

Servant Leadership Focus is a monthly newsletter to promote and stimulate servant leadership ideas and tools into the Viox culture.



TRANSFORMATIONAL STORIES What Separates Leaders from Followers?

Mike Stabile

All human beings possess the seeds of leadership, but only those who capture the “spirit of leadership ever become truly effective leaders.” (*Every human being has the instinct and capacity for leadership, but most do not have the courage or will to cultivate it!*)

After years of research and reading through books, articles, journals, research on the subject of leadership, going to conferences and seminars in leadership development, I could never identify or was anyone else able to understand fully the mysterious key that separated and distinguished the leader from a follower. Until I came across a book written by Dr. Myles Munroe on this very subject and there it was so “simple” and so obvious that at first I was skeptical!

Genius is found in simplicity! **What separates leaders and followers?**
(The way they “THINK!”)

“True leaders are distinguished by a unique mental attitude that emanates from an internalized discovery of self, which creates a strong posture and confident self-concept and self-worth.”

P.14 The Spirit of Leadership

The spirit of leadership is an attitude that affects the entire life of the leader and controls his or her response to life, danger, crises, disappointments, failures, challenges, and stress. The attitude gives the leader a sense of confidence, faith, and belief in possibilities. It inspires others to have hope in the face of great odds and causes the leader to cultivate a spirit of purpose, daring, passion, and conviction.

The leadership potential within you is waiting to be discovered and unleashed. True leadership is self-discovery. It has very little to do with you, but is fundamentally a matter of becoming who you are.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS:

- ❖ **The Neuroleadership Journal Issue 1 2008**
- ❖ **Born with Assignment**
by Mike Stabile
- ❖ **Strengths Based Leadership**
by Tom Rath & Barry Conchine
- ❖ **Topic: Brain-Based Leadership Part 4**

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APPROACH [REWARD] AVOID [THREAT] RESPONSE Al Ringleb & David Rock

According to integrative Neuroscientist Evian Gordon, the **‘minimize danger and maximize reward’ principle is an overarching, organizing principle of the brain** (Gordon, 2000). This central organizing principle of the brain is analogous to a concept that has appeared in the literature for a long time: *the approach-avoid response*.

This principle represents the likelihood that when a person encounters a stimulus their brain will either tag the stimulus as ‘good’ and engage in the stimulus (approach), or their brain will tag the stimulus as ‘bad’ and they will disengage from the stimulus (avoid). If a stimulus is associated with positive emotions or rewards, it will likely lead to an approach response; if it is associated with negative emotions or punishments, it will likely lead to an avoid response. The response is particularly strong when the stimulus is associated with survival.

The significance of the approach-avoid response becomes clearer when **one discovers the dramatic effect that these states can have on perception and problem solving, and the implications of this effect on decision-making, stress management, collaboration and motivation**. In one study, two groups of people completed a paper maze that featured a mouse in the middle trying to reach a picture on the outside. One group had a picture of

cheese on the outside, the other a predator - an owl. After completing the maze both groups were given creativity tests. The group heading towards the cheese solved significantly more creative problems than those heading to the owl (Friedman and Foster, 2001). This study, supported by several other similar studies, shows that even subtle effects of this approach-avoid response can have a big impact on cognitive performance.

Translating this effect to the social world, someone feeling threatened by a boss who is undermining their credibility is less likely to be able to solve complex problems and more likely to make mistakes. This reduced cognitive performance is driven by several factors.

Firstly, when a human being senses a threat, resources available for overall executive functions in the prefrontal cortex decrease. There is a strong negative correlation between the amount of threat activation, and the resources available for the prefrontal cortex (Arnsten, 1998). The result is literally less oxygen and glucose available for the brain functions involved in working memory, which impacts linear, conscious processing. **When feeling threatened by one’s boss, it is harder to find smart answers because of diminished cognitive resources.**

Cont. p.2



GALLUP POLL ON LEADERSHIP ABILITY

In a recent poll, they asked people: “*Why they follow the most influential leader in their lives?*”

Here are 3 Key findings:

- 1. The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths.**
- 2. The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team.**
- 3. The most effective leaders understand their followers.**

Coaching reminders:

Mike is available for individual leadership coaching. Call or email for appointments.
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CONTINUE FROM P. 1 APPROACH AND AVOID RESPONSE

Secondly, when threatened, the increased overall activation in the brain *inhibits people from perceiving the more subtle signals required for solving non-linear problems, involved in the insight or ‘aha!’ experience* (Subramaniam et al, 2007).

Thirdly, with the amygdala activated, the tendency is to generalize more, which increases the likelihood of accidental connections. There is

a tendency to err on the safe side, shrinking from opportunities, as they are perceived to be more dangerous. People become more likely to react defensively to stimuli. Small stressors become more likely to be perceived as large stressors (Phelps, 2006). *When the boss appears threatening, perhaps they just do not smile that day, suddenly a whole meeting can appear threatening and the tendency can be to avoid taking risks.*

REDUCING STATUS STRESS

DAVID ROCK

It can be surprisingly easy to accidentally threaten someone’s sense of status. A status threat can occur through giving advice or instructions, or simply suggesting someone is slightly ineffective at a task. **Many everyday conversations devolve into arguments driven by a status threat, a desire to not be perceived as less than another.** When threatened, people may defend a position that doesn’t make sense, to avoid the perceived pain of a drop in status.

own best time at a task or sporting activity, the reward circuitry from a sense of being ‘better than’ is activated, but in this case, the person one is ‘better than’ is oneself in the past.

In most people, the question ‘*can I offer you some feedback*’ generates a similar response to hearing fast footsteps behind you at night. Performance reviews often generate status threats, explaining why they are often ineffective at stimulating behavioral change. **If leaders want to change others’ behavior, more attention must be paid to reducing status threats when giving feedback.** One way to do this is by allowing people to give themselves feedback on their own performance.

Status can go up when people are given positive feedback, especially public acknowledgment. One study showed activation of the reward circuitry in children being as strong as money as when told ‘that’s correct’ by a repetitive computer voice. (Scott, Dapretto, et al., 2008, under review). Leaders can be afraid of praising their people for fear of the request for promotion. *However, given the deeply rewarding nature of status, giving positive feedback may reduce the need for constant promotions, not increase it.*

Organizations know all about using status as a reward and many managers feel compelled to reward employees primarily via a promotion. This may have the unfortunate side effect of promoting people to the point of their incompetence. The research suggests that status can be increased in more sustainable ways. For example, people feel a status increase when they feel they are learning and improving and when attention is paid to this improvement. This probably occurs because individuals think about themselves using the same brain networks they use for thinking about others (Mitchell, 2006). For example, when beating one’s

Finally, status is about one’s relative position in a community of importance such as a professional group or social club based on what is valued. While society, especially advertising and the media, would have people spend money in order to be ‘better than others’, it doesn’t have to be a zero-sum game. **Status can be increased without cost to others or an effect on relatedness.** As well as playing against oneself, one can also change the community one focuses on, as when a low level mailroom clerk becomes the coach of a junior baseball team. or, one can change what is important, for example deciding that the quality of one’s work is more important than the quantity of one’s work.

WHY DO PEOPLE FOLLOW?

TOM RATH & BARRY CONCHINE

To explore why people follow, Gallup conducted a formal study from 2005-2008. **Our goal was to obtain the average person’s opinion about leadership**—instead of experts, historians, CEOs, celebrities, and politician defining leadership for them. In sharp contrast to other leadership research, which is primarily based on case studies, interviews, research with one organization, or convenience samples, this study looked at a true random sampling of more than 10,000 followers who were conducted via The Gallup Poll.

After completion of the initial surveys, we studied the 25 most commonly mentioned words. To our surprise, many of the “usual suspects” like purpose, wisdom, humor, and humility were nowhere near the top of the list. We continued to review the descriptors, distinct patterns started to emerge. In some cases, more than 1,000 people had listed the word without categories or options provided.

The research was anchored around the following questions:

- 1. What leader has the most positive influence in your daily life?*
- 2. Now, please list three words that best describe what this person contributes to your life?*

It seems that followers have a very clear picture of what they want and need from the most influential leaders in their lives: **trust, compassion, stability, and hope.**