

The Wisdom of Max Depree

Promises the Leader Makes the Institution

1. The organization expects the leader to define and express both in writing and, especially, through behavior the beliefs and values of the institution.
2. To carry out its work, the organization needs from a leader a clear statement of its vision and its strategy.
3. A leader is accountable for the design of the business.
4. A leader is responsible for lean and simple statements of policy consistent with beliefs and values, vision and strategy.
5. Equity is a special province of a leader in the assignment of all resources in relation to agreed-on-priorities.
6. A leader focuses not on his/her own image as leader, but on the tone of the body of the institution.
7. A leader ensures that priorities are set, that they are steadfastly communicated and adhered to in practice.
8. A leader ensures that the planning for the organization at all levels receives the necessary direction and approvals.
9. A leader reviews and assesses the results primarily in three areas: key appointments and promotions, results compared to the plan, the connections to key publics.
10. Leaders are accountable for the continuous renewal of the organization.

Organizational Covenants

Covenantal relationships, on the other hand, induce freedom, not paralysis. A covenantal relationship rests on shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to values, to goals, and to management processes. Words such as love, warmth, personal chemistry are certainly pertinent. Covenantal relationships are open to influence. They fill deep needs and they enable work to have meaning and to be fulfilling. Covenantal relationships reflect unity and grace and poise. They are an expression of the sacred nature of relationships.

Covenantal relationships enable corporations to be hospitable to the unusual person and unusual ideas. Covenantal relationships tolerate risk and forgive errors. I am convinced that the best management process for today's environment is participative management based on covenantal relationships. Look for the "good goods" of quality relationships that prevail in a corporation as you seek to serve.

How can we begin to build and nurture intimacy? Well, one way to begin is by asking questions and looking for answers. How does the company connect with its history? What business is it in? Who are the people and what are their relationships with one another? How does the company deal with change and conflict? Most important, perhaps, what is their vision of the future? Where are they going? What do they want to become?

Leaders are obliged to think about these questions. Both the act and the art of leadership, if we are to be intimate with our work, demand this.

From time to time I am asked, "What is your personal goal for Herman Miller?" When one loves jazz, one thinks of Louis Armstrong. When one truly enjoys baseball, one thinks of Sandy Koufax. When one appreciates stabiles, one thinks of Alexander Calder. When we respond to the French Impressionists, we think of Renoir. Each of these beautifully talented, beautifully trained, beautifully disciplined persons is special to us because he is a gift to the spirit.

My goal for Herman Miller is that when people both inside the company and outside the company look at all of us, not as a corporation but as a group of people working intimately within a covenantal relationship, they'll say, "Those folks are a gift to the spirit."

The Responsibility of Leaders

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.

The last is to say thank you.

In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor