



## Transformational Leadership & Service Podcast

### Episode 29 Transcript

#### *The Triangle of Success*

Recently an audience member approached me, enthusiastically complimenting the scope, depth and value of my program. I was thrilled with the public approval. But before I could break my arm patting myself on the back, she asked a question worth considering. "How can you be so certain of the practical benefits of the lessons and techniques you share?" In other words, how do you know these things will work?

This woman's question allows me to reveal one of my professional passions. I consider myself an avid observer of human behavior. In almost every situation, I find myself constantly watching, wondering and often asking "why" or "why not?" Over the years the truths I have discovered have proven to be invaluable for my own journey.

For instance, I often asked myself, "Why are some individuals successful leaders, while equally talented folks seem to flounder?" In search of an answer for this question, I watched, considered and queried literally hundreds of successful leaders. I have concluded that all effective leaders possess at least three common characteristics. Thus, I have come to believe that these three elements constitute an equation critical for leadership success. I refer to it as the "Triangle of Success."

Let's begin with the first element – **knowledge**. I hope we can agree that knowledge is a key element in successful undertakings. But what is knowledge and is knowledge alone enough? Knowledge is not manifest in a wall full of diplomas and certificates. It's not accurately measured by a numeric grade point average or by years of workplace seniority. True **knowledge equals understanding**. In the case of leadership, understanding what our followers both need and expect from us provides practical working knowledge. Without such an understanding we are doomed to wander aimlessly from one irrelevant issue or activity to another.

The second element is **skill**. Is skill more important than knowledge? I say not *more* important, rather *equally* important. Both, knowledge *and* skill are critical to personal leadership development. Simply stated, **skill equals application**. The ability to apply a concept or idea to some task serves as an unmistakable leadership advantage. A few specific skills which can be immensely beneficial in leading followers include professional courage, decisiveness, patience and the ability to listen honestly. Each of these skills can be learned. But each must be applied for their benefits to be realized.

A question remains. We all know great numbers of people who possess both knowledge and skills in considerable measure. Why then are there still many more followers than leaders?

The third element in the "Triangle of Success" is **attitude**. Attitude is key -- more important than either of the previous two. Why? Because ***attitude equals desire***. Anyone can have the knowledge and skill necessary to accomplish great things. But if no personal desire exists to drive behavior and performance, the end result will be unrealized potential. Conversely, we all know individuals who lack great knowledge and skill, yet their attitude, their desire, serves them, even drives them, as they methodically overcome the obstacles before them. For them, desire is the great equalizer.

Our challenge is to consciously ward off feelings of complacency and over confidence as we develop one or more of the elements above. We must realize that school is never out for leaders and that desire is the true breakfast of champions.