

The Leader within You: Let It Come Out!

STUART G. WALES, PH.D., P.E., DIST.M.ASCE

A leader lies in wait within you. Your leader wants to emerge to help you achieve more success and significance. *Success*, in my view, is measured in terms such as your accomplishments and material gain. In contrast, *significance* is determined by your positive impact on others and on the infrastructure and environment. Success has to do with stuff, while significance is all about substance—the good you do for others.

If you do not view yourself as a leader, please read this column—it may interest and help you. If you are a leader and read this article, please share your thoughts with me and/or pass the article on to someone else.

YOU PRODUCE, YOU MANAGE, AND YOU CAN ALSO LEAD

You are adept at *producing*; that is, others assign tasks to you, confident that they will be effectively and efficiently completed. You also demonstrate *managing* knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For example, when assigned a project, you competently determine the approach and process, assemble the team, and engage team members in achieving the desired results—the deliverables—within schedule and budget constraints.

While you value and will continue to apply your producing and managing knowledge, skills, and attitudes, you are beginning to see an even higher and more influential role, the *leading* role. Personal reflection reveals that the producer within you concentrates on *doing*—that is, effectively and efficiently completing assigned tasks. The

manager within you concentrates on *how*—that is, determining the means of achieving an objective or result as established by others and then guiding the process.

In contrast, and as a logical extension of producing and managing, the leader within you, if you release it, could focus on engaging others in envisioning and then creating the future. *To lead* means to identify and move toward the *what*, as in, What will be our organization's next major initiative? or the *where*, as in, Where do we want to go next?

To lead means to understand the present while engaging others in imagining and moving toward a very different, much-improved future. Clearly leadership is needed. More importantly, it is wanted by many, as explained by lecturer and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson when he said, "Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we could be."

WHEN THE LEADER IS RELEASED

You are beginning to converse with the latent, if not stirring, leader within you. You and that leader increasingly realize that the leader within, when released, does the following:

- Values producing, managing, and leading within yourself and the ability to mix and match them as needed, sometimes leading, sometimes managing, and sometimes producing;
- Strives to practice honesty and integrity—that is, and simply put, to tell the truth and do what

you say you will do, recognizing that these two qualities are the basis for earning the trust of others;

- Recognizes the need to be what you expect of others in keeping with the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi's thought, "Be the change you want to see in the world";
- Listens respectfully, attentively, and empathetically to what others say while carefully watching what they do and valuing those whose actions and words are aligned;
- Appreciates those who have gone before and what they have accomplished to provide the world of today, and views those contributions as an obligation and challenge to do at least as much for tomorrow;
- Believes that there are only two futures for individuals and organizations—the one they create for themselves or, in the vacuum of inaction or reaction, the one others create for them;
- Persists uncompromisingly toward a vision while being open to modifying the tactics needed to achieve the vision;
- Views problems as opportunities, mistakes as lessons learned, and failures as temporary setbacks while suspecting that those who experience few problems, mistakes, and setbacks have aimed too low;
- Promotes inclusiveness that invites actual and perceived stakeholders and thoughtful critics and opponents, as well as thoughtless detractors, to join the discussion and to responsibly and convincingly articulate their views;

- Encourages transparency—that is, defines and publicizes processes to be followed, precedes meetings with agendas and follows them with minutes or summaries, and documents decisions, action items, lessons learned, and team accomplishments;
- Asks participants, regardless of their views or arguments, to “put them in writing” in the belief that writing disciplines mental processes, as noted by playwright Edward Albee, who stated, “I write to find out what I am thinking”;
- Appreciates, seeks, draws on, and synergizes diverse concepts, ideas, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, functioning, in effect, as a perpetual student;
- Acknowledges, with respect and specific appreciative comments, the contributions of others in the awareness that, as noted by psychologist Abraham Maslow, “recognition is a need we all crave and there are no exceptions”;
- Recognizes that the most effective teams are those possessing three attributes—members share an objective or vision; members collectively represent appropriately diverse knowledge, skills, and attitudes; and members have created and enjoy a trustful and communicative relationship; and
- Believes in the power of a team to accomplish essentially anything, in keeping with the spirit of anthropologist Margaret Mead’s comment, “Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. It is the only thing that ever has.”

As I noted at the beginning of this column, a leader lies in wait within you and wants to emerge so that you can achieve even more

success and significance and so that you can practice even more responsible stewardship of your education, experience, and personal gifts. You and that leadership presence are conversing, and as a result, you are beginning to see a new set of possibilities for you and for others. By *others*, I mean people and entities you do or could interact with in your community, within your place of worship, at work, and across business and professional societies.

POPULAR, BUT WRONG, VIEWS

We often hear expressions like “She is a born leader” and “He is a natural leader.” Is that true? No, based on my study and experience. Famed football coach Vince Lombardi didn’t buy the “leaders are born” view. He said, “Leaders aren’t born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work.” That hard work means learning and applying leading knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

And then we have the “introverts need not apply” argument. Surely leading requires extroversion and, for added measure, charisma! Not true! Consider these business CEOs who lead but are professed introverts: Bill Gates at Microsoft, Brenda Barnes at Sara Lee, Warren Buffet at Berkshire Hathaway, Charles Schwab at Charles Schwab & Company, and Steven Spielberg, film director and producer. Jim Collins, in his 2001 book *Good to Great* (Harper-Collins, New York), dispelled the notion that extroversion is needed to lead. So what? So this: If you tend toward introversion—like me

and the majority of engineers—that trait should not stop you from releasing the leader in you.

And finally, some argue that leading requires being in a high position within an organization. In contrast, I believe that producing, managing, and leading should be practiced by all and are not defined by position. Ideally, each person should lead, manage, and produce within his or her area of responsibility and authority and beyond into his or her sphere of potential influence.

GOING FORWARD

Here’s a suggestion: Look for a leadership gap—that is, a situation crying out for action and change. Such gaps are everywhere and might include a failing process in government, a dying service area in a consulting firm, a stagnant curriculum within a university department, or a struggling program within a volunteer organization. Begin to articulate a vision, a picture of a markedly improved situation. Seek a small core of individuals who share your or a similar vision. Driven by your desire to make a difference, lead and gradually expand that team, drawing on all the resources available to you such as your education and experience, your proven ability to produce and manage, and the leader within you. Your team will succeed.

Stuart G. Walesh is an engineering, management, and leadership consultant. He can be reached at stuwalesh@comcast.net, or visit his website at www.helpingyouengineeringyourfuture.com/index.htm.