

ON PURPOSE

WHY SHOULD I FOLLOW YOU?

by Richard J. Leider

It's no revelation that many leaders are overwhelmed with change. They are being challenged today from every direction. But why do some leaders prosper whereas others don't?

We can speculate at length why some falter or fail due to external reasons — failure to anticipate market needs and failure to innovate. Yet, the real difference between success and failure today, can also be traced to internal reasons — to how well leaders engage the hearts and souls of their followers. One sure test of leadership today is whether a leader has engaged followers.

DO YOU HAVE ON PURPOSE FOLLOWERS?

What does it take to engage people today? What does it take to inspire people to rally around a common purpose? First, it takes self-leadership. One big difference between the success or the failure of leaders today can be traced to character — how authentically they lead. Authentic character usually accompanies greatness in anything and is largely responsible for the energy and unity found in high-performing teams and organizations.

So, a key role of leaders in the new work world is to answer the question many followers are asking: “Why should I follow you?” Today, leaders must take a serious look in the mirror to answer that question. They must understand that leadership today is earned. Real commitment and engaged followers come through asking and answering the tough character questions first.

HOLDING UP THE LEADERSHIP MIRROR

During my more than 30 years as a coach to many leaders, I have been continually impressed with the courage that great leaders have for holding up the mirror to look inside. They understand that the soft stuff of leading is as important as the hard stuff.

While many leaders are energized by the prospects of this new era of *fast companies*, many others are hostile to what they perceive as a major change in their game. These latter people usually dismiss fast companies as anomalies. But, now that their talent is migrating to these companies, their denial is shifting to fear and anger.

WHERE ARE THE NEW MAPS AND GUIDES?

Back in the good old days of predictable economic and market patterns, a leader could say, “That soft stuff’s not for me; I’m going to keep on doing what’s always worked.” That choice no longer exists for the vast majority of leaders as the *war for talent* increases. Many leaders who have enjoyed years of predictable growth are finding themselves struggling to attract and retain great people.

All leaders are going to have to be *discoverers* in the 21st Century. The *discoverers* creating this nation had no maps, no guides. It was them — and the potential opportunity. Some made it. Many didn’t. This means for the foreseeable future, if the war for talent persists, we’ll be continually *discovering*. We’ll have to take on new risks. No maps. Few guides. And we’ll have to continually *create trust as we lead people into new territories*.

WHY SHOULD I FOLLOW YOU?

Today’s employees don’t blindly follow. Why should they? They are educated, street smart, globally wise and more aware of their options. Their engagement depends on the trust they have for their leaders.

Let’s assume for a few minutes that you have been asked to interview your new boss or leader. What would *you* want to know about him or her as *your* new leader? Assume you know the basics of a resume: work history, age, family, hobbies, etc. What would be your questions?

With today’s new workplace realities, many people are silently questioning their leaders’ purpose, values, vision and courage. Most know their

leaders do not have all the answers. So, they want to participate in living in the questions.

Leadership demands trust. Trust relies on character. In his book *Principle Centered Leadership*, Stephen Covey notes that our heritage was governed by the “character ethic” — principles like keeping promises, honesty, and exercising courage. Character is the “why” of “Why should I follow you?” Far too many leaders today have emphasized the “personality ethic.” Projecting a certain image, using the right phrases they have mistakenly focused too much on the *form* and not enough on the *essence* of leading. They lost their character. And, they lost people’s trust.

Character comes from the inside out. It can be summed up in the words of an Anglican Bishop found inscribed on his tomb in the Westminster Abbey:

“When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country. But, it too seemed immovable. As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it. And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realize, if I had only changed myself first, then by example I would have changed my family. From their inspiration and encouragement I would then have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world.”

WHO YOU ARE COMES BEFORE WHAT YOU DO

Form does not create trust. The power of form depends on the degree *essence* is also present.

Below the surface, at a leader's core, lies essence. Essence is our underlying substance — our purpose, values, vision and courage. When we discover our essence and learn to lead with it, then leading into the future becomes a courageous discovery process.

A key to courageous leadership is to address the question of “who we are” *before* the question of “what we do.” When we focus on the *who* question before the *what* question, we discover the essence of our leadership.

WHO IS LEADING: YOUR FORM OR YOUR ESSENCE?

A critical question today is “Who is leading?” Is it my form? Or is it my essence? When we lead from essence, trust is built. When we integrate who we are with what we do, many chronic leadership problems drop away.

The Leadership Mirror is a first step to discern our leadership essence. It suggests to us important information about our leadership character. In doing the exercise, it is important to dig below surface impressions to risk looking deeply into the mirror.

Effective leaders today have a strong sense of their essence. They have true purpose, values and vision that guides their leadership. John Greenleaf, in his

book, *Servant Leadership*, urged leaders to go “beyond conscious rationality,” and to go into the “unchartered and unknown” to lead from within.

Purpose, the mission or reason we were born, is the essence of our leadership, and is always larger than ourselves. It inspires and is the quality that attracts and retains people. Because it comes from deep within us, if we are leading on purpose we meet Greenleaf's criteria for servant-leaders: “Those served grow as persons ... and the least privileged in society ... benefit, or at least ... (are) not further deprived.”

We cannot find our purpose in a book, although the writings of other leaders can be inspirational. To lead on purpose, we must be willing to look in the mirror — to understand our underlying substance and to lead from it.

We want leaders today who look in the mirror. We want leaders whom we trust, who lead with integrity. Integrity results from consistency between our speech and our actions.. Integrity is something leaders live every day. Who they are speaks as loudly as what they do.

Richard J. Leider is founder and chairman of The Inventure Group.

THE LEADERSHIP MIRROR*

When is the last time you have taken the time to step back and look into the mirror, to challenge your old answers and ways of doing things, and to look for the underlying substance of your leadership? On the following questions, score yourself on a scale from 1 to 7. A “1” implies a definite “no” to the question. A “2” or “3” implies an infrequent articulation or use. “4” implies sometimes, “5” or “6” imply a frequent articulation or use, and “7” implies a definite “yes.” Put your answers in the boxes provided.

1. Do I have clear values as a leader?
2. Do my followers recognize my values through key actions that I demonstrate?
3. Am I clear on my leadership strengths?
4. Am I engaged in self-development efforts to focus on my strengths?
5. Do I have a clear sense of my purpose as a leader?
6. Do I leave my leadership legacy daily?
7. Do I have a clear point of view about what it means to lead?
8. Do those around me understand my point of view about leadership?
9. Do I have a vision for what I'd like to accomplish as a leader?
10. Do my followers know my vision because I communicate it to them?
11. Do I take time for leadership reflection?
12. Do I have a personal “board of directors” to share reflections with?
13. Do I have written personal leadership goals?
14. Do I take action on my leadership goals?

The first set of statements (1,2,5,7,9,11 and 13) assess how clear you are on your essence qualities. The second set of statements (2,4,6,8,10,12 and 14) assess to what extent you apply and demonstrate those qualities. Statements where your score fell below a “5” are growth areas in your journey to discover who you are and what you do as a leader. “Essence” is who we truly are. When we discover our “essence” and learn to lead with it, then we develop trust with our followers.

* This exercise is used with permission from the *Leading From Within®* program, © 1998 The Inventure Group

No Strings Attached By Daniel S. Hanson

After twenty years working for the same company I turned in my notice. I quit. One might think that would be a big deal. It wasn't. It was sort of a nonevent. I wasn't surprised. My path and the company's path had taken a different turn years ago. There were, as the old saying goes, no strings attached.

There was a time when strings were attached. In those days leaving would have been a big event. At least for me it would have been. I was attached to my work and the people who worked with me. I felt good about the company and what it stood for. I managed a group of misfits who built a profitable business from a group of by-products. We were proud of our accomplishments. What's more, we cared for our work and each other. We even took on the theme "We Care" because we believed in it. Life wasn't perfect, but our work and our relationships meant something to us. There were strings attached.

Over the years the strings got broken. I'm not sure what caused the break. My move to a new assignment in Corporate Planning could have had something to do with it. Several mergers took place in the 90s that changed the structure and the size of the company. We got into Total Quality for a short while. Several divisions "re-engineered." We downsized twice. We reorganized so many times that I lost count. None of these events by itself caused the break of emotional ties. It was more like a cumulative effect. Along the way caring relationships toward work and others became unimportant. Bottom-line and shareholder

value took over.

The company changed but I changed too. As I became less attached, I began to put my efforts into teaching, writing and speaking out about workplace issues. Much of what I had to say dealt with the breaking of emotional ties at work. I suppose I was telling my own story. Whatever the reason for doing it, I became emotionally attached to my work outside the company. My work for the company became a job, a means to a more meaningful end.

I ran into the CEO in the hall the other day. I wanted to say something about my feelings after twenty years with the same company. Instead we talked about business as if nothing had changed. He was nice, but the feelings weren't there. There were no strings attached.

Several of my friends who had left before me called to congratulate me. They told me how wise I was to leave. They reminded me that the company was not the same anymore. Several people asked me if I had been given "a package" (a reference to the severance packages that are given to executives who are asked to leave major corporations). I hadn't and it was a sore point. Leaving on my own precluded me from any package. When the company decides to let someone go the victim is compensated, but when you make the choice you are on your own. I suppose that's fair. After all, I knew that before I made my decision. It still bothers me, though. All those years and nothing special to show for it. I really wonder whether severance isn't a "guilt package" designed to absolve the decision-makers from responsibility and remorse. It leaves no strings attached. In my case there is no guilt, and thus, no package. So I still leave with no strings attached.

I shouldn't be complaining. At least I chose to leave. I had the last word. I know several people who were let go without notice. No matter how you cut it, it hurts to be told that you are no longer needed. It's like being told you don't matter anymore. Dealing with job loss is especially difficult for those of us who grew up believing in the fantasy that loyalty counted for something. In the end, I walked out knowing that I made the choice.

People tell me it is good that my leaving is a nonevent, that way I have no regrets. But I wonder, what price do we pay for no regrets? What happens to us as human beings when we shield ourselves from the pain of emotional encounters? What have we lost by turning endings into nonevents? An even

bigger question bothers me. What happens to a society when it no longer hurts to leave a relationship even if it is a work relationship? What are the consequences of no strings attached?

I recall the words of Frederick Buechner, author of several books on spirituality in everyday life. "You can survive on your own. You can grow on your own. You can even prevail on your own. But you cannot become human on your own." Perhaps he was reminding his readers that when strings are no longer attached we lose something vital. And that something is our humanity. In which case, no strings attached is a big deal.

In the meantime, I am leaving to follow a dream I have nurtured for a long time. I know life won't be perfect, but there will be lots of strings attached.

Dan Hanson is the author of two books about workplace issues, A Place to Shine: Emerging from the Shadows at Work and Cultivating Common Ground: Releasing the Power of Relationships at Work.

Inventure Coach Richard Leider

Dear On Purpose:

I have been struggling for the past couple of years trying to find out what it is that I am meant to do in this life. I feel like I'm lost a lot of times. Other times I think that I'm just a malcontent and that I expect too much out of life. Reading your book helped me realize that there are others out there who believe that their work needs to be compatible with what's inside them.

Trying to fit into a job doesn't work. The salary, the title, the prestige mean absolutely nothing if what you're doing is meaningless to you. I know this all too well. I've practiced law for the past seven years and I'm not exaggerating when I say that I have never had one day of satisfaction in my career!

The hardest part for me is trying to figure out what I'm passionate about. How do you know? Maybe

some people are just not destined to find joy in work. What if I'm one of them and I end up wasting my life? Are there any words of wisdom that you can share?

Thanks for knowing that there is a purpose.

*Sincerely,
In Pursuit of Purpose*

Dear In Pursuit of Purpose:

I remember the interview clearly. After thirty years teaching others, I had been accepted into a Master's program at United Theological Seminary and was sitting across from my new advisor. I needed his signature to take the class I wanted. It was a 600 class and I was supposed to be taking 101 classes. He was positive, articulate and had the power to sign or not to sign. Then he asked me the question: "So, Richard, you're a seasoned professional used to teaching others and basically being in charge. How do you feel about being a student again?"

I stumbled through an answer. But, I had to be honest with myself after the interview without feeling guilty of my feelings or needs at this point in my life. Being a student was going to be a challenge for me and for the faculty.

School has been a challenge. The first class taught me that I wasn't as confident as I assumed. I felt excited, yet lost. A turning point came after sharing my concerns with a group of fellow students. A new perspective emerged. I was not alone. They also were experiencing similar feelings.

We all journey through predictable stages during a transition, including a stage called "limbo," marked by feelings of self-doubt and being lost. They are certainly common for me and for you, I sense.

What can be done to increase your confidence level and the likelihood that your work experience will be a meaningful one?

My professional experience as a career coach helped me revisit the two essentials that changed my perspective: 1) Take stock; and 2) Take charge!

Taking Stock. Before creating a vision of where you want to go in life and how you can get there, you must know yourself. Answer the questions Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Searching for the truth about yourself requires courage. You must think seriously and answer a series of questions to assess your quality of life in 10 fundamental areas.

Time. What is your daily schedule? Do you have time for your real priorities? What is your most important need now?

Suggestion: Keep a journal of your activities, and review it at least quarterly. If your schedule is not consistent with your priorities, be prepared to change it.

Values. What are your top three values now? Can you describe one risk you have taken recently because of your values?

Suggestion: Ask yourself why you do the things you do. Consider what values your actions express and whether you agree with them.

Vitality. How do you spend your leisure time? Do you have fun? If you are tied to a routine and never enjoy spontaneous fun, you are suppressing an important part of yourself.

Purpose. Why do you get up in the morning? Do you have a sense of purpose?

Suggestion: Consider what you would like your epitaph to say...if you learned that you had only two years to live, how would you spend your time?

Career. How did you get where you are? Did you choose your career or did it choose you? At what point did you come to love what you are doing, and why? If your current job does not match your needs and wants, the mental and physical costs can be

high. True career progress requires not continual *promotion* but continual *growth*.

Talents. What natural talents do others see in you? Which talents do you most enjoy using?

Suggestions: Consider your ability to handle facts, figures and concepts ...deal with people ...manipulate objects, etc. Consider keeping a *talents inventory*.

Spirituality. Do you set aside time for contemplation? What principles govern your actions? You will live a more satisfying and fulfilling life if you know you are here for a higher purpose—not just to satisfy your material wants and compete in a rat race.

Health. How are your health and your energy level? Do you exercise enough ...relax ...smoke ...drink? If you take care of your health, you can expect a longer, better life.

Relationships. Do you have friends? To whom do you talk? Do you talk about what is important to you? The single most important source of meaning in our lives is our connection with the people we love—spouse...family...friends. Reflect on how well you are able to communicate with those closest to you.

Money. What annual income do you need to support your lifestyle? How is your financial health? Do you have written financial goals and plans? If your current situation is unsatisfactory, decide whether the appropriate change is to make more money or to need less.

Important: You cannot take stock by yourself. Discuss the questions with the people who know you best.

Taking Charge. After taking stock of your current activities and setting your priorities, you are equipped to decide the changes you want to make for a better future.

- Write a master dream list of all the things you would like to do throughout your life.
- Talk with your partner—or your family—and make a joint list.
- Choose four major goals to pursue for the next 12 months—one each for your personal life, your work, your relationships and your finances.
Key questions to ask yourself...

Do the people who matter to me support me?
Do I have enough time and enough money?
Am I willing to sacrifice any lower-priority items that conflict with a more important one?

If you can answer each question with a yes, tell others about your plan to increase your motivation.

Develop an action plan for each goal—with deadlines. Break the plan down into small, measurable steps. Put a date on each step to track your progress. Your action plan will put you on the road to meaningful change.

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