



The Iceberg

The iceberg represents your leadership. The 10% above the water is your skill. The 90% below the water is your character. It's what's below the surface that sinks the ship.

An iceberg is an interesting picture of the first rule of leadership. There's more to it than meets the eye. Most of an iceberg is below the surface of the water. You probably remember the awesome story of the Titanic. (Maybe you saw the movie!) The huge and unsinkable ship received five iceberg warnings that fateful night of April 14, 1912, just before it went down. When the sixth message came in during the wee hours of the next morning: "Look out for icebergs," the operator wired back, "Shut up! I'm busy." These were his last words over the wire before it all happened. Exactly thirty minutes later, the great vessel – the one whose captain said even God couldn't sink – was sinking. Hundreds of passengers and crew were drowned.

What was the problem? They forgot the truth about icebergs. What they saw above the water couldn't have sunk the great ship. Unfortunately they forgot that most of an iceberg is below the waterline.

They underestimated the power of the iceberg, and overestimated their own strength. What an accurate description of so many leaders today.

The iceberg is a great picture of leadership because so much of our influence comes from qualities we can't see on the outside. It's stuff below the surface. I estimate 90% of our leadership is made up from our character. And, our character is the sum total of our:

- Self-discipline (the ability to do what's right even if you don't feel like it)
- Core values (principles you live by that enable you to take a moral stand)
- Sense of identity (A realistic self-image based on your gifts and personality)
- Emotional security (The capacity to be emotionally stable and consistent)

Many people make it into the limelight, and neglect their character. Your skill may get you to the top – but it's your character that will keep you there. If you don't have strong character, you will eventually sabotage your leadership. You can only fake it so long. We learned this in the 1980s when so many religious televangelists fell morally. We learned it again in the 1990s when many politicians fell morally, when corporations such as Enron, WorldCom and Tyco committed moral crimes and pro athletes were taken to court due to lack of character. Even dozens of Catholic priests were charged with sexual crimes. My explanation? The iceberg. Weak character may begin with lying and cheating on tests. It eventually takes the form of fraud, sex crimes, robbery and scandals. In 2003, news became public that American Airlines, food service giant Ahold, and Healthsouth were all charged with mishandling funds. Were these companies part of the list of scandals in 2002? Nope. The scandals all happened after, and in spite of, the new legislation to combat corporate crimes. In other words, we didn't learn our lesson from Enron, back in 2002.

It didn't start with our generation, though. About a hundred years ago, a boy grew up in Europe. His father's given name was Alois Schicklgruber. As a teen, he never learned about character. His parents never taught him right from wrong, and he began to come up with his own ideas and values. His father put him down when he talked about becoming a priest, and insulted him when he spoke of becoming an artist. He was never valued, nor taught values. One night, he heard his mom and dad argue about moving away. He was convinced they hated him and suspected they would leave him behind. He decided to put up an emotional wall and never let anyone inside his heart. He ran away. This boy grew up to be a man. The man became a leader. You know him as Adolf Hitler.

History proves that Adolf Hitler was a great leader, but he wasn't a good one. He failed to use his influence well. His skill and charisma were huge. His character was horribly flawed.

He sabotaged himself – but not until he had slaughtered more than six million innocent people along the way. While leadership skills are good to have, it does no good to develop your skills at the expense of your character and integrity. For instance, it would be easy to think that the mortgage banking industry is merely about finance, accounting, interest and negotiation. While those competencies are important, they are only the tip of the iceberg. The vast majority of that industry – and any industry for that matter – is about who we are below the surface. The lesson? Lead yourself well before you try leading others.

The bad news about icebergs is that it's what's below the surface that sinks a ship. When we have weak character it will eventually damage our ability to lead. The good news about icebergs is that it's what's below the surface that supports the tip or the iceberg. In the same way, strong character will hold you up long enough to use your skills.

Reflect and Respond

It is easy for us to sprint right to a list of competencies when we define Leadership development. As Americans, we tend to want to immediately work on competencies or techniques. But those are all externals. True Leadership is built from the inside out. Whatever happens on the outside of our life stems from what's happening on the inside. When we see a house that has stood for decades, we know it has a strong foundation. The visible is only a reflection of the invisible. Incidentally, there are icebergs that have nothing below the surface of the water. They are like floating ice cubes. They are called "whistlers". They are easy to spot.

Can you guess how?They drift

Why is focusing on the "inside" so difficult for us today?

Why do we put so much emphasis on the "outside" of our lives?

We often become "Human Doings" before we are "human beings". What does this phrase mean to you?
