

Leader presumes follower. Follower presumes choice. One who is coerced to the purposes, objectives, or preferences of another is not a follower in any true sense of the word, but an object of manipulation. Nor is the relationship materially altered if both parties accept dominance and coercion. True leading and following presume perpetual liberty of both leader and follower to sever the relationship and pursue another path. A true leader cannot be bound to lead. A true follower cannot be bound to follow. The moment they are bound, they are no longer leader or follower. The terms leader and follower imply the freedom and independent judgment of both. If the behavior of either is compelled, whether by force, economic necessity, or contractual arrangement, the relationship is altered to one of superior/subordinate, management/employee, master/servant, or owner/slave. All such relationships are materially different than leader-follower.

Induced behavior is the essence of leader-follower. Compelled behavior is the essence of all the others. Where behavior is compelled, there lies tyranny, however benign. Mere behavior is induced, there lies leadership, however powerful. Leadership does not imply constructive, ethical, open conduct. It is entirely possible to induce destructive, malign, devious behavior and to do so by corrupt means. Therefore, a clear, meaningful purpose and compelling ethical principles evoked from all participants should be the essence of every relationship, and every institution.

A compelling question is how to ensure that those who lead are constructive, ethical, open, and honest. The answer is to follow those who will behave in that manner. It comes down to both the individual and collective sense of where and how people choose to be led. In a very real sense, followers lead by choosing where to be led. Where a community will be led is inseparable from the conscious, shared values and beliefs of the individuals of which it is composed.

True leaders are those who epitomize the general sense of the community — who symbolize, legitimize, and strengthen behavior in accordance with the sense of the community — who enable its conscious, shared values and beliefs

to emerge, expand, and be transmitted from generation to generation—who enable that which is trying to happen to come into being. The true leader's behavior is induced by the behavior of every individual who chooses where they will be led.

The important thing to remember is that true leadership and induced behavior can be constructive or destructive, but have an inherent tendency to good, while tyranny and compelled behavior have an inherent tendency to evil.

Over the years, I have frequently had long, unstructured discussions with hundreds of groups of people at every level in diverse organizations about any subject of concern to them. The conversations most often gravitate to management; either aspirations to it, dissatisfaction with it, or confusion about it. To avoid ambiguity, I ask each person to describe the single most important responsibility of any manager. The incredibly diverse responses always have one thing in common. All are downward looking. Management inevitably has to do with exercise of authority — with selecting employees, motivating them, training them, appraising them, organizing them, directing them, controlling them. That perception is mistaken.

The first and paramount responsibility of anyone who purports to manage is to manage self, one's own integrity, character, ethics, knowledge, wisdom, temperament, words, and acts. It is a complex, never-ending, incredibly difficult, oft-shunned task. Management of self is something at which we spend little time and rarely excel precisely because it is so much more difficult than prescribing and controlling the behavior of others. Without management of self, no one is fit for authority, no matter how much they acquire. The more authority they acquire the more dangerous they become. It is the management of self that should have half of our time and the best of our ability. And when we do, the ethical, moral, and spiritual elements of managing self are inescapable.

Asked to identify the second responsibility of any manager, again people produce a bewildering variety of opinions, again downward-looking. Another mistake. The second responsibility is to manage those who have authority over

us: bosses, supervisors, directors, regulators, ad infinitum. In an organized world, there are always people with authority over us. Without their consent and support, how can we follow conviction, exercise judgment, use creative ability, achieve constructive results, or create conditions by which others can do the same? Managing superiors is essential. Devoting a quarter of our time and ability to that effort is not too much.

Asked for the third responsibility, people become a bit uneasy and uncertain. Yet, their thoughts remain on subordinates. Mistaken again. The third responsibility is to manage one's peers — those over whom we have no authority and who have no authority over us — associates, competitors, suppliers, customers — the entire environment, if you will. Without their support, respect, and confidence, little or nothing can be accomplished. Peers can make a small heaven or hell of our life. Is it not wise to devote at least a fifth of our time, energy, and ingenuity to managing peers?

Asked for the fourth responsibility, people have difficulty coming up with an answer, for they are now troubled by thinking downward. However, if one has attended to self, superiors, and peers, there is little else left. The fourth responsibility is to manage those over whom we have authority. The common response is that all one's time will be consumed managing self, superiors, and peers. There will be no time to manage subordinates. Exactly! One need only select decent people, introduce them to the concept, induce them to practice it, and enjoy the process. If those over whom we have authority properly manage themselves, manage us, manage their peers, and replicate the process with those they employ, what is there to do but see they are properly recognized, rewarded, and stay out of their way? It is not making better people of others that management is about. It's about making a better person of self. Income, power, and titles have nothing to do with that.

The obvious question then always erupts. How do you manage superiors-bosses, regulators, associates, customers? The answer is equally obvious. You cannot. But can you understand them? Can you persuade them? Can you motivate them? Can you disturb them, influence them, forgive them?

Can you set them an example? Eventually the proper word will emerge. Can you lead them?

Of course you can, provided only that you have properly led yourself. There are no rules and regulations so rigorous, no organization so hierarchal, no bosses so abusive that they can prevent us from behaving this way. No individual and no organization can prevent such use of our energy, ability, and ingenuity. They may make it more difficult, but they can't prevent it. The real power is ours, not theirs.

There is an immense difficulty in this perception of things. Failure is constant and certain. If one's conduct, intelligence, and effort are deficient, as at times they inevitably must be, it is a failure of the first magnitude. If one fails to gain the confidence, consent, and support of superiors, it is a failure of the second magnitude. If one is subverted by peers, dominated by competitors, or hamstrung by mindless regulators, it is a failure of the third magnitude. If those over whom we have authority are not induced to understand, accept, and practice the concept, it is a failure of the fourth magnitude. One must look to self for every failure.

At first, it seems an impossible burden to bear. Upon reflection, it is neither to be dreaded nor feared. It is no burden at all. Success, while it may provide encouragement, build confidence, and be joyful indeed, often teaches an insidious lesson-to have too high an opinion of self. It is from failure that amazing growth and grace so often come, provided only that one can recognize it, admit it, learn from it, rise above it, and try again. There is no reason to be discouraged by shortcomings. True leadership presumes a standard quite beyond human perfectibility, and that is quite all right, for joy and satisfaction are in the pursuit of an objective, not in its realization. The only question of importance is whether one constantly rises in the scale.

It is easy to test this concept. Reflect a moment on group endeavors of which you are an observer rather than participant. If your interest runs to ballet, you can undoubtedly recall when the corps seemed to rise above the individual ability of each dancer and achieve a magical, seemingly effortless

performance. If your interest runs to sports, the same phenomenon is apparent. Teams whose performance transcends the ability of individuals. The same phenomenon can be observed in the symphony, the theater, in fact, every group endeavor, including business and government.

Every choreographer, conductor, and coach, or for that matter, corporation president, has tried to distill the essence of such performance. Countless others have tried to explain, and reduce to a mechanistic, measurably controlled process, that which causes the phenomenon. It has never been done and it never will be. It is easily observed, universally admired, and occasionally experienced. It happens, but cannot be deliberately done. It is rarely long sustained but can be repeated. It arises from the relationships and interaction of those from which it is composed. Some organizations seem consistently able to do so, just as some leaders seem able to cause it to happen with consistency, even within different organizations.

To be precise, one cannot speak of leaders who cause organizations to achieve superlative performance, for no one can cause it to happen. Leaders can only recognize and modify conditions that prevent it; perceive and articulate a sense of community, a vision of the future, a body of principle to which people can become passionately committed, then encourage and enable them to discover and bring forth the extraordinary capabilities that lie trapped in everyone struggling to get out.

Without question, the most abundant, least expensive, most underutilized, and constantly abused resource in the world is human ingenuity. The source of that abuse is mechanistic, Industrial Age, dominator concepts of organization and the management practices they spawn.

In the deepest sense, distinction between leaders and followers is meaningless. In every moment of life, we are simultaneously leading and following. There is never a time when our knowledge, judgment, and wisdom are not more useful and applicable than that of another. There is never a time when the knowledge, judgment, and wisdom of another are not more useful and

applicable than ours. At any time that “other” may be superior, subordinate, or peer.

Everyone is a born leader. Who can deny that from the moment of birth they were leading parents, siblings, and companions? Watch a baby cry and the parents jump. We were all born leaders; that is, until we were compelled to go to school and taught to be managed and to manage.

People are not “things” to be manipulated, labeled, boxed, bought, and sold. Above all else, they are not “human resources.” They are entire human beings, containing the whole of the evolving universe, limitless until we start limiting them. We must examine the concept of leading and following with new eyes. We must examine the concept of superior and subordinate with increasing skepticism. We must examine the concept of management and labor with new beliefs. And we must examine the nature of organizations that demand such distinctions with an entirely different consciousness.

It is true leadership; leadership by everyone; leadership in, up, around, and down this world so badly needs, and dominator management it so sadly gets.

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