

## Being a Leader Worth Following

Joshua Freedman

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

A few years ago we enjoyed a business climate where companies flourished with little effort; stocks soared, cash was everywhere, and growth seemed automatic. Now we're in a dramatically different realm.

What does it take to lead today? Not just to "muddle along," but to truly lead? To take people and organizations to heights they would not otherwise reach, to be someone worth following?

While I am extremely concerned about our present and short-term future, I also see some tremendous benefits in the current economic crisis. One is the opportunity for true leaders to emerge.

What does it take? In keynotes and consulting projects, I frequently ask groups to tell me. I ask them to think of a leader who inspired them to go above and beyond – a leader who helped them be and do more than they thought possible.

In the last few weeks I've asked this of three widely eclectic groups: from leaders at Lockheed Martin and the World Bank Group, to preschool teachers at the Stephen Wise Temple. Perhaps it won't be a surprise that their answers were quite similar?

Before I share their answers, please take a moment to consider the question for yourself:

1. Think of a leader who helped bring out your very best. Someone you consider "a leader worth following."
2. What did/do you feel with this person?
3. What did/does s/he do to inspire this?

While the answers vary somewhat each time I ask, there are a few comments that almost always appear. What do these exceptional leaders do?

- Listen / Give me time



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- Encourage / Challenge / Give me feedback (critical as well as praising)
- Take risks on me / Give me a chance
- Express their passion / Live their vision

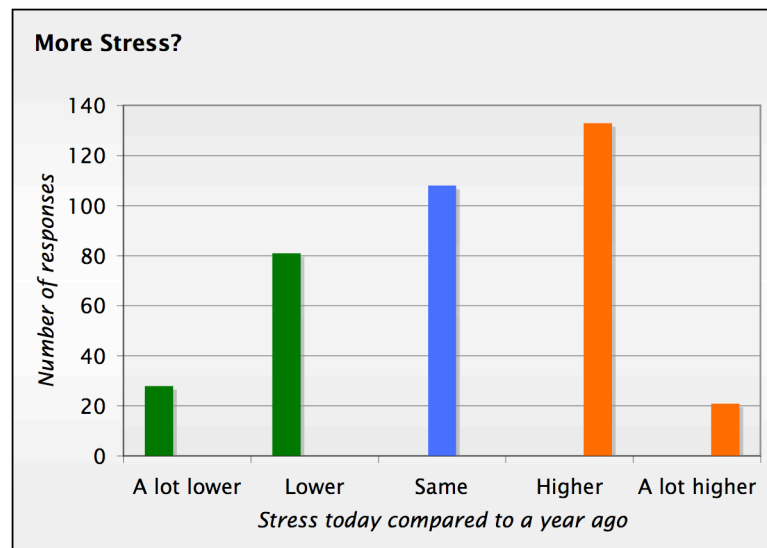
What's critical though, is that these behaviors alone are not enough. There is a "secret sauce" or "x-factor" that sets these people apart, and that's the WAY they do what they do. Based in genuine care, they take these actions authentically, naturally, and consistently. Not only do they walk their talk, they also talk their walk.

This requires an exceptional level of self-awareness. The Six Seconds EQ Model calls this "Know Yourself," and it's an essential foundation. But it's not enough. True leaders also need a match between who they are, what they do, and the way they do that. We can take any action in multiple ways - when we take the right action, in the right way, and for the right reasons we get the most power. The mass of the shaft lines up behind the point of the arrow.

According to the groups I've surveyed, when leaders accomplish this alignment, they engender key reactions, including: Trust, commitment, and a passion for excellence. They help people feel both safe and "on fire" - perhaps it's only from a foundation of real safety that people can take the extraordinary risks to excel?

Given the power of these feelings, it's no surprise that emotional intelligence is one of the hallmarks of great leaders (in a recent study, EQ was twice as strong at predicting performance than IQ - and stronger than business knowledge or other skills - see [www.6seconds.org/case](http://www.6seconds.org/case) for more). Leaders who use their own feelings effectively create "the right" emotional climate because their feelings shape the feelings of those who follow. (For research on this, see <http://www.6seconds.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=267> ).

In a recent poll on our web site, we asked people "Compared to a 'typical day' a year ago, how's your stress level now?" The results are graphed here. You can see most people are reporting higher stress - the two "higher" options are 42% more prevalent than the two "lower" options. While this is not a scientific poll, it's a reminder that many people, perhaps the large majority of us, have a sense that times are tough.



As “times get tougher” the skills of emotional intelligence become even more critical for true leaders. As stress and anxiety increase, people become more reactive, more survival-oriented, less innovative. Left to their own devices, these days people focus on the spiraling values of their IRAs, they stand around the coffee machine wondering if their firm is the next domino to fall, they call their husbands and wives to make sure there’s some extra cash in the house. In other words: They are afraid.

Now fear is not a bad thing. It’s right to be scared in times like these. Fear can help us clarify what we need to protect. It drives us to focus on the narrow path toward safety – on the here and now – on survival. One problem is that we can’t actually do much about the crises we face, so we go into a generalized anxiety and even obsession. The other is that the path of safety is not the route to success.

So in times of trouble, true leaders provide both comfort and challenge. They help people channel the general unease and take action to make a difference. They keep a vision of possibility without denying the pain of the present. They take risks in spite of, maybe even because of, the prevalent fear. They blend head

and heart to be trustworthy, courageous, and authentic – to take care of their people and walk together toward a compelling purpose.

Then when the dust settles – as it always does – those leaders have taken their people head and shoulders above the competition.

So consider:

- Are you a leader worth following?
- Are you taking your people someplace worth going?
- And, what skills do you need to “tune up” to stand out as a leader in times of challenge and controversy?

Whether you are in a formal leadership role or not, you have a choice about how you are showing up and using your influence and personal power. I was recently talking with a tough 14-year-old girl in an inner city school; she wasn’t willing to take much responsibility for her own choices, but when I asked, “are you a leader?” she gave a strong “yes.” Whether you’re a young teen or a gray-haired exec, I’d ask the same that I asked her: Be one worth following.

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