again. This process requires an appropriate amount of time and a strong measure of patience. Through continuous effort, raw talent can be turned into a skill. Once that skill is developed, it can be applied to a problem and produce a significant accomplishment.

There is no shortcut to success that is based on talent or intelligence alone. Talents must first be developed into usable skills. It is the application of these skills that produces achievement. Hard work and effort serve as the catalyst to success throughout the process. Without effort, talent is just unrealized potential, and goals are merely talked about rather than achieved.


Keep in mind, this process is not endless patience with directionless actions or, worse, inactions. Instead, grit relies on a passion that produces a sense of loyalty, loyalty that undergirds the desire to persevere. When describing the mindset centered on the "sustained, enduring devotion" that is passion, Duckworth writes, "Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare."

THE PATIENT LEADER

A patient leader is one who first recognizes the link between success and grit. Shortchanging this process will produce the opposite of success, substandard products and services. That being so, a patient leader should become more devoted to processes that develop the individual and collective skills of the organization.

Because this process will take an investment of time, I recommend an employee development plan that focuses on the most critical and creative skill sets implemented outside of the time crunch of any particular project. Once these skill sets have been developed, they can be aggressively and purposefully directed toward the successful completion of a project or goal.

If you want the success that comes from gritty people, your own patience will be required. Patience is a virtue and not a trinket. It cannot be purchased; it must be earned. So, identify some areas

of passion, apply some perseverance, and see what develops. And be quick, but don't hurry. 

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A graphic for the 'Untamed Potential' trade show. It features three stylized houses in blue, pink, and green, each containing different icons representing various facility management topics like cleaning, maintenance, and safety. The houses are set against a yellow background with a black silhouette of a city skyline at the base. The text 'REGISTER NOW' is in a black box at the top, and 'UNTAMED POTENTIAL' is in large, bold, white letters in the center. Below this, the event details are listed: 'THE 2016 ISSA/INTERCLEAN TRADE SHOW AND ISSA CONVENTION' and 'OCT 25-28 • CHICAGO, IL • USA'. A list of features follows, and the ISSA/INTERCLEAN North America logo is at the bottom right.

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