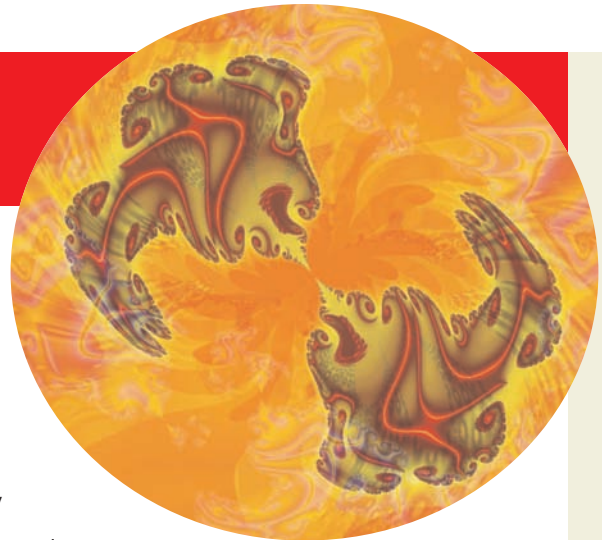


Dynamic Duos: LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

by David P. Prescott

Leaders, whether acting from conferred authority or emergent authority, create the conditions for, and motivate others to be, both great followers and great leaders. Great leaders and great followers teaming together, continually exchanging and reinforcing both their leadership and followership roles, have the capacity to create and sustain great enterprises, with results that surpass individual imaginings. Together they foster life-enhancing places of work where personal and corporate achievement brings satisfying and more than satisfactory results.



Leadership is the capacity to enroll others in a purpose larger than themselves and to take steps, and inspire others to take steps, toward bringing that purpose closer to reality. Great leadership requires acting with courage in the face of fear or uncertainty. Great leadership springs from centered personal authenticity which enables the leader and those led to stretch beyond their perceived capabilities. Great leadership invites and invokes outcomes beyond individual imaginings and expectations.

Followership is enrolling by choice in a purpose larger than one's self and deliberately applying one's gifts and talents toward bringing that purpose closer to reality. Implicit in this understanding is an ongoing commitment to labor within the community of the enterprise whose purpose is being pursued. Followership requires taking responsibility. Great followership is characterized by deep commitment, striving for excellence in all that one does, taking judicious risks and learning from mistakes. Great followers "give 110%." Or, as I have heard some professional sports coaches say of outstanding athletes, "they show up to play." Like great leadership, great followership requires acting with courage in the face of fear or uncertainty. Leadership and followership are parallel efforts toward a common goal.

The key to great followership is great leadership. They go together, inseparable partners. When I was growing up, there was a popular song about love and marriage. The lyrics said that they went together like a "horse and carriage" and that "you can't have one without the other." While social notions of love and marriage may have changed, and the horse and buggy have disappeared except as tourist attractions, there is a message in the song for corporate leaders. You can't have leaders without followers. You can't have great followers without having great leaders. There is constant interplay between them and among them that sustains their common efforts.

No one individual—which is how we commonly think of leaders—can be fully prepared to deal with the complex tasks and fast moving events of today's business world. Marshaling the human and financial resources necessary to move an organization—whether complex or



simple, whether an entire business enterprise, a division or a department—is more than a one-person job. No one individual can adequately process or fully understand all the new information that flows around an enterprise every day. Consider the massive amount of data transmitted through the daily interaction of employees as well as the multitude of interactions with customers, suppliers, regulators, community members,



members, shareholders and other stakeholders. No one individual has the sheer physical stamina or sufficient hours in the day to master the details of every opportunity, problem or issue that people in the enterprise are dealing with on an ongoing basis. The performance of the enterprise—and ultimately the success of its leaders—depend on the actions, interactions (or inaction) of a multiplicity of followers who are part of every corporate community.

Much prior thinking focused on the role of leader with its attendant picture of an individual (usually a white male) walking in front of a faceless crowd that followed behind. Followers were considered interchangeable functionaries who filled well-defined roles in the corporate mechanism. That thinking has changed as a result of discoveries revealed in the so-called “new science.” Margaret Wheatley, a leading

thinker on the implications for organizational life of the new scientific thinking, talks about the effect of those understandings on our notions of leadership and followership.

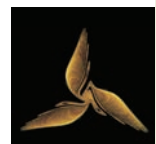
“Leadership, an amorphous phenomenon that has intrigued us since people began studying organizations, is being examined now for its relational aspects. More and more studies focus on followership, empowerment and leader accessibility. ... If the physics of our universe is revealing the primacy of relationships, it is any wonder that we are beginning to reconfigure our ideas about management in relational terms?”

In the simplest of terms, ancient wisdom describes the relationship of “good” leaders to followers. Lao Tze wrote:

“Fail to honor people
They fail to honor you;
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say, ‘We did this ourselves.’”

What are the characteristics of leaders such that their followers say, when the aim is fulfilled, “We did this ourselves?” In other words, what will followers look for in a great leader, today and in the near future? And how must leaders respond, for their sake, for the sake of their followers and for the sake of the enterprises for which they are responsible?

Before addressing these questions, I want to point out that my concept of the relationship



between great leadership and great followership necessarily involves a two-way exchange. That is to say, the role of leader and the role of follower often shift back and forth in every interaction. They are involved in an intricate dance, with the lead constantly changing from one to the other. Take, for example, a conversation between a “boss” and “subordinate” about a customer complaint raised at a regularly scheduled meeting which might go as follows:

- Boss: Do we have any customer issues to deal with?
- Subordinate: Customer X is not happy with the shipment we sent last week.
- Boss: Customer X is a very important customer. What happened?
- Subordinate: I received both a phone call and a letter detailing the complaint.
- Boss: What do you think we should do?
- Subordinate: I think you should call the customer. I will send you a memo summarizing the phone conversation along with the complaint letter, and an explanation of what happened.
- Boss: I'll make the call as soon as I get your memo.



While the boss leads by initiating the discussion about customers, the subordinate leads in articulating the solution to the problem. Each has exercised leadership in turn. At times the boss is the leader; at other times the follower. This interplay is the dance between a leader and a follower. If the conversation were more complex, the lead would shift constantly as the conversation unfolded. Admittedly, the outcome could be very different if the subordinate does not speak up, or if the boss simply says, “you deal with it” and the interchange ends. There would be no dance. Such an outcome would not represent the two-way exchange I believe great leadership and great followership represent. The two-way exchange motivates and sustains leader and follower efforts toward a common end.

I would also note the distinction between “conferred authority” and “emergent authority.” Leaders have “conferred authority” by being appointed to a particular role by a governing body or individual with the power to do so. When I was appointed executive vice president at the company I worked for by the owner, I assumed the mantle of conferred authority. It came with the title. The executive director of a values-based environmental group whose board I chair, is employed pursuant to a contract authorized by the board. The contract confers authority upon him. It also happens that he is an Episcopal priest. His has conferred authority by virtue of his ordination to the priesthood, visible when he wears a clerical collar.

Leaders who have no conferred authority may have “emergent authority.” Emergent authority is the power to influence ceded to one by consent of one’s followers. It has to do with the deference accorded to a person by those he or she works with, not because of a role or title, but because of the leadership he or she manifests day to day. Such people are leaders because they have earned the respect of colleagues, whether peers, subordinates or superiors. Those who follow professional sports have all heard about athletes who are recognized as leaders by their teammates.



Some may have been appointed captains by their coaches, but the basis of their leadership is not a title. Rather, they are respected for their talent, for their work ethic and for their performance. These athletes are leaders by virtue of emergent authority. Parker Palmer puts it this way: “I lead by word and deed simply because I am here doing what I do.”ⁱⁱ Those who do what they do, and do it well are typical of leaders with emergent authority, irrespective of whether they have conferred authority.

Great leadership requires acting with courage in the face of fear or uncertainty.

tude, thinking or behavior of another. The credibility of the one seeking to influence, as perceived by the other, is an indispensable element of emergent authority. The power of the emergent authority—that is the sway it actually has—is directly proportionate to the degree of perceived credibility of the person seeking to exercise it.

Emergent authority can be stifled or not exercised. Most have experienced the all too familiar case of a vibrant conversation shutting down when a leader with conferred authority enters a meeting room full of subordinates. In that case, emergent leadership dies from fear of the person with conferred authority. It is also true that conferred authority may not be exercised. I have a friend on the board of a small New England college who complains that the school’s president “won’t make a decision.” For some reason, he will not exercise the authority conferred upon him by the board.

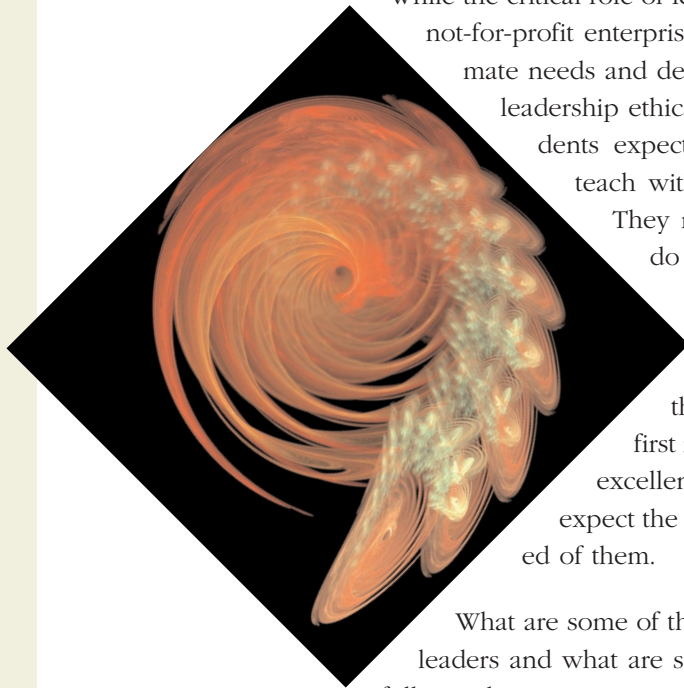
Great leaders, while exercising their own conferred authority (and building their own complementary emergent authority), encourage the exercise of emergent authority by those around them. In fact, they depend on it. Emergent authority, when allowed to prosper, shifts leadership from person to person, back and forth and around the circle during every meeting, telephone conversation or e-mail exchange. It shares both the burden and responsibility for building the enterprise and accomplishing its purposes. With the practice of emergent authority irrespective of title or role, everyone working in a collective enterprise is, from time to time, both a leader and a follower.

As we address questions regarding the relationships between leaders and followers, we need to recognize that follower expectations have evolved over time. Harshly and simply stated, expectations, at least among America’s younger work force, have gone from merely being paid to do a “job” to finding a sense of meaning or worth in gainful employment. Numerous studies have shown that “it’s not just about the money.” While pay is a significant element of worker satisfaction, it is not the most important factor. Having meaningful work, having healthy relationships with others and having a sense of personal fulfillment are most critical. Those who feel fulfilled in their work tend to be far more productive than those who are dissatisfied. (Satisfied people are also easier to be around;

Given the distinction between conferred and emergent authority, I have often been amazed when people tell me that they are not leaders. When asked why they believe that, I am most often told, “I have no title.” These who so answer are ascribing leadership only to conferred authority. The truth is that in every interaction among people, emergent authority is present. In every interchange, one party seeks to influence the attitude,



grumblers often poison a workplace.) As we reconfigure our ideas about leadership and followership in relational terms, we need to ask what followers expect of great leaders.



While the critical role of leadership in the success (or failure) of business and not-for-profit enterprises is rightly stated, we under-emphasize the legitimate needs and demands of followers. My business partner teaches a leadership ethics course to college students. He asks what the students expect of him as teacher/class leader: to prepare and teach with maximum effort or to “dog it” and just get by. They react indignantly to the suggestion that he should do anything but his best. The students uniformly expect their teacher/class leader to excel at what he proposes to do. I believe the same to be true of followers. If inquiry were made, I suspect that they would uniformly expect that their leaders be first rate. Great leaders will respond positively to call for excellence from their followers. In turn, great leaders expect the same excellence from their followers that is expected of them.

What are some of the specific expectations that followers have of great leaders and what are some of the ways in which leaders can foster great followership?

Great leaders enroll followers in lofty purpose, in pursuits larger than oneself, in pursuits which transcend narrow self-interest. They want to know, understand and identify with the “big idea” around which the entire enterprise community is organized. They want to be inspired by that to which the enterprise aspires. In concrete terms, they want to believe that the goods and services they work hard to create and deliver are worthwhile in a larger context. To engage both leaders and followers, corporate purpose—the big idea for which the enterprise exists—needs to be worthy in their eyes. Jim Collins talks about the power of a “BHAG”—a Big Hairy Audacious Goal.⁴³ For example, a purpose stated as “enhancing life through technology” or “making transportation safer by selling high quality tires” creates a vision that one can easily relate to at a fundamental human level. We can easily comprehend from our own experience what it means to “enhance life” or to drive on “safe tires.” High purposes can capture the heart. The grace of high purpose is that members of the corporate enterprise know that their work is both personally meaningful and making a positive difference in the world.

Purposes such as “corporate growth” “increased market share” or “making a profit,” on the other hand, can not engender a heartfelt response. Statements of these types hold up an object to be achieved. These objects are “out there.” As subsidiary goals they doubtless serve a function, but as statements of overall corporate purpose they lack the grace to warrant a deep and abiding commitment. They do not provide rallying points for dedicated sustainable common effort. Great leaders paint a picture of an important tomorrow larger than today; great followers see themselves in that picture.

Great leaders enroll followers in a shared vision and foster the conditions in which others are free to act consistent with meeting agreed objectives within their roles and responsibilities. Enrollment conveys a sense of invitation, of saying “yes,” of having a choice. Such enroll-



ment assumes that those enrolled are responsible adults who will act in the best interests of pursuing the overall corporate purpose. Great leaders have the courage to put themselves at risk by trusting in the work of others. In turn, great followers act with a sense of purpose, using their emergent authority in furtherance of the shared vision.

Great leaders know themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, their patterns of interaction with others, their passions and purpose. They take special responsibility for what is going on inside themselves because they know they have the power to cast “shadow” or “light” onto the people who work around them. They cast light when they affirm the dignity of others, celebrate their triumphs and empathize with their pains. They cast shadows when they project motives or intentions onto others when there is, in reality, no basis for such motives or intentions. Great leaders know that the source of their shadows is “the darkness we carry within ourselves.”^v Great leaders are aware that “[I]f we do not understand that the enemy is within, we will find a thousand ways of making someone ‘out there’ into the enemy, becoming leaders who oppress rather than liberate....”^v Great leaders have done the hard work of looking inside themselves and embracing all that they found as integral parts of who they are.

Great leaders practice self-mastery. Self-mastery is the capacity to have one’s true self be “in charge” of one’s interior life and one’s exterior life, to be in control of one’s consciousness and one’s actions. Great leaders continually do the deep introspective work of examining the genesis of their emotional and sometimes irrational reactions to people or situations. While affirming their emotions and embracing their shadows, they grow through hard won lessons—successes and failures, losses and triumphs, wounds and healings. Having learned from self-examination and from life experience, they behave consistently from a set of consciously held values and beliefs. Peter Senge describes a discipline he calls “personal mastery”—a process of “continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience and of seeing reality objectively.”^{vi} Great leaders practice self-mastery and personal mastery. They act with intentionality, from a true sense of self. By doing so, they provide a model for their followers to do likewise.

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Great leaders don’t hide. They don’t try to mask their lack of knowledge, weaknesses or idiosyncrasies. They do not deceive themselves into believing that no one else can see their shortcomings. They know that others can see through masks, just as they can. They know how easy and common it is to practice self-deception. A friend of mine tells the story of the dog that believes his master is a god because his master feeds him. The household cat, on the other hand, believes that she is a god because her master feeds her. The dog and cat are each deceiving themselves although their self-deceptions are different. While this example may make a cute story, the fact is that self-deception is easy to practice. Great leaders don’t hide behind self-deception.

Great leaders ask for help. They know and assert their strengths; they know and compensate



for their weaknesses. They lean on the strengths of others for assistance. They ask for opinions, they are not afraid to admit mistakes or receive constructive criticism from those with whom they work. They are not afraid to say, “I’m sorry.” They gather expertise around them to supplement the knowledge they lack. Great leaders know that one of the most powerful imperatives in the English language is “please help me.” Their openness in asking for help gives permission to their followers to do the same.

Great leaders interact with others in “I-thou” relationships. Martin Buber described the difference between an “I-thou” relationship and an “I-it” relationship.^{vi} The former relationship is with a subject, a person of worth and value, recognized as having inherent dignity and respectability. The latter relationship is with an object, a thing of little value, and no inherent dignity, a thing to be exploited or used without regard to the consequences to the object. Great leaders see others as full human beings to be engaged as equals, not as objects to be exploited. They exhibit genuine caring in their relationships, and thus make others feel that they have dignity and importance, that who they are and what they do really matters. They can stand in another’s shoes, and see through another’s eyes. Interacting with followers in an “I-thou” manner not only generates reciprocity from particular followers, but also models the standard for relationships within the entire enterprise.

At the heart of great leadership is personal authenticity.

understand, not anticipating what is going to be said or thinking about how to respond. They are not feeling threatened, overwhelmed, or distracted. Instead, they are intentionally in the here and now, engaged with all their available senses.

Presence acknowledges our common heritage as human beings; it admits that at our deepest levels we share the primal anxiety that we are inadequate, irrespective of power, position or possessions. Presence means being in the here and now; fully engaged, yet at the same time able to observe what is unfolding. Presence is being in the first person and third person at the same time. Presence is the superglue of human relations.

Great leaders act with integrity. Simply put, they tell the truth. They take responsibility for their action (or inaction). They don’t blame others, or shift responsibility to where it does not belong. And they keep their promises. You can count on their word. Integrity is the currency of leadership. The more currency a leader has, the more loyalty, dedication and effort can be “purchased” from followers. Leaders who act without integrity are bankrupt. The disastrous effects of such leadership have been extensively disclosed by the news media in their coverage of companies like Enron, Adelphia or Worldcom. A leader acting with integrity calls out similar behavior from followers.

Great leadership is not a technique, but a way of being. In the words of Lao Tze, “The way

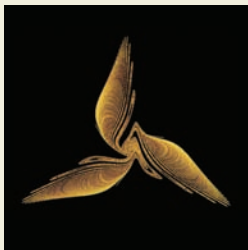
Great leaders practice presence. Presence is listening with the heart. It requires the suspension of all of the assumptions, biases, fears and judgments inculcated in us by our parents, family, friends, community and culture. To be present, a leader disconnects from the influence of prestige, power and possessions, and for the moment, lets heart intelligence rule instead of head intelligence. When leaders are truly present, they are alive to what is alive in others. They are listening to



to do is to be.”^{viii} At the deepest level of leadership is the “...fundamental structure of being human...” where we find “...roots not only in philosophy, but also in theology.”^x At the heart of great leadership is personal authenticity. Being personally authentic means connecting one’s everyday life and leadership with one’s true identity and purpose. It means living every day with purpose—the distinctive purpose that expresses the leader’s unique identity. One who is authentic is one who is genuine and worth of trust. Authentic leaders have passion for the purposes of their organization, behave consistently with their values, have a compassionate heart, build enduring personal relationships around shared purpose and act with consistency and self-discipline.^x Great leaders see themselves as integrated people with needs to nourish and stimulate body, mind and heart. In short, authentic leaders are real human beings, and their followers see them as such. Consequently, “...‘becoming a real human being,’ really is the primary leadership issue of our time.....”^{xi} Great leaders lead from a solid center of integrity, humanity and purpose and by so doing, they model for, and encourage their followers, to do the same.

Leaders, whether acting from conferred authority or emergent authority, create the conditions for, and motivate others to be, both great followers and great leaders. Great leaders and great followers teaming together, continually exchanging and reinforcing both their leadership and followership roles, have the capacity to create and sustain great enterprises, with results that surpass individual imaginings. Together they foster life-enhancing places of work where personal and corporate achievement brings satisfying and more than satisfactory results. Of those results, both leaders and followers are able to say “We did this ourselves, and we did this together.”

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What is Tarxien?

Tarxien is a team of committed, experienced leaders, each on his or her own leadership journey, who provide a catalyst for you to explore — perhaps more deeply and creatively than you have had the opportunity to do ever before — your own journey as a leader and person.

Contact us at 609.921.6453 or info@tarxien.net.

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ⁱⁱPalmer, Parker J., *Let Your Life Speak*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2000, p. 74.

ⁱⁱⁱCollins, Jim, *Good to Great*, Harper-Collins, New York, NY, 2001, pp. 197-204.

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^v*Ibid.*

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