

Leadership In Motion Pictures: A Guide To Understanding Your Motives

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As we desire or continue to lead, there are instances where we may look back and think about how we got into the positions we are in or we desire to be. However, leadership is more than a state of being; it is a process that involves a particular form of influence called motivating¹. A leader might pose these questions to oneself:

- 'Why do I desire to lead?'
- 'What are the benefits?'
- 'Who will benefit?'
- 'What is my motivation to become or to remain a leader?'

Leaders must engage in persuasive behavior as a means of gaining followers' compliance toward some desired goal². In other words, in order to lead, one must affect followers. What fuels the desire to lead? What are the qualities of a leader that influences others to follow? This article attempts to answer the questions above and determine the motives that propel our desire to lead.

Leaders like to see that the work they are doing is motivating others to move toward the goal. However, leaders vary their motives from situation to situation; this is known as situational theory. A leader is able to vary how they relate to subordinates based on their needs³. In order to clarify how leadership motive influences leadership style, we will take a trip into the movie theater. We will, first, visit the snack bar and then take a glimpse into the previews. We have a choice of what we desire; therefore, as leaders, we choose the style we desire to utilize. Additionally, the movies outlined in this article highlight four different types of leadership (charismatic, transformational, servant, and transactional) and the motivations that inspire effective leadership.

¹ Jago, A. & Vroom, V. (2007). The Role of the Situation in Leadership. *American Psychologist* 62(1), p.17-24.

² Yukl, G. (2005). *Leadership in Organizations* (6th edition). New York: Prentice-Hall

³ Perrow, C. (1970). *Organization analysis: A sociological view*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

The 'Soda Pop' Leader

Imagine ordering a soda pop and the server fills it to the top, allowing it to run over. The spillover, which begins in the cup, affects everything in its path. The 'Soda Pop' leader has the desire to reach a goal for him or her; however, in the process, he or she affects others. In "Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit"⁴, the protagonist, Sister Mary Clarence, has been assigned to work 'undercover' as a nun at a private school and is expected to teach and groom the students. For her, it is a deal with the investigators to help her expunge her previously created criminal record; for the students, it is just another teacher's attempt to assist them and the school, which could potentially go wrong.

As they work together to perform in a choir competition that can help them raise funds to save their school, both Sister Mary Clarence and the students have changed and they strive for the same vision. She presented her vision in such a convincing manner that the students wanted to achieve the vision⁵. Sister Mary Clarence cared for the students more than she thought that she would and her character and dedication influenced the students. Sister Mary Clarence is an exemplary charismatic leader. House (1976) suggested that charismatic leaders act in unique ways that have specific charismatic effects on their followers⁶. He further recognized the important role played by followers to attribute charisma to these leaders⁷. Sister Mary Clarence taught students who were from the inner city and had a reputation of being disorderly. She empathized with the students and sought to provide them different opportunities to change the impression others had of them. Their acceptance to participate in, and later win, the choir competition boosted the students' morale and gave them the opportunity to prove themselves talented.

The 'Goober' Leader

When we order Goobers we are aware that at some point while eating, a transformation takes place. These chocolate-covered peanuts are soft on the outside and hard on the inside. We taste the sweet chocolate, initially, and the taste on the palate transforms, welcoming the peanut in the center. The motive for the leader is to promote change and the organization welcomes the change; allowing a complete transformation of how the organization functions. In "The Lion King"⁸, Simba battles with his

⁴ Duke, B. (Director). (1993). *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit*. United States: Touchstone Pictures.

⁵ Jacobsen, C. and House, R.J. (1999). "The rise and decline of charismatic leadership".

http://leadership.wharton.upenn.edu/l_change/publications/House/Rise%20and%20decline%20of%20charismatic%20leadership%20-%20house.doc

⁶ House, R.J. (1976). A 1976 theory of charismatic leadership. In J. G. Hunt & L.L. Larson (Eds.), *Leadership: The cutting edge*. (pp. 189-207). Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press

⁷ Bryman, A. (1992). *Charisma and leadership in organizations*. London: Sage.

⁸ Allers, R. & Minkoff, R. (Directors) (1994). *The Lion King*. United States: Walt Disney Feature Animation

ability to lead the pride. His father, Mufasa, desired to teach him all that he needed to know in order to lead. The pride, aware of Simba's destiny to lead, was more confident in his leadership than he, especially after his father's death. He was forced to leave the pride when very young because his uncle, Scar, scared Simba into thinking that he was responsible for his father's death and did not possess the capabilities to lead.

As Simba experienced a symbolic journey that helped him realize that he needed to return to lead the pride, his inner transformation gave him confidence to regain the pride's support and claim his seat on the throne as king. With his reign, we learn that he changes the dynamic of the pride to what his father envisioned; a vision Uncle Scar previously destroyed and dishonored. Transforming organizations takes knowing that 1) there is confidence needed to do so and 2) that the followers will need to share in that confidence and vision. It is about serving the organization; in this case, the pride. The transformational leader is one who builds commitment to the organizational objectives and then empowers followers to accomplish those objectives⁹. Transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than the expected by showing the follower the importance of the goal, getting the follower to build his or her own interest in the team, and moving them forward to address higher needs.¹⁰ This interaction was affected when Simba left the pride and left his honorable reign as the chosen king. Once he returned and retained the pride, the intended goals were accomplished.

The 'Popcorn' Leader

Popcorn makes for a tasty, desirable treat at the movies. Popcorn starts as a hard corn kernel and becomes soft in a cooked state. As leaders we depend on our bodies to perform the necessary actions to lead, but some leaders lead primarily with their hearts. With this core-led type of leadership, the leader is motivated to care for the well-being of the follower. This is servant leadership or leaders who seek the needs of the follower and will set aside personal preferences for those needs¹¹.

"Lean on Me"¹² is a true story about Joe Clark, who was assigned to be principal of Eastside High School. This was a high school that faced many challenges in the 80's (from low test schools to drug influences). Joe Clark had an authoritarian approach to disciplining his students, not because he enjoyed being what the students referred to him as, 'mean', but he knew that there were greater accomplishments that the students could seek. He set aside his pride and previous challenges with the school board to continue to lead the students and the school to become better. He sacrificed his

⁹ Yukl, G. (1998). *Leadership in Organizations* (4th edition). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

¹⁰ Bass, B.M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.

¹¹ Winston, B.E. (2006). *Leadership style as an outcome of motive: A contingency 'state' rather than 'trait' concept*. Unpublished manuscript, Virginia: Regent University.

¹² Avildsen, J.G. (Director) (1989). *Lean On Me*. United States: Warner Brothers Pictures

position and his legal reputation with law enforcement. When confronted by drug dealers, he endangered himself to protect the students who desired to achieve more and better themselves. Clark realized that he could not accomplish this task alone. He appointed staff to various positions and dismissed staff that did not support the vision. He also placed trustworthy staff in teaching positions that were dedicated to the students' education and development. He selected employees that were aligned with the organization's values¹³.

It could be argued that Clark demonstrated transformational leadership as well; however, transformational leadership differs from servant leadership in that the transformational leader is focused on the well-being of the organization whereas the servant leader is interested in the well-being of the follower¹⁴. The students' well-being motivated Clark. He was willing to face many obstacles to ensure that the students learned the necessary information to pass the state required exams. These exams were essential to allow some of the students to graduate. However, the greatest accomplishment Joe Clark sought to achieve was that the students learned how to work at their greatest potential. This leader, much like the popcorn, is most desired because of the impact the leader makes on the follower¹⁵.

The 'Cashier' Leader

In order to get any of the aforementioned snack bar items, you need money. A transaction must be made to get your snack. Similarly, the exchange of skill to accomplish a goal is necessary to initiate, and later build, a working relationship between leader and follower.

In the movie, "The Karate Kid"¹⁶, Daniel was a new kid in the area and did not make friends quickly; consequently, he was bullied at school. Later, Daniel wanted to learn martial arts in order to defend himself against his high school bullies. Mr. Miyagi, his neighbor, was willing to help, but provided tasks for Daniel to perform in order get where he desired. Daniel felt that the tasks were unnecessary, but later learned that they were essential to effectively execute the art form. Not only did Daniel learn martial arts to defend himself, but he also developed skill great enough to participate in (and win) the area martial arts competition.

¹³ Patterson, K.A. (2003). "Servant Leadership: A Theoretical Model." Doctoral Dissertation, Regent University.

¹⁴ Bass (2000) as well as Patterson, Russell and Stone (2004)

¹⁵ Winston, B. (2006), Be a leader for God's Sake. Virginia: Regent University.

¹⁶ Avildsen, J.G. (Director) (1984). The Karate Kid. United States: Delphi Films.

The process helped Daniel learn integrity, discipline, and focus. Similar qualities are necessary to achieve the goals in organizations¹⁷. These qualities are evident in the transactional leader. Transactional leaders are focused on understanding the goals and the tasks necessary to get there. It has been stated that transactional leadership behaviors may lead to mediocrity as followers perform at minimum levels in an effort to maximize the extrinsic reward for work done¹⁸. However, Mr. Miyagi's approach proved the opposite. Mr. Miyagi was confronted with a need and he did what was necessary to deliver a desired outcome. Daniel, though apprehensive initially, was influenced to comply with Mr. Miyagi's instructions because he promised the goal Daniel desired. Transactional leaders are influential because it is in the best interest of the subordinates to do what the leader wants¹⁹. As previously stated, this type of leader is different from the others. The first three types are people-oriented; this is task-oriented, determining what needs to be done to get to the goal. The focus is to get the task completed²⁰.

Conclusion

Going to the movies can be more than an enjoyable experience; it can illustrate our approach to leadership. Where we go and with whom we go can impact our decision of what movie we see and even what we eat (e.g. hot dog meets horror film might not be a good idea). The experience involves choices. From this information, we recognize that leadership is about choices as well: the choice of where we lead, whom we lead, and how we lead. This may require us, as leaders, to learn from our previous experiences to know how to handle certain situations. Granted, we may learn lessons along the way, yet it would make an impact on our leadership styles. The circumstances occurring within the organization can determine the type of style used.

Situational theory has broadened our understanding of leadership by forcing us to consider the impact of the situations on leaders²¹. Whether you are like Sister Mary Clarence, Simba, Joe Clark or Mr. Miyagi, each leader's motivation depends on the follower's cooperation and the overall function of the organization. Effective leadership requires that a person adapt his or her style to the demands of different situations²². The right setting (organization) and the right company (followers) can help with an enjoyable 'night at the movies' (leadership).

¹⁷ Northouse, P.G. (2007). *Leadership Theory and Practice* (4th edition). CA: Sage Publications Inc.

¹⁸ Bass, B.M (1990). The future of leadership in learning organizations. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 7(3), 18-40.

¹⁹ Kuhnert, K.W. & Lewis, P. (1987). Transactional and transformational leadership: A constructive/developmental analysis. *Academy of Management Review*, 12(4), 648-657.

²⁰ Winston, B.E. (2006). Leadership style as an outcome of motive: A contingency 'state' rather than 'trait' concept. Unpublished manuscript, Virginia: Regent University.

²¹ Northouse, P.G. (2007). *Leadership Theory and Practice* (4th edition). CA: Sage Publications Inc.

²² Northouse, P.G. (2007). *Leadership Theory and Practice* (4th edition). CA: Sage Publications Inc.

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