## How to Lead When You're Not in Charge

**The Lie:** You have to be in charge to lead. If leadership is "influence," then we all have influence and can lead where we are. Simply put, influencers influence, so you want to be influencing well wherever you are.

(Note for the Point Leader: As a leader, you want yourself surrounded by influencers. If you push decisionmaking down the organizational chart, then you want people to know how to lead when you're not in charge).

**1. Lead Yourself.** We tend to think "they" (the top leader) need to lead me well. No. You need to lead yourself well.

Learn to be a *great* follower! There are four kinds of followers:

① "Yes" Followers - those who say "yes" to everything the top leader says or wants

2 Pragmatic Followers - those who do only what they perceive benefits them

<sup>(3)</sup> Alienated Followers - those who put all of their energy into doing their own thing and who are passive and/or critical of the top leaders

④ Star Followers - those who want to help the top leadership achieve what they want to achieve for the whole organization

It goes without saying that Star Followers (those who lead themselves well):

- Are the easiest to lead (note: they are not easiest because they are the least opinionated, but because they help the whole organization).
- Therefore, they are the one's everyone desires to have under them.
- And are the most likely to be "moved up" to higher levels of leadership.

So, if you lead yourself well, you will be given more influence by the leaders above you!

2. Chose Positivity. The greatest thing you can bring to the team is positive energy and a positive attitude.

(Note: This is especially true for the top leader; the greatest thing I can give to my staff is my energy. This is most important when things aren't going well. The point leader hast the ability to lift the whole team: "There is hope!" This is also why you should only hire people with high energy).

Positivity is a fight for "we," not "me"! As we all know, the natural human pull is toward "me."

"When you have weigh in you have buy in!"... this is true... but for followers they also need to learn to be positive even if they can't weigh in on a decision (for example, if the decision is made by the highest board, one that not all staff are on). A critical spirit is not helpful for the top leaders or the organization.

You can make it work or not work. You have the power to sabotage any decision made by the top leadership (with the words we speak to other, the look in our eyes, the facial expressions we give people... expressions like disgust). You can make it a poor decision or a great decision based upon how you execute it!

So, when you get handed a decision, you have to ask yourself, "Am I going to fight for 'me'... or 'we'?" It is so easy to be the critic; to find what is wrong with every decision. <u>Our</u> ideas are <u>always</u> the <u>best</u> ideas (or so we think). In an organization, the critic is not helpful. Office cooler chatter or the "meeting after the meeting," even if you are right, is not helpful.

So, more important than the organization making the right decision is the ability for you to own the decision and to make the decision right!

The truth is that your positivity will spread to those around you! So, be positive.

Your have choice in your attitude when you are not making the decisions. You can be frustrated for not being

in on the decision or you can be glad for their decision because it frees you up to do well what you do ("OK! That's one more thing they're taking off my plate!").

**3. Think Critically.** I can't be a "rainbow puking unicorn" (always having positive spins on *everything*). I have to think. And thinking critically is a skill you can learn.

The top leader wants sub-leaders who are thinking, "How can I make this organization better?" Point leaders don't want sub-leaders who secretly want to fail.

To have this mentality requires a shift in thinking from "employee" to "owner." Even though you are not in charge, think like an owner. If the owner sees trash in the hallway, he/she picks it up. Many employees don't. That's how owners think. Everyone wants to be in charge, so why not start seeing things from the perspective of the one in charge?

Star Followers have a high "with it" attitude. You should be present in things. Instead of just being along for the ride and experiencing it, why not think critically about it?

There is a difference between "critical thinking" and "thinking critically." There is a very fine line between the two, but *thinking critically is a skill, while critical thinking is a snare*. Critical thinking is bad for you and bad for the organization. It becomes an attitude and a way of carrying yourself. You become cynical and then begin to want things in the organization to fail because you are not "for" it.

(Note: An insecure point leader will take critical thinking as criticism. So, as the point leader, we need to be open to critical thinking and not taking it personally).

Uni	corns	Critical	Thinkers	Criti	cs

A person with a critical spirit is constantly grading things ("Oh, that wasn't good enough."). So, learn to walk around not so much grading people/things but rather to give people a hand! Nobody wants the "clipboard boss." Everyone wants to work for the "towel boss" (the boss who wants to serve).

**4. Reject Passivity.** Passivity can set in when you're not in charge. You can begin to think, "They haven't decided anything yet on this big issue, so I'll just sit around and wait." No, go make it better yourself. Get to work on things that you can work on and that are in your realm of responsibility. Don't wait on others to get their stuff together before you get your stuff together. Don't ever say, "I can't make my thing better until they make the big thing better."

Now, of course, this isn't an excuse to be a rebel and to do a lot of end-runs around the top leadership. It simply means to work on the things you can legitimately be working on to make the organization better.

Someone once said, "When there is someone to blame, then there's nothing to work on." So, commit to not blaming. Work on what you can work on. *When I'm only waiting on someone to hand me something to do, I have to potential to become the person who will not be handed anything.* Or, to say it positively, when I'm working on the things that are in front of me, I ultimately will become someone who my boss will give greater things to do.

So, don't ask your point leader, "Hey, let me know what you want me to do next" of "If there is anything else you need me to do, let me know." That is not good. But pushing forward with initiative. That is the kind of follower that a leader wants. Be taking the initiative to do your own stuff, not just what the boss what they want you to do next.

To summarize, don't get into the habit of saying, "I'll wait on them to decide/clarify/get it together so that I can...." If you have the tendency to feel that way, then work on shifting your focus from "making my boss

happy" to "making this organization better."

(<u>Note for the Point Leader</u>: Give your best people the best opportunities. And your best people are those making the most of the opportunities they are given).

One final way to reject passivity is to remember that:

**Empowerment starts with me.** ("My boss doesn't empower me." Empower your boss. Take initiative. Be part of the solution. Be positive. That allows the boss to look further down the road).

If you are saying, "One day when I'm in charge....", then you will never be in charge. Because you are not working to improve yourself.

**Final Thought.** The influence you cultivate now is the kind of influence you will use when you become the point leader. How you sub-lead now will become the habit of how you lead in the future.