

LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY
 VOL. 28 NO. 4 THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE APRIL 2011



Scenic Hazard

Most leaders who are standing in the tee box enjoy a telescopic vision or scenic vista, yet all they can see in the foreground is the pox of sand traps and ocean waves with many ways to fail and few safe places to drive business, save strokes, or make money.

<p>JAMES QUIGLEY AND STEPHEN LANGTON <i>Collective Leadership</i> Unite diverse groups in a common purpose. 3</p> <p>EDGAR H. SCHEIN <i>Humble Inquiry</i> For leaders, helping others is complicated. 4</p> <p>MARK NYMAN <i>Function Misalignment</i> Align the purpose with the strategy. 5</p> <p>E. TED PRINCE <i>Money Makers</i> Very few managers or leaders create revenue. . . . 5</p> <p>LARRY SENN <i>Leader's Job #1</i> Align strategy and culture. . . 6</p>	<p>GARY D. BURNISON <i>Beyond Perception</i> Stay connected to what matters the most 7</p> <p>CHIP R. BELL AND JOHN R. PATTERSON <i>Cultivate Innovation</i> It requires you to exercise bold leadership. 8</p> <p>SHEILA MURRAY BETHEL <i>Effective Leadership</i> You can take three steps to enhance authenticity. . . . 9</p> <p>DANA C. ACKLEY <i>Glass Walls</i> Break through to a brighter future. 10</p> <p>MARC MICHAELSON AND JOHN ANDERSON</p>	<p><i>Turn Vision into Reality</i> Great companies become real communities. 11</p> <p>STEVE ARNESON <i>Employee Bill of Rights</i> Every person deserves to have certain rights. 12</p> <p>HENRIK EKELUND <i>Practice Makes Perfect</i> Put and keep the company on the right course. 13</p> <p>JONAS AKERMAN <i>Effective Simulations</i> 10 key elements of successful simulations. 13</p> <p>IRVING BUCHEN <i>Why Leaders Fail</i> Avoid 10 dead-ends. . . . 14</p> <p>DAVE ULRICH AND NORM SMALLWOOD</p>	<p><i>Personal Leader Brand</i> Go beyond having a leader point of view. . . . 16</p> <p>SANDI EDWARDS <i>Sudden Leader Loss</i> Most organizations are very ill-prepared . . . 17</p> <p>JOE FOLKMAN <i>Employee Commitment</i> The grass is not always greener elsewhere. . . . 18</p> <p>IRA CHALEFF <i>Courageous Followers</i> Would we stand up for or to our leaders. . . . 19</p> <p>BEVERLY KAYE AND BEVERLY CROWELL <i>Coaching for Engagement</i> Tap into discretionary energy and effort. 20</p>
--	---	--	--

Courageous Followers

Should we stand up to or for leaders?



by Ira Chaleff

WHEN SENIOR MILITARY officers enter a room, subordinates stand. So do members of the press and cabinet officers when the President enters. We stand when the presiding judge enters the courtroom. Other cultures follow this norm. Is it healthy?

When we bestow formal authority on an office, we need that office—president, governor, general, judge, CEO or chairman—to function and to lead difficult initiatives. Positions confer certain powers, and shrewd office-holders acquire additional power. But ultimately the power of the office always rests on the agreement of those over whom it exerts authority.

Consider tribal leadership. Perhaps at its dawn, leadership went to the strongest individual or fiercest warrior. Soon social skills, strategic skills, and communication skills were important. When the tribe elevated a more multifaceted leader, some members would still be stronger, and others could form factions and counter or undermine the leader, keeping the tribe in turmoil and weakening its capacity to thrive.

To manage these forces, symbols, narratives, and customs emerged that protected the tribe from continuous conflict, enabling leaders to exercise what power the form of governance bestowed. Today, the president, judge, general or CEO enjoys similar predictability of support, *provided they do not egregiously violate the trust placed in them*. Standing up when they enter is a way of reinforcing the order of things.

Most leaders like this custom, as the group continually reaffirms the power bestowed on the position. It is further reinforced by conventions such as addressing the head figure by title, rank, or salutation. The deference that is shown helps get things done. But, *is it healthy for the group or the office holder, given the human tendency to abuse power?*

I find that it depends on variables, such as the divergence of opinion tolerated or encouraged, or the processes in place for decision making that invite diverse voices to be heard. But the practice is fraught with potential danger.

Behavior tends to change in the face of authority. Those lower in the hierarchy often self-censor or comply with orders, even those they feel are operationally or morally questionable. In the Milgram experiments, subjects complied with orders to inflict pain on others despite their discomfort—and the only trappings of authority were a lab coat and clip board! How much more do medals, robes, titles, and corner offices affect behavior? Should we further reinforce the social distance and power differential with the habit of standing each time the office holder enters?

Ultimately, the outward display of etiquette is not the problem—it's what occurs inwardly, in how the leader with these trappings of authority, and those near him or her, interact with each other.

How can we honor the merits of standing when the leader enters the room without exacerbating the tendency of hierarchy to distort relationships and communication?

Courageous followers stand up to and for their leaders. We need to stand up for our leaders—they need and usually deserve our support. If in our culture we literally stand up for the leader, we can use this act as a silent reminder of our dual duty to also stand up to our leaders.

Leaders need candor, and candor requires courage. We can use the convention of standing when the leader enters to remind ourselves that we need to stand in both postures if we are to serve the leader and organization well. Especially when either the culture or style of the leader requires formal acts of deference, we need to remember the equal importance of respectful divergence.

When we are in the authority role, we can consider to what degree it serves us to relax these conventions. We can even imbue the custom of standing for a leader with a dual meaning that retains respect for authority without producing the hyper-deference that is the downfall of leaders. We stand up for the leader and, when necessary, to the leader, in service of our purpose and values.

If you are frustrated in trying to influence senior leaders whose style impedes growth, productivity or

morale—what can you do? If you dare to question the leader, you are quickly earmarked as someone who needs to go; hence, silence (intimidation) reigns.

Those who work closely with the leader, (*senior followers*) need to assume responsibility for keeping their relationship honest, authentic and courageous. Yet, we don't honor courageous followers. We talk pejoratively of followers being weak. And we don't train people how to be strong followers who are not only capable of brilliantly supporting their leaders, but can also effectively *stand up to them when necessary*.

Optimum performance requires that both leaders and followers place the organization's welfare at least on par with protecting their personal interests. Where authoritarian relationships prevail, team members tend to conform, rather than risk the conversations that are needed to address leadership's contributions to mediocrity. Smart leaders create cultures where honest communication is the norm and rewarded. But,

human nature conspires against this, and few speak truth to power. If they do so, and get rebuffed, they don't do it again.

If you are in a follower role with a leader who is abusing power, why risk your job by standing up to him? It is a better way to live. *Win or lose, you carry*

yourself with integrity and self-respect. And, if you aspire to leadership positions yourself, you'd better learn to take risks. People who can't risk, can't lead.

Ask yourself: Am I holding back my contribution. Am I willing to take risks? Do I need to take more initiative? Do the perceived risks require courage to act? If so, what sources of courage can I draw on? Have I earned the leader's trust? What power do I have in this situation? Do I have the skills to effectively confront the leader?

If you tolerate the leader's counterproductive or dysfunctional behavior, *you pay a steep price*—and you place the leader at risk. So, in the leader's self-interest, learn how to help the leader be more receptive to making changes.

When we're receptive to both receiving and initiating honest and respectful feedback, and having difficult but necessary conversations, we can break unproductive followship patterns. *We can then stand up for our leader with pride.* LE

Ira Chaleff is president of Executive Coaching and Consulting Associates and author of *The Courageous Follower*. Visit www.courageousfollower.com.

ACTION: Stand up for and to your leaders.

