



A Leader is as a Leader Does

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Abstract

Do you follow the leader or lead the followers? What type of relationship do you have with your followers? What type of relationship do you have with your leaders? Your leadership style is important; your motive is what really matters.

This article addresses the motives of leaders as well as the motivation of the followers. Specifically, how a leader leads and how and who follows with a focus on the leader/follower relationship. Arrington argues the importance of the leader's motives and how these motives impact the leader/follower relationship as a "leader is as a leader does."

While most would agree that leadership is an art, it is also the ability to lead others toward a common goal or objective and to influence others. The old adage, 'lead by example' makes a powerful statement about leadership. To lead by example simply means to lead as you would have your followers lead or to do as you would have your followers do. Yet, many leaders expect followers to perform and produce results that they themselves are unwilling to practice. This lack of leading by example may be due to motives other than performance. As such, this article addresses the leaders' motives and the motivation of their followers as well as how motivation determines individual leadership style and effectiveness. Ultimately, the article focuses on why 'a leader is as a leader does.' It examines who the leader is, how well and whom the leader leads and the relationship with the follower.

A Leaders Motive

"Many people believe that leadership is a way to improve how they present themselves to others. Corporations want people who have leadership ability because they believe these people provide special assets to the organization."¹ Essentially, one's leadership knowledge, skill and ability, is based upon personal motives. Some people are motivated to lead because they believe in an inherent ability to do so while others lead for personal gain including position, power and money. In either case, individual leaders have personal motives. Northouse refers to a leader within an organization leading based on title or position as an assigned leader while one who leads due to group response is referred to as an emergent leader.² It is believed that the assigned leader is leading because they have a job to do while the emergent leader is leading because they desire to do the job well.

As a result, the leader adopts traits that are essential to how they lead, motivate or influence followers. This is referred to as the trait approach.³ This approach is one of the first systematic

advances toward the study of leadership. It studied innate qualities of leader's characteristics (traits). According to Bass, research concentrated on the differences between leaders and followers by studying great leaders such as Abraham Lincoln, Mohandas Gandhi and Napoleon.⁴ This trait approach is referred to as the *great man* theory because it evolved from the skills, traits and behaviors of social, political and military leaders who were renowned or great.

Some leadership traits of the great man theory are intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability. The theory focuses on the leader and not on the follower. Therefore, some believe these traits make up the foundation of leaders who desire greatness. Many great leaders study and model the great man traits displayed by Lincoln, Gandhi and many others. Some use these leadership traits to help determine how they lead and who they become as individuals. These leadership traits can help to enhance one's leadership skills through study, personal development and application.

A Leader's Skill

A leader's skill determines how effective a leader is because followers are more likely to follow a leader who appears to know what he or she is doing. Therefore, the skills approach is based on a leader-centered perspective.⁵ The skills approach moves away from believing that leadership is innate to a learned behavior asserting skills can be learned, applied and measured. A review of the three-skill approach follows.

The three-skill approach applies technical, human and conceptual skills as an effective combination of leadership that can be applied to the supervisory, middle and top management of an organization. Katz's model addresses the skills that he believed were necessary at various levels within the organization in order for the leader to be effective.⁶ He suggests that there are varying levels of usage of the three skills depending on the level of the leader or manager within the organization. For example, the top manager may need or use less technical skills, the

supervisor needs or uses less conceptual and more technical and human skills while the middle manager may need to apply all three skills in order to be effective.

In addition to the skills, the leader needs knowledge, competence and social ability. These attributes are critical for the leader to motivate, problem solve and perform throughout the organization. Ultimately, the skills approach states that while a leader must have knowledge or technical skills, they must also possess the ability to motivate and lead others while having a conception of where they are going and how they are going to get there. As a result, leadership style is important if the leader expects followers to embrace their vision.

The Importance of Leadership Style

There are so many leadership styles that have been researched, studied and applied yet no one style is the 'all in all' of leadership. In fact, many leaders use a variety of leadership styles to adapt to the situation. This approach is called situational leadership. On the other hand, some leaders work toward applying specific leadership styles to their leadership based upon who they are which determines how they lead. Reviews of some common leadership styles may be helpful in understanding why style is important to what a leader does.

The Blake & Mouton leadership grid illustrates five major styles including authority-compliance, country club management, impoverished management, middle-of-the-road management and team management.⁷ Each style places greater or less significance on task or people and can be determined based upon the title. The key is choosing a leadership style that gets to the motive of whom the leader is and why they choose to lead the way they do. While the first four leadership styles (authority-compliance, country club management, impoverished management and middle-of-the-road) may appear least appealing they are likely effective depending upon the situation in which they are used. Even a "great" leader may use any of these approaches depending upon the environment

and culture in which they are leading. Ultimately, the team management approach is a proven and highly effective method that considers the human, technical and conceptual aspects of the skills approach because it is situational and can be highly motivational. However, the leader using this approach has to be genuine or even the team management approach can be ineffective. Is the leader applying the team management approach to benefit the team or is it to please management or to gain a personal reward? These rhetorical questions are important for the leader to understand as they develop behaviors and styles that appeal to the follower and supports performance.

Why Followers are Motivated to Follow the Leader

Behind every effective leader is a good follower. Good followership is critical to the success of every leader and eventually to every organization. The wise saying 'too many chiefs and not enough Indians' was likely derived from this very concept. Besides, if a great leader is to be effective he or she needs a host of good followers; otherwise, the human, technical and conceptual skills usage is difficult for the leader to apply.

In *The Courageous Follower*, Ira Chaleff describes the role of the follower from a five dimensional perspective.⁸ Chaleff believes the follower needs the courage to stand up to and for the leader. His five dimensions are:

1. The courage to assume responsibility.
2. The courage to serve.
3. The courage to challenge.
4. The courage to participate in transformation.
5. The courage to take moral action.

While these five dimensions are essential to good followership; the questions are what motive will the follower have to operate within this framework and will the leader be open to a follower who is willing to 'stand up to and for the leader'? One might suppose the answer depends upon the type of leader [character] the follower is as followers have influence too.

As such, the relationship between the leader-follower is a significant one. It ultimately determines how well the follower will perform, produce, engage and focus on the task or goal. The real question is will the leader have the courage to listen and be open to receive feedback from the [courageous] follower? Again, this likely depends upon the motives of the leader; why they do what they do and who they are as well as the motive of the follower who has a key role in the success of this relationship and the leader.

Conclusion

No matter what type of leader you are, a leader's motive determines how they lead and why they lead the way they do. It further reveals that some leaders 'lead by example' while others want followers to do what they are unwilling to do. This is due to a chosen leadership style, trait and character based upon who they are and their individual motives. This observation is based on the premise that leaders lead with an individual purpose, which may or may not be based upon the goals and objectives of the organization. Are they leading for results, personal gain or for the advancement of others? That purpose could be an innate purpose or the "great man" theory. It could be skill or character based or based upon leadership style. Yet, the leader has motives that make up who the individual leader is and why they lead the way they do.

As such, the leader-follower relationship, often determined by the leader, is critical to the success of all involved. Is the leader open to a courageous follower who is willing to stand up for and to the leader? Is the leader willing to listen to the follower? Is the leader willing to lead by example? While a leader is as a leader does perhaps a follower is as a leader does.

About the Author

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References

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² Northouse, (2009).

³ Northouse, (2009).

⁴ Bass, B.M. (1990) *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research*. New York: Free Press.

⁵ Northouse, (2009).

⁶ Katz, R.L. (1955). Skills of an effective administrator. *Harvard Business Review*, 33(1), 33-42.

⁷ Blake R. R., & Mouton, J.S. (1964). *The managerial grid*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.

⁸ Chaleff, I. (2003). *Courageous follower*, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.