

Richard Gee

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To: Richard
Subject: Your Leading Ways #19

**Number 19**

Our theme in this issue: How to be a Better Follower

Speaker Tip of the Month

Removing the Um's from America..... one speaker at a time.

The prevalent 'filler word' used in this country is UM. Listen for it, and when you hear it politely point it out to the user. It is amazing when you tell someone, how quickly they drop it, or pull themselves up when they have just used it.

Suggest they replace it with the powerful **P-A-U-S-E** !

*on to Leading Ways....***How to Be a Better Follower**

In the Tango, it is 50:50 leading and following, with each person following their heart but then moving in unison!

Sounds odd, but I recently followed a fire truck in order to observe what was happening -- a ladder engine with steering at the rear -- you could say that the person on the back is a follower... but without his radio instructions to the driver and then turning the rear wheels,

the fire truck would never reach its destination. When the engine turns, the driver at the front is a follower for part of the time. You could also say they are a team, or a partnership.

So perhaps we have moved on from the overvaluation of leadership in the 90's "If you are not the lead dog the scenery never changes."

I have spend a lot of time researching, writing and talking about great leaders, but really *we are all leaders and followers depending on the situation -- or -- the role we choose to play.* In other situations we become partners in an activity.

Even CEO's are followers in their relationship with the Board while implementing the Board strategy, and in turn Board members are followers to the wishes of shareholders and the financial markets.

Volumes have been written over the years on leaders, but what about the other group - the followers?

Perhaps a starting point is to look at the work of Steven Scott and his discussion of the four basic personality types. Two of the personality types in particular lend themselves to those who are more follower than leader.

The 'Golden Retriever' tends to be loyal, stable, sensitive to others and agreeable. To a lesser extent the 'Otter' can be more of a follower and is the enthusiastic, motivational cheerleader.

It is quite natural that not everyone will become a leader but can still add real value to an undertaking, in that they do not necessarily just do only what they are told.

"Everyone is necessarily the hero of their own life story"

-- John Barth

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Often they are mature responsible people with the ability to look ahead at challenges and opportunities facing the organization. Instead of being a leader through formal granted authority they become leaders because of quiet and natural influential qualities.

A good example of this is to consider the attributes of a good #2 to the CEO. How often have you heard the negative "He/she is not ready for the top job."

Wouldn't it be much better to say that the person is an outstanding #2 who provides judgment to the leader, helps the person to see him or her self more clearly, and has proven to be a great sounding board for the CEO.

Trends over recent years in empowerment, self-managed work teams, and the removal of layers of middle management from organizations has heightened the need for us to focus on the attributes of great followers.

Leaders are told to step down and work with people, and followers are usually told to step up to the challenge.

Projects are perhaps the best illustration of the changing roles between leaders and followers.

In the project kick-off phase the leader primarily drives scope, staffing, objectives and guidelines for those in the project team.

In the middle stages of a project the leader and team members work collaboratively and each is either a leader or follower based on the knowledge or expertise they bring to project milestones.

During the project wrap-up leader and follower roles differ again, with the leader defining the project end, and the beginning points for new projects.

Perhaps then leadership is a dynamic two-way relationship between leaders and followers, rather than something one does to another?

Perhaps also, unless you learn to be a good follower you will not become a great leader?

If we assume that great leaders have qualities of availability, cooperation, dependability, devotion, endurance, thoroughness, respectfulness, responsibility and self-control --- ***where else will you learn those qualities other than by being an effective follower?***

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Jim Collins in his discussion on leadership perhaps summed it up best while eluding to the fact that Level-five leaders of having, in part, *humility* and *will*. ***These are classic characteristics of followers.***

Becoming a Better Follower means:

- Helpfulness -- taking care of last minute details and unexpected requirements.... providing a helping-hand when needed.
- Stability -- having values of 'no surprises' and providing an excuse-free culture.
- Loyalty -- working enthusiastically each day on the tasks at hand, and also being a valued team member.
- Persistence -- attacking tasks with dedication and a sense of purpose. Making sure that they remain a problem-solver, and not a problem creator.
- Trust -- maintaining high standards of integrity and honesty.
- Observation -- becoming an astute observer of non-verbal communication in order to point out nuances in people's behavior which may negatively impact on work results.
- Complementing the Leader -- being aware of a leader's strengths and weaknesses and complementing the leader where required.
- Creativity -- by being eager to meet the needs of others, perhaps coming up with solutions to the problems of others.

Good followers are independent, critical thinkers. They take the initiative for their jobs or activities, fix problems or come up with better ways of doing things, and are committed to the organization or to the goals of the group. In many ways followers have similar characteristics to leaders.

Followers are often in the shadow of leaders and although the word "follower" may have had a bad rap, followers are key to every successful venture, organization and activity.

Historically organizations tended to have clearly defined boundaries and hierarchies but with the flattening of organizations; the now wide-spread dissemination of information and financial results about a company [rather than it being available only to the top]; and with the advent of e-commerce there are now fewer such boundaries.

For the future then, and also with the expectations of Gen-X & Y we are moving more towards a leadership model of collaboration, rather than leading from the top.

Perhaps each of us should ask the question:

"If I am to be more effective, should I learn and practice better the attributes of being a better follower?"

**"Communication starts with intention...
as your intentions will be felt long before your
message is heard"**

-- Doug Firebaugh

Have a great week!

Denis Orme

Book of the month

Workday prayers: On-the-job meditation for tending your soul by Timothy K. Jones ISBN 0829413758
Loyola Press

- ... from the book "Sometimes we go through life with an *'I've been this way before'* dullness. Nothing serves so well as a tonic for a tired soul as a bracing vision of God's greatness. Nothing is quite so humbling."

Enjoy the opportunity for even a quick moment of meditation...
a break from your usual frantic pace at the office.

*...as heard on radio.....Denis Orme in talking
about his latest book has been on these radio talk-back shows:*

- MichiganFM today ... *CareerTalk* ...aired five times.
- 'Live with Lee' Southern Michigan speaks
- Ontario Canada CHOK 1070
- KLAS. www.klasfm.com

This message was intended for: richard@geewiz.co.nz
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