

# "Ask the Leadership Consultant" \*

weLEAD Online Magazine

[leadingtoday.org](http://leadingtoday.org)

©2007 weLEAD Incorporated



February 2007

Greg L. Thomas

## Question:

**"Thanks for your new series on the weLEAD site! I do have a question. My partner and I started a business together and we have started to grow. We know that being a new and young company, we have the opportunity to build it the right way. We both came from autocratic organizations that were terrible places to work and we want to be servant leaders. Aside from some good books we have found, what word of advice do you have for us?"**

**Answer:** Primarily, never forget that we lead *people*! We don't lead organizations... but *people*. The word "organization" is a created term to refer to a group of *individual* people who have a shared interest or purpose. We may work for an organization, or serve an organization, but ultimately it is *people* we are leading. The reason I mention this is that many authors and consultants speak of rebuilding or changing organizations as if they are dealing with a single individual. So if we are interested in growing or changing an organization, we must change the *people*, one-by-one, who *collectively* are the organization.

Don't confuse leadership with management. Millions of people exchange their skills and talents for a paycheck every few weeks but they are not led by a hierarchy above them, and they are not necessarily followers. In this workplace environment, a transaction takes place between their abilities and receiving compensation for it. They intellectually *accept* a role in a hierarchy to meet their financial and cultural needs. Again, this does not mean they are being led, or that they have become followers. If you want to have employees, that is fine... but if you have a *powerful* goal or mission you want to achieve, you will need *followers*. If you want to achieve long-term greatness for your organization, you will need to become a leader.

To truly lead someone goes *deep* into the hearts of people and becomes a special relationship. This means we can touch them far beyond an intellectual level; we can touch them emotionally from the heart. Whereas a manager works by giving instructions and direction that reaches people's minds, a *leader* works by motivating their *hearts* and minds. This results in an added level of zeal and commitment that paves the way for extraordinary achievement and growth. All the money and intellect in the world can't buy this level of loyalty and devotion to a cause!

Here is another thought I would like to leave with you. Those who follow you will have *chosen* to do so. They have decided to *allow* you to influence them. When we have an opportunity to lead, it is not by a conscious choice that says inside us, "Now, I will be a leader". The truth is that if no one *chooses* to follow you, you are not a leader! As John Maxwell has written, "If you think you are leading and no one is following, you are only taking a walk." We do not decide to lead, *others* decide to follow and make the opportunity for leadership possible.

Autocratic leaders look at followers as disposable. From their selfish perspective, they are a "dime a dozen" and can be easily replaced. As a matter of fact, they tend not to even want followers who do

not think, dress, and act like they do. Those who *conform* most are shuffled to the top of the hierarchy and those who are diverse, innovative or creative remain in the middle or at the bottom. This means that a lot of mediocre and talentless people rise to the top because they "play the game" of mere conformity. Autocratic leaders view followers as a resource to be *milked* for their own personal needs. The seeds of *future* destruction are already planted in this kind of environment and in this diseased corporate culture. You may find the article, [Where Have All the Followers Gone](#) of special interest.

But, here is the *right* way to look at leadership from a servant leader perspective! Leadership is a *gift* that a follower gives a leader! The follower gives the *gift of influence* that makes leadership possible. They *allow* the leader to influence them and say within themselves, "I choose to let this person influence me and change my mind and behavior." This is a precious gift to a leader and should never be abused because the followers have made themselves *vulnerable* to the leader they are supporting. They have offered an *emotional* and *personal* commitment to a cause or idea. If their gift is abused or trampled, it is almost impossible to regain their support or enthusiasm.

How detrimental and serious is this to leadership? I have personally known individuals who deeply felt their *gift of influence* was abused by a leader. Some were offended and have never trusted or supported another cause or idea since. Others became so bitter, they dedicated their lives to dismantle and destroy the leaders or organizations they once supported. Some have even been successful in doing this very thing!

If you want to nurture and attract followers, you must do two important things. You must be highly effective with certain basic skills that produce results, and you must live the kind of life that other people admire and want to emulate. This is why honesty, integrity and humility are so important. You can find many articles about skill development, and becoming a servant leader on the **weLEAD** site. May I suggest one written by Dr. Howard Baker entitled, [Is Servant Leadership Part of your Worldview](#).

Good luck, and I encourage you to build a truly great company around the *values* of servant leadership. Join the *growing* list that is expanding every day.

*If you have a challenging question you would like our consultant to discuss, please email your question [here](#). We will be happy to keep your question anonymously.*

**\* The advice and counsel offered by the consultant is based on the limited information provided by the questioner. No two situations are exactly the same, and the consultant makes every effort to provide helpful and educational counsel based on the information supplied.**

***About the author:***

***Greg has an extensive thirty-five years experience in public speaking and has spoken to hundreds of audiences worldwide. Greg has a Master of Arts degree in Leadership from Bellevue University, where he also has served as an adjunct professor teaching courses in business management and leadership since 2002. His first book, [52 Leadership Tips](#) (That Will Change How You Lead Others) was published in 2006 by WingSpan Press. His second book, [Making Life's Puzzle Pieces Fit](#) was published in March 2009. Both are available at amazon.com. Greg is also the president of [Leadership Excellence, Ltd](#) and a Managing Partner of the Leadership Management Institute. Leadership Excellence, Ltd. effectively builds individuals and organizations to reach their highest potential through enhanced productivity and personal development using a number of proven programs. He is also the president and founder of [weLEAD Incorporated](#).***

This material is copyright protected. No part of this document may be reproduced, in any form or by any means without permission from weLEAD Incorporated. Copyright waiver may be acquired at the [weLEAD website](#).