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A Leader – Who Me?

“I’m a manager - not a leader”

“I’m not leadership material”

“I’m not the charismatic type”

Harry handed George a beer as George flipped hamburgers on the barbeque. George had been a little distant and distracted since Harry and his family had arrived for their annual Canada Day July 1st barbeque. *“What’s up George? You seem a little upset?”*

“You’d be upset too if you had the performance review I had on Friday. These damn performance evaluation meetings happen each July and it’s as if my boss saves up the real negative stuff so he can wreck my July long weekend. ‘Poor leadership abilities!’

Poor leadership abilities!’ What the heck does that mean? I get the job done, don’t I? We hit target each quarter, don’t we?”

Harry handed George the plate of cheese slices for the hamburgers. *“Did they have any specifics for you? ‘Poor leadership abilities’ sounds pretty vague to me.”*

“Apparently, my staff have low morale and the department has high turnover. Hey, who doesn’t have low morale these days? Life in the office equipment business is dog-eat-dog. I think I’m a good manager, but if they’re looking for Gandhi, I’m not their guy. I’m just not the charismatic type. Besides leaders are born, not made – and I wasn’t born that way.”

George is typical of many people today – wanting to be a better leader – but not knowing how to become one or even if it is possible. His story illustrates the three myths that limit people from becoming great leaders in their workplaces and in their communities. The **first** myth (based on the fantasy world of the Wizard of Oz) is that leadership ability is not something that you can develop, rather that it is something that you are just born with or you need “magic” to get. The **second** myth is that management skills are enough to do your job – leadership skills are optional. The **third** myth is that to be a leader you must be like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Gandhi – leaders that transforms a culture or those around them.

Myth #1: You Have to Be Born with Leadership Ability

The primary character of the book, *“Wonderful Wizard of Oz”* is Dorothy, a little girl from Kansas, whose house gets pulled up into a

tornado and dumped precisely on top of the Wicked Witch of the East, putting an end to her evil ways. Thus begins Dorothy's journey to meet the Wizard of Oz, whom she hopes will "magically" return her and her dog, Toto to her home in Kansas. Along the way she picks up a disreputable threesome – a lion, a scarecrow and a tin man – who choose to accompany her to see the Wizard so they too can magically gain something they believe they do not already possess - courage, a brain, and a heart.¹ Dorothy's fellow adventurers actually possess what they are searching for, but somehow do not recognize it in themselves. They spend the first part of their adventure searching for the Wizard to ask for their heart, brain, courage, and Dorothy's return to Kansas. Once found, the Wizard then sends them off to destroy the Wicked Witch of the West. He promises on their return, he will fulfill their requests (not that he can, but they don't know that!). With the courage of the lion, insight of the scarecrow, compassion of the tin man and a little bit of everything from Dorothy, they endure flying monkeys, buzzing insects, drugging poppies, treacherous animals, and grabbing tree limbs to seek out the Wicked Witch. After melting her with a bucket of water, they return to the Wizard of Oz in order to be granted their hearts' desires.

George said he "*wasn't born that way*" when discussing his leadership abilities with his friend, Harry. He firmly believed that leadership ability was something that you just 'had', not something you developed. This book is titled "*Escape From Oz*" because we need to 'escape' from the fantasy that somehow we can gain leadership characteristics magically, much like Dorothy and her companions thought the Wizard could magically help them. We must escape our belief systems that limit our ability to grow, learn and develop as leaders. We need to escape the fallacy that some of us are 'natural' leaders and some of us will never be leadership material.

“The Wizard of Oz” is like all fairy tales in motive – to entertain, and motivate towards moral character. The early fairy tales of the 13th to 16th century, especially those of the famous Brothers Grimm, led those who read or heard the stories to remember the moral lesson as well as the thrilling details. This is also true with *“The Wizard of Oz”*; even though the author, Baum, in his introduction to the book, disclaims the intention towards moral instruction. With other fairy tales, the reader learns lessons that can limit their view of life or expand their ability to be a good citizen. *“The Wizard of Oz”* is not exempt from this effect. As children, we primarily develop our beliefs about ourselves and our world before the age of eight or nine – the same age when most of us read or were read fairy tales. Therefore the lessons, good and bad, that children learn from a tale, can remain with them for a lifetime.

The characters of the tin man, the lion and the scarecrow teach us a fascinating lesson about personal leadership and why we should want to escape the influence of this fable. All three characters perceived a weakness in themselves – an incompleteness in their lives due to the lack of something. The tin man was totally made of tin, due to his many accidents with his bewitched axe, and thought that because he no longer had a physical heart to guide his behaviour, he must be extra careful not to hurt anyone or anything - even though his loving nature was often evident. The scarecrow regarded himself as a fool because he had no brains - even though time after time we see the scarecrow finding the solution to the problems faced by the team of four as they journey. The lion was convinced he is cowardly because he feels afraid when he faced danger - yet when faced with wild animals, he tells Dorothy and the others to stand close behind him and he will fight to his death.

The tin man, the scarecrow and the lion all had strong beliefs about who and what they were. Information or evidence that disagreed with these firmly held beliefs was discounted or disregarded. The characters never believed that they had the courage, knowledge and heart that they craved - even after their arduous journey - where they demonstrated over and over that they already had what they were seeking from the Wizard.²

The four characters exemplify the leadership characteristics they believed they were lacking. The scarecrow, tin man and lion deny their intelligence, kindness and courage – even when there is evidence to prove otherwise. When we have strong beliefs about ourselves, we discount information or evidence that is contradictory to those beliefs.

Do we have beliefs about our abilities that we are denying – leadership abilities that we could develop and grow? It is in our own control to become the leaders we wish to be. First, we must recognize that we have the power to discover and develop as leaders.

Myth #2: I'm a Good Manager – That's Enough

In today's organizations, many people believe that having management skills is sufficient. In Henry Mintzberg's book, "*The Nature of Managerial Work*", he observed what managers actually do (versus what they say they do) and identified their roles at work.³ He broke the tasks of a manager down into three types of roles: interpersonal, informational and decisional. Under the interpersonal category, he placed the "job" of leader – specifically

the ability to motivate others and unite efforts towards a vision. He believed that leadership was a subset of management.

Other business writers such as John P. Kotter ⁴ see leadership and management as complementary yet distinctly different functions (not as a subset of one or the other), with each being more important depending on the situation the organization is facing.

For example, in times of peace, the armed forces of a country can be successful by having good administration throughout the ranks with good leadership only at the very top. In times of war, good leadership must be present at all levels. People cannot be “managed” into battle – they must be led. In times of relative peace, whether in a country or an industry, the management roles of planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing and controlling are more important. In times of change, the roles of leadership must rise to the surface – those of setting direction, aligning people to the vision of the organization, and motivating them to achieve the desired results. Like two hands that interlink, leadership and management come together to create and maintain a strong organization.

Organizations today, whether a non-profit service club, a small business, or a corporation with hundreds or thousands of employees, require “manager-leaders” – a combination of the leader and manager. This is because, today, there is no peacetime. Change is demanding that we be diligent and vigilant, as if we were in a combative state. Industries are changing overnight. Even organizations that were considered secure are under threat from competition, technology and the changing world market.

Succeeding in this environment means individuals must not only learn management skills and acquire knowledge, but must learn

the skills and develop the attitudes that will assist them in becoming excellent leaders.

Myth #3:
You have to be charismatic to be a leader

When we think of leadership, one person often comes to mind – Mahandas K. Gandhi (called Mahatma, or Great Soul, by his followers). He was a transformational leader who led the struggle for Indian independence from the United Kingdom by advocating non-violent non-cooperation. He was imprisoned several times by the British authorities, and later was a significant player in India's independence negotiations of 1947. After his death, India's First Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, described him as *“that glory that we saw for all these years, that man with the divine fire, changed us also - and such as we are, we have been molded by him during these years, and out of that divine fire many of us also took a small spark which strengthened and made us work to some extent on the lines that he had fashioned.”*⁵

Gandhi was what we would term a 'transformational leader'. He transformed his people, himself, even his country.

Transformational leadership happens when a person communicates with another in such a way that both the leader and the follower are lifted to higher levels of motivation. Their reasons for being involved, which might have been somewhat different, become aligned. Their resources are pooled for the common purpose. The words we use to describe this kind of leadership include: elevating, mobilizing, inspiring, and uplifting. It eventually raises the level of human conduct and aspirations of both the leader and the follower and therefore is 'transforming'. This is an

energetic type of leadership where the leader and follower engage in an enthusiastic relationship where followers become active participants and even become leaders themselves.

At the other end of the continuum scale lies transactional leadership. **Transactional leadership** is leadership based on an exchange. The leader provides certain things in exchange for the follower supplying certain things. The leader provides some reward (pay, bonuses, recognition, praise) for services by the follower (productivity, ideas, loyalty). The leader is clear on the vision of the organization or group that the follower belongs to and communicates to the follower to ensure the organizational goals and objectives are achieved.

Between these two ends of the continuum lie the subjectives of leadership – engaging the hearts and minds of the followers, motivating, accomplishing, trust building, empowering and developing others, and challenging the current situation - to grow and develop as a group, organization or team.

You don't have to be a hero to be a leader – transformational, transactional, or anywhere in between. If we restrict our definition of leadership to the far end of the transformational scale (Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr.), we restrict our vision for our own potential.

James MacGregor Burns, writing about transformational and transactional leadership, suggests *“leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize institutional, political, psychological and other resources so as to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of followers.”*⁶

Whether we transform our organization, or simply achieve our goals, leadership is fundamentally about engaging those we lead.

Endnotes and References

1. The tin man was originally a human woodsman who had been the victim of an old woman's selfishness. He fell in love with a Munchkin maiden but she lived with an old woman and the woman did not want to lose the person who did her cooking and housework. She made a deal with a wicked witch for a payment of two sheep and a cow. The witch enchanted the axe of the woodsman to slip and cut off his leg. He had a tinsmith replace his leg with a leg of tin. It worked well but the wicked witch was not pleased and made his axe fall once more - again he went to the tinsmith, who replaced his other leg with tin. After this the enchanted axe cut off his arms one after another but nothing daunted the woodsman - he replaced his parts with tin and continued to pursue the Munchkin maiden. The wicked witch made his axe slip once more and cut off his head and he had it replaced with tin. The wicked witch made the axe fall and cut his body in two. The tinsmith came to the woodsman's aid and made him a body of tin and fastened his tin arms, legs and head to his body by means of joints. (One has to wonder: Why didn't he throw away that damned axe?)

The lion believed that the other animals in the forest expected him to be brave. He discovered if he roared loudly, the animals and even men would run away. But he was sure if they ever tried to fight him, he would have to run away himself.

The scarecrow was put up on a stick in the field to scare away crows but soon the crows realized he was not a real man and came and ate the corn crop anyway. The scarecrow was told by a crow that if he had brains in his head he would be as good as any man, and better than some. Brains were the only things worth having, whether you were a man, a scarecrow or a crow. The scarecrow felt he was a fool and wanted to change that.

2. In the movie, "*Wizard of Oz*", starring Judy Garland, the characters do not demonstrate the same degree of courage, insight and heart that they do in the original book.

3. Henry Mintzberg, "*The Nature of Managerial Work*" (1973). Henry is a Professor of Management at McGill University in Montreal and at INSEAD in Fontainebleu, France.

4. John P. Kotter is Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the Harvard Business School and the author of the books "*The General Managers*",

"Power and Influence", "Leadership Factor", and "A Force For Change: How Leadership Differs From Management".

5. After Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, made these comments in Gandhi's eulogy, February 2nd, 1948.

6. James MacGregor Burns, *"Leadership"* (1978).

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Four Cornerstones of Personal Leadership

In August, 2001, Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France for the third consecutive year. The 88-year old event is a 21-day cycling competition covering more than 3,453 km throughout France and neighbouring countries, including the difficult terrain of the French Alps and the Pyrenees Mountains. As many as 190 cyclists start the competition and approximately 140 finish the race. In the world of cycling, the Tour de France is considered the *most* gruelling and demanding multi stage competition. It is referred to by many as the “Superbowl” of cycling.

Four years ago, Lance Armstrong was suffering from cancer. He went through chemotherapy and a series of operations. He then rebuilt his body and returned to professional cycling in 1998.

Lance Armstrong demonstrates the four elements essential for personal leadership – **insight, courage, self-discipline** and the ability to **influence** others. All four elements are important. They are the cornerstones of personal leadership. As with a building, one of the four can crumble or be removed and the building will still stand. However, four strong cornerstones create a strong and safe structure. The four leadership elements create an effective, balanced leader.

The first cornerstone is **insight**. With insight, you can think, you can recognize needs. Perhaps you see the need for programs to assist people in poverty in your community or a need that is not currently being filled by a business in your area.

The second cornerstone is **courage**. With insight *and* courage, you would have the initiative to talk to colleagues and friends about the needs you perceive in the community. You could discuss with others the possibility of beginning a service club or organization to address those needs. If it was a business idea, courage would get you down to the bank to risk your financial future or the courage to publicly announce that you are opening a new business.

With **self-discipline**, the third cornerstone, you could be persistent in working through the red tape of organizing a service club or chapter that addresses hunger and poverty. With self-discipline and courage, you could continue cold calling for your new business even after the first fifty rejections.

The final cornerstone is **influencing others**. With this fourth element, others will join you and work towards your common goal – whether it is building a service club, a union, a corporation, or a new world.

What happens if we don't have all four elements? A person who only has insight is someone who talks about starting a business, building an organization, writing a book – but never acts on the idea. Courage without insight gets you to the wrong place quickly. Courage and insight without self-discipline may give you an initial burst of enthusiasm, but it will soon dwindle as the going gets tough. Self-discipline, courage and insight without influencing others makes you a leader without followers. That can be very lonely.

How did Lance Armstrong demonstrate the four cornerstones of personal leadership? The team he led was sponsored by the United States Postal Service. They arrived in France months before the race, rode the course, practiced and trained as a team. The objective of the team was to see that Lance Armstrong, their leader, won the competition. Although cycling appears to be a singular sport, Lance's teammates could help him in winning the Tour by riding beside him, encouraging him through the tough times, and riding in front of him to redirect the wind. Their involvement was essential to his success. Although their success would be financially recognized as a team, Lance would be the 'picture boy' of the Tour if he won. How did he keep his team together in a situation where he, as the leader, would receive the majority of the attention, glory and financial rewards? His leadership abilities were essential to the success of the goal.

The first cornerstone – insight – was demonstrated time and time again as he strategized to confound and confuse his competitors, with the upcoming days' rides and final goal always at the back of his mind.

His teammates certainly would believe he was courageous – fighting cancer and winning made him so. But to train to a level

where he is considered one of the elite performance athletes of the world is not what one would expect of a person who had been ravaged by cancer.

He demonstrated courage and influence over his team with his performance in Stage 9 of the Tour. During this stage from Pontarlier to Aix-Les-Bains, France, the cyclists raced through extremely inclement weather. During the 185 km stage of the race, one of the team members took a fall and broke his collarbone, which forced his withdrawal from the team. This was detrimental to the overall morale of the team which had worked together so closely. Nine now down to eight. On the next day, during stage 10, the team was to climb into the French Alps. Seeing his remaining seven teammates at breakfast, worn, demoralized and dejected, Armstrong realized the danger of the team breaking down and not producing their desired objective. He decided in that moment to 'take' the next stage that would see him regain time lost on the previous day and the team's morale restored. He delivered one of the most impressive records on a mountain stage in the history of the Tour de France. When the media looked for comments regarding his success, he told the world what an impressive job his teammates had done instead of discussing his own feelings of success – consistently using the words "*the team*" instead of the word "*I*".

The final cornerstone of self-discipline which includes consistency of character was seen during one of the stages in the Pyrenees Mountains. His nearest competitor, German cyclist, Jan Ulrich, fell headfirst off his bike during a steep descent. Lance slowed his pace until he saw if Jan was all right, instead of taking advantage of the moment. Followers want to follow leaders who demonstrate consistent integrity.

The Leader We Think Of – Gandhi

He was arrested in 1922 and charged with sedition for his articles in “Young India”. On March 23, at the end of his trial he was allowed to address the court before being sentenced to six years in jail.

“Before I read this statement, I would like to state that I entirely endorse the learned advocate general’s remarks in connection with my humble self. I think that he was entirely fair to me in all the statements that he has made, because it is very true, and I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this court the fact that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of government has become almost a passion with me; and the learned advocate general is also entirely in the right when he says that my preaching of disaffection did not commence with my connection with “Young India” but that it commenced much earlier and in the statement that I am about to read it will be my painful duty to admit before this court that it commenced much earlier than the period stated by the advocate general. It is the most painful duty with me, but I have to discharge that duty knowing the responsibility that rests upon my shoulders.”

We can look at the example of Gandhi as a transformational leader who demonstrated the four essentials of personal leadership. His courage to face judgement time and time again by the British courts, insisting that if they were going to incarcerate him, they should know the whole story of his civil disobedience against the crown.

His insight regarding the future of his country and what was required to gain his objective of equal rights for Indians within India

was demonstrated in his other comments before the court. While living in South Africa, he had supported the empire by serving in the Boer War, even though he was discriminated against by the British because he was an Indian.

Mahatma Gandhi's self-discipline by remaining on his path, working towards his political goals through fasts and boycotts and placing his goals before his own creature comfort, is something few of us would be willing to do.

Finally, the influence that Gandhi had over the people of India – to remain non-violent while their world was one of violence and injustice. At his eulogy, the Prime Minister of India commented on his influence over others:

“Great men and eminent men have monuments in bronze and marble set up for them, but this man of divine fire managed in his lifetime to become enshrined in millions and millions of hearts so that all of us became somewhat of the stuff that he was made of, though to an infinitely lesser degree. He spread out in this way all over India, not in palaces only, or in select places or assemblies, but in every hamlet and hut of the lowly and those who suffer. He lives in the hearts of millions and he will live for immemorial ages.”

What Kind of Leader Do You Want To Be?

Regardless of where we land on the sliding scale between transformational and transactional leaders, and the current depth of concrete under our cornerstones, leadership skills and abilities can be dissected and examined. A 'natural' leader cannot easily teach a student what is needed to grow as a leader. However, by breaking down the leadership components – the four cornerstones

and, as discussed later in this book, the four types of personalized leadership – we can understand and develop as leaders.