

The essential tools for  
guiding today's leaders into  
tomorrow.

# What Every LEADER Should Know

by Dr. Thomas Gordon

Liz Carter was appointed operations supervisor at her bank. At about the same time, Wayne Howard was elected president of his service club. Andrea Martin finally achieved her lifelong ambition of becoming vice-president of sales at her company. After six years as a first-line supervisor in a manufacturing company, Eric Morrison was moved up to plant manager. Anna Vitale was voted student body president at her university.

Their friends congratulated them and told them how much they deserved the new position. One phoned her husband and excitedly announced the good news. Another took his family out for dinner to celebrate. All felt proud of what they had achieved. Secretly, they all felt they had “arrived”, “made it up the ladder”, “got to the top.”

These are the universal reactions of people who get appointed to position

of leadership. They feel, “I’ve made it.” But in actuality, anyone who gets a leadership position has not made it. It is just the beginning.

## **BEING THE LEADER DOESN'T MAKE YOU ONE**

After you get to be the leader of a group, you're going to have to do a lot to earn the acceptance of the group members and have an influence on their behavior. Even more important, receiving a leadership title—supervisor, department head, president, manager, or just plain boss—soon brings unexpected disappointments and uninvited problems. Undoubtedly you'll see evidence of jealousy on the part of some of your group members. Others may show resentment because they didn't get your job; in their eyes you didn't deserve the position, they did.

Becoming a group's leader almost inevitably brings about significant changes in your relationships with group members. People who

previously reacted to you as a peer or friend suddenly have changed their attitude toward you. You're “up there” and they're now “below” you; they “report to you”; you're “in charge.”

Even if you were brought in from the outside to be made the leader of your group, be prepared to encounter a wide range of unfavorable responses—suspicion, distrust, hostility, subservience, passive resistance, insecurity. And don't overlook the possibility that someone might even like to see you fall flat on your face in your new job!

People come naturally to these built-in patterns of negative responses; they learned them when they were children. The leader “inherits” each group member's “inner child of the past.” For each of us has a past history of being a child, intimately involved in multiple relationships with a variety of adults: parents, grandparents, schoolteachers, coaches, scout leaders, piano teachers, school principals, and of course the infamous assistant principal. All these

adults had power and authority over us when we were children, and most of them used it frequently. All children try out different behaviors to cope with these authority figures. Some of their coping mechanisms prove effective, some ineffective. Those that work get used again and again, and so become habitual responses to all other adults who try to control and dominate them.

These coping mechanisms are seldom discarded when children pass into adolescence or when they enter adulthood. They remain an integral part of the adult personality, to be called upon (or unconsciously triggered) whenever s/he enters a relationship with someone holding power or authority. So all adults in a very real sense harbor an “inner child of the past” that strongly influences how they react to leaders.

When thrust into each new relationship with an authority figure, people naturally employ those same coping mechanisms that were built in by habitual use throughout their lifetime. This is why a new leader inherits the inner child of the past of each of his or her group members. Their particular coping mechanisms are already present, ready to be used—the leader didn’t cause them to be there. Nevertheless, because group members at first perceive most leaders as probable controllers and dominators, that’s the way they will respond to him or her, even though the leader may have no intention of using power and authority.

## HOW WE COPE WITH POWER AND AUTHORITY

Undoubtedly you will recognize most of the coping mechanisms in the following list, and you’ll be tempted to identify the particular ones you most often employed as a child, as well as those you find yourself still using as an adult:

1. *Resistance, defiance, rebellion, negativism*
2. *Resentment, anger, hostility*
3. *Aggression, retaliation, striking back, ridiculing the authority figure*
4. *Lying, hiding feelings*
5. *Blaming others, tattling, cheating*
6. *Dominating, bossing, or bullying those with less power*
7. *Needing to win, hating to lose, perfectionism*
8. *Forming alliances, organizing against the authority figure*
9. *Submission, obedience, compliance, subservience*
10. *Buttering up the authority figure, currying favor*
11. *Conformity, fear of trying something new or creative, requiring prior assurance of success, dependence on authority figure*
12. *Withdrawing, escaping, fantasizing, regressing*
13. *Getting sick*
14. *Crying*

Is it now more clear why, when you become a leader, you haven’t made it? In fact, it might be said that you’ve had it! Even before

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you get much of a chance to earn the leadership of your group, in the eyes of the members you have a new identity—a potential controller and dominator. And even before you make any actual use of your authority or power, group members are already programmed and ready to cope with it, using some combination of the above coping mechanisms.

Certainly I don’t intend to discourage anyone from aspiring to become a leader. Rather, I want to be quite realistic about the unique dynamics that govern the relationship between leaders and group members. And principally I want to underscore my thesis: being the leader does not make you one, because leaders don’t automatically get the respect and acceptance of their group members; so in order to earn the leadership of their group and have a positive influence on the group members, leaders must learn some specific skills and methods.

## WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

“Leaders are born, not made.” That’s what most people thought, until social scientists began to make leadership a legitimate subject for intensive investigation, no more than 60 or 70 years ago. Back in the old days, when strong social class barriers made it next to impossible for just anyone to become a leader, it appeared to most people that leadership was inherited, since leaders emerged so frequently within the same favored families. As

class barriers crumbled and it became obvious that leaders were coming from all strata of society, common sense told us that leadership was much more complex than being born with the right genes or in the proper families.

If not the right combination of genes, then perhaps all leaders possess certain traits or characteristics acquired through their upbringing or education. This notion started a search for the universal traits of leaders. But then hundreds of studies showed no trait differences between leaders and non-leaders, which all but killed the theory that leadership was a product of certain attributes residing within all leaders.

A major breakthrough came when social scientists began to look at leadership as an interaction between leaders and their followers. After all, they reasoned, it is the follower who in the last analysis either accepts or rejects the influence of the leader. The key question became: why do followers accept and why do they reject? What goes on in this interaction?

Obviously, you can't be a leader without followers. You won't for long be a group leader without having group members who accept your influence, guidance, and direction. But how does a leader acquire followers? The answer to this basic question emerges clearly when we understand the needs all human beings possess and how they struggle to satisfy those needs. Somewhat oversimplified, the following explains how leaders acquire followers.

## HOW LEADERS GET FOLLOWERS

1. To survive, every person is engaged in a continuous struggle to satisfy needs or relieve tension.
2. Some means is required to satisfy a need (tools, food, money, physical strength, knowledge, etc.).
3. Most needs of individuals are satisfied in relationships with people or groups, so people and groups become the means we rely on most heavily for the satisfaction of our needs. (We do not grow our own food, make our own clothes, get our education by ourselves, etc.).
4. People actively seek out those relationships in which the other person is seen as having the means for satisfying their needs.
5. People join groups, then, because they hope that membership will offer them the means for satisfying their needs. Conversely, they leave groups when they no longer get their needs satisfied.
6. Group members accept influence and direction of a leader only if they regard him or her as a person through whose means they will get their needs satisfied. People follow (and permit their activities to be directed by) a leader whom they believe will get

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them what they need or want.

It follows that a leader earns and retains his or her role as a leader only if in the eyes of the group members “following the leader” holds out the promise that they will get their needs met. I have spent most of my professional life identifying and describing the critical attitudes, skills, methods, and procedures required to make this promise a reality. No longer is it such a mystery how certain persons become effective in earning and retaining leadership of their groups and how others do not. Through research and observation, social scientists have identified many of the critical requirements of effective leadership. It is my aim to organize this knowledge so that it is more easily understandable to those who aspire to become leaders and more available for their use.

## THE LEADER'S DILEMMA

Acquiring followers through meeting the needs of group members does not tell the whole story of effective leadership. The other side of the coin is that leaders must be successful in getting their own needs satisfied.

People seldom seek leadership positions solely to satisfy the needs of group members. Leaders are human, too. And they have the usual human needs for status, achievement, higher pay, recognition, self-esteem, security, and acceptance—in fact, usually the same needs as their group members. If they don't find ways of satisfying these needs in their leadership position, they will not want to remain there very long. Even when leaders continue to tolerate a job long after they find that many of their needs are not satisfied, they soon find themselves incapable of putting forth all the effort required to do what

they must do to ensure that their group members' needs are satisfied.

The explanation is obvious: people will continue to expend energy doing things that benefit others only if they feel they are receiving "reciprocal benefits." There is always a limit to one-way sharing of benefits in human relationships. You can think of this principle in terms of "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine."

The "full cup principle" is also at work here: to be able to continue giving to others (letting them drink from my cup), I must have a full cup and find ways of replenishing myself (keeping my cup relatively full). The importance of this principle is well understood by professional helping agents who find their own helping capabilities seriously reduced when they experience troubles and need-deprivations in their own personal lives. This is why so many professional therapists find it necessary to retain their own therapists to keep their professional cup relatively full.

Then, too, one of the strongest needs of all leaders operating in an organizational setting is to look good in the eyes of their own bosses. True, a leader's self-esteem is derived largely from inputs and evaluations of his or her bosses. And more important, unless leaders meet the expectations and objectives of their bosses (are perceived as effective in helping the organization reach its goals), they will be under the threat of being demoted or terminated.

Consequently, leaders working within a formal organization are caught in a dilemma—they must meet the needs of the organization, as well as satisfy the needs of their group members. The trick lies in learning

how to balance the needs from both directions, so as to be perceived as effective by both bosses and group

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members. As anyone knows who has worked in a formal organization, this is not an easy task, because organizational needs are primarily for increased productivity and efficiency, while the group members' needs are for higher pay, recognition, achievement, respect, and the like.

### **AN EFFECTIVE LEADER IS BOTH TASK-CENTERED AND PEOPLE-CENTERED**

Numerous studies of leadership in hierarchical organizations strongly indicate that effective leaders need one set of skills to meet their own needs (and those of their bosses for productivity and efficiency) and another set of quite different skills to satisfy the needs of group members.

I'll describe these skills in very general terms:

#### **A. Skills to meet group members' needs.**

1. *Behavior that increases group members' self-esteem and personal worth.*
2. *Behavior that increases group cohesiveness and team spirit.*

#### **B. Skills to meet organizational needs.**

1. *Behavior that motivates productivity and the achievement of group goals.*
2. *Behavior that helps members reach goals: planning, scheduling, coordinating, problem-solving, providing resources.*

An effective leader cannot be only a "human relations specialist" (meeting members' needs) or only a "productivity specialist" (meeting organizational needs). *He or she must be both.* Even more important, the effective leader must also acquire the flexibility or sensitivity to know when and where to employ these quite diverse skills to achieve *mutual satisfaction of the needs of group members and the needs of the leader.*

#### **C. Skills to resolve conflicts so that the needs of both parties are met.**

Finally, the effective leader must learn skills to resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise between these two competing sources of needs.

### **WHAT PEOPLE NEED FROM THEIR GROUP**

Leaders of groups earn their positions of leadership by doing things that, in the eyes of the members, make their hopes come true that their needs will be satisfied. Let me stress again: *you can't be a leader without having group members.* And group members will accept your direction and influence only if you help them get their needs satisfied.

It sounds simple enough, but first leaders must learn exactly what their group members need. Only then can they decide what to do to satisfy

those needs in exchange for the members' performing certain services or functions for the organization. This equitable exchange is the key to leadership.

What do people need from their group? Early scientific management specialists thought that individuals worked primarily for personal

financial gain. This is the economic theory. Later research conclusively demonstrated that people need much more from their groups—among other things, the acceptance of other members, a feeling of achievement and accomplishment, social interaction with other members, and the opportunity to achieve social status from participating in the group.

It is therefore much more accurate to think of socioeconomic theory a concept that acknowledges that leaders have a wide range of incentives to offer group members to attract them to the group. To retain them in the group as productive group members, effective leaders must satisfy more than simply the financial needs of their people.

## MASLOW'S THEORY ABOUT NEEDS

A useful way of describing the needs of people is in the form of a hierarchy with several different levels. The pioneering psychologist, Abraham Maslow, constructed a five-tiered pyramid that represents the relative importance of five different kinds

of human needs to an individual: physiological, safety, acceptance, esteem, and self-actualization.

The Level I needs, such as thirst, hunger, and warmth, are the

most important (or "prepotent"), for they must be predominantly satisfied before a person will be motivated to try to satisfy the needs at the next level. The Level II needs (security and safety) must be predominantly satisfied before a person will be motivated to seek

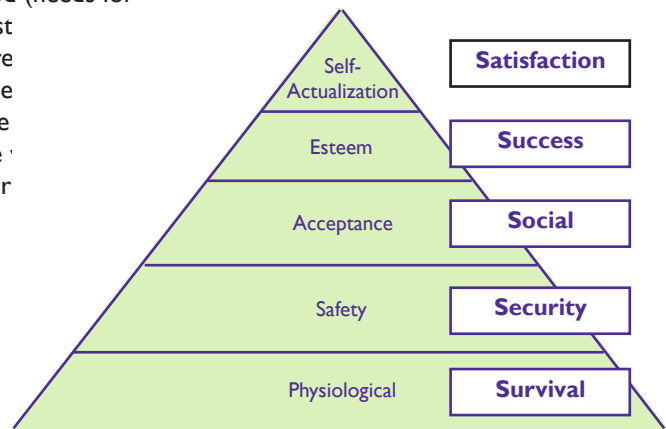
satisfaction for the higher-level needs, and so on up the pyramid. For example, a primitive man who is hungry will be highly motivated to stalk a wild animal to obtain food, even risking his life (ignoring safety and security needs). After killing the animal and eating what he needs and now motivated to satisfy his security needs, he may cure the remaining meat and store it for future consumption (safety and security needs). When plenty is stored away, he then might think of asking friends to come over and share his food (needs for acceptance and social interaction). When those needs are met, he may decide to experiment with a new and more flavorful way of preparing his food (needs for achievement, self-esteem if those needs are re-satisfied he might depict pictures of the animal he has killed on the wall of his cave (need for self-actualization).

The implications of Maslow's theory of hierarchical

needs are of great importance to leaders.

1. Groups and organizations do not always provide opportunities for their members to satisfy Level IV and Level V needs, especially for people at lower levels whose jobs are quite rigidly defined or routine, whose activities are almost totally controlled, and whose freedom for personal direction, making decisions, and taking initiative are very limited.
2. When leaders exercise arbitrary power, group members may feel afraid of censure or continually feel insecure in their jobs. With their security and safety needs not satisfied, they are thus stuck at Level II, unmotivated to achieve and meet their social needs and their need for competence and self-esteem.
3. Different group members may be operating at different need levels at the same time or in the same situation. For example, in a meeting, one group member may be tired (Level I); another may want the group to get something accomplished (Level IV); still others may be talking and joking with each other (Level III).

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4. Level I and Level II needs are seldom very potent motivators in an affluent society because group members already are getting most of their physiological needs satisfied (minimum wage laws) and are often free of the insecurity of being fired (protection of unions). This is why it seldom works when leaders try to motivate or control group members by using warnings or threats of being fired.

5. If workers have little opportunity to satisfy their needs at Levels III, IV and V on the job, they will seek opportunities off the job to satisfy their needs for social interaction, achievement and self-actualization (through sports, hobbies, etc.) This is why many people put forth only just enough energy to keep their jobs and receive their pay; in addition, they feel alienated from or uninvolved in the organization.

6. To be motivated toward high achievement and accomplishment (Level IV), members need leaders who already have seen to it that (a) they receive a wage that seems equitable, (b) they have a feeling of job security, and (c) the group provides them opportunity for social interaction, friendship and a feeling of being understood and accepted (Levels I, II and III needs are being satisfied).

7. One of the principal benefits to members from having a leader who makes it possible for them to participate in group problem-solving and decision-making is that such activity gives them a great deal of opportunity

to satisfy their social and interactional needs (Level III), their needs for self-esteem and status in the organization (Level IV) and on occasion their needs for self-actualization and self-development (Level V).

**“Group members will accept your direction and influence only if you help them get their needs satisfied.”**

### HERZBERG'S THEORY OF MOTIVATION

A refinement of Maslow's concept provides leaders with even more insight into the needs of group members. It is the two-factor theory of motivation developed from the research of Frederick Herzberg. He collected evidence of two relatively independent factors: (1) certain factors operating in a work group situation act as obstacles to need satisfaction and become irritants, or “dissatisfiers,” (2) other factors are viewed as providers of need satisfaction and become gratifiers of needs, or “satisfiers.”

Acting as *obstacles* to need satisfaction (“dissatisfiers”) were:

1. *Poor interpersonal relationships with superiors.*
2. *Poor interpersonal relationships with peers.*
3. *Inadequate technical supervision.*
4. *Poor company policies and administration.*
5. *Poor working conditions.*
6. *Problems in workers' personal lives.*

Acting as providers of need satisfaction (“satisfiers”) were:

1. *Achievement*
2. *Recognition*
3. *The work itself*
4. *Responsibility*
5. *Advancement*

The absence of the dissatisfiers seldom produced satisfaction—for example, good working conditions seldom produced feelings of satisfaction. However, poor working conditions did produce feelings of dissatisfaction. But only the presence of the satisfiers (achievement, recognition, etc.) brought feelings of satisfaction.

These studies strongly suggest—and this is extremely important to leaders—that for group members to feel motivated toward high productivity and be satisfied in their jobs, the work itself must be rewarding. The job must provide opportunity for growth, responsibility, recognition, and advancement. These requirements sound very much like Maslow's Level III, IV, and V needs, and so provide further support for my earlier assertion that the effective leader needs to learn well the skills and methods that enable group members to meet their highest-level needs—self-esteem from achievement on the job and from the recognition of that achievement, as well as self-actualization (the feeling of utilizing one's potential).

### MYERS' MOTIVATION THEORY

Comparable findings to those of Herzberg were obtained in a six-year study of motivation conducted by M. Scott Myers, then an industrial psychologist at Texas Instruments.

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The results were summarized in the *Harvard Business Review* as follows:

*What motivates employees to work effectively? A challenging job which allows a feeling of achievement, responsibility, growth, advancement, enjoyment of work itself, and earned recognition.*

*What dissatisfies workers? Mostly factors which are peripheral to the job—work rules, lighting, coffee breaks, titles, seniority rights, wages, fringe benefits, and the like.*

*When do workers become dissatisfied? When opportunities for meaningful achievement are eliminated and they become sensitized to their environment and begin to find fault.*

Myers, like Herzberg, identified the same two kinds of employee needs that supervisors must satisfy, but named them Motivation Needs, which are task-centered, and Maintenance Needs, which are relatively peripheral to the work itself.

Myers' study offers further validation of the point I have been emphasizing all along, namely: the effective supervisor must have the skills of a task specialist (skills of planning and organizing work) as well as the skills of a human relations specialist (skills of identifying and solving sources of member dissatisfaction). The effective leader is task-centered and people-centered. Group members want to be on a winning team, but never at the expense of injuries to their self-worth or self-respect.

## **THE LEADER AS A PROBLEM-SOLVER**

It has also been helpful to me to think of the principal function of a

group leader as facilitating problem solving and conflict resolution. Groups need a leader to see to it that their problems and conflicts get solved. One could make the case that a completely problem-free work group would not even need a leader—at least not very often. If a group could always function efficiently and productively so that its members always experienced a sense of achievement, group cohesion, high self-esteem and personal worth, obviously there would be little need for a supervisor. Only when groups have problems and conflicts do they sorely need leaders. That is, when the members are having problems getting their needs met; when the group is causing the leader a problem because it is failing to attain the goals of the organization; or there are unresolved interpersonal conflicts that interfere with the group's ability to work together collaboratively and productively.

## **EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP REQUIRES SPECIFIC RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**

It is clearly evident that an effective leader must be both a “productivity specialist” (meeting the organization's needs) and a “human relations specialist” (meeting members' needs and facilitating conflict resolution). One without the other does not work.

We now know the specific communication and conflict resolution skills that a leader needs to become an effective human relations specialist—one that encourages cooperation, collaboration, collegiality, co-determination.

The organization I founded, Gordon Training International, offers intensive, in-depth Leader Effectiveness Training (L.E.T.) workshops where leaders can learn these essential skills.

For further information on L.E.T. and Gordon Training International, please see the next page or check out our website at [www.gordontraining.com](http://www.gordontraining.com)

