

LEADERSHIP

## **The Leading Edge of Leadership**

*Believe it or not, you're known for something right now by those around you...is it your leadership?*

by **Michael York**

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Phil Knight of NIKE once remarked,  
"THERE IS ONLY ONE LEADER!"

That sounds powerful...ONLY ONE!  
Black or white, win or lose, no room for finishing second.

I get the opportunity to do quite a few "leadership" talks or presentations. Once as I was preparing to do a session for a member-organization at a university, I went back to my dictionary to look up the word *leadership*.

Big clue here...

*Guess how many people look up words in the dictionary?*

Right, not many. Because they think they already have a pretty good idea what the word means (and if not, they'll just fake it, or worse...misuse it).

That means looking up words occasionally, even when you think you already know their meaning, is uncommon. There are many "common" misconceptions on leaders and leadership.

***Webster defines leadership as  
"the ability or capacity to lead."***

Just above that entry in the new college dictionary under the word "leader" there are more than 13 references or definitions of "LEADER."

And really, not one of those definitions I found are appropriate in delivering a message to a group of individuals or to an organization that wants to truly understand leaders and genuine leadership.

I was disappointed in that discovery. Much as the disappointment I feel when I hear some of the proliferation of leadership messages in the marketplace today.

But just a couple of entries down that same page is the definition of LEADING EDGE...

***“The edge of a sail or vessel that faces the wind. The foremost position in a trend or movement; the vanguard, someone or something occupying such a position... THE LEADING EDGE.”***

Wow. The Leading Edge.  
That was the mental picture I was looking for.

### **The TRUE LEADER**

The setting of the sail, the direction we've chosen to go, the individual or organization out in front. The point at which we face the challenge and adversity ahead, the winds of change, and the leading edge that propels us through it.

Does that give you a mental picture?

It's not a bad definition of how true leaders meet the challenge of leadership. And true leaders can be anywhere in the organization, not just at the top.

***True leaders don't create more followers, they create MORE LEADERS!***

By their thinking, commitment, actions and expectations they raise the bar on what's considered possible or IMPOSSIBLE.

Don't just think about individuals as leaders, think about products or organizations.

FedEx made the delivery service as a whole RADICALLY better, even the postal service! They changed the expectation of the marketplace by changing the PERFORMANCE (or the HOW) of delivery.

Can you believe there was a time when we said, "Oh, it'll get there when it gets there...2 or 3 days, maybe? OK, I guess that's fine..."

*The NEXT DAY!* That's what FedEx promised, and soon it was what the marketplace demanded.

I love how Jim Rohn (one of my long-time teachers) offers up his take on true leaders...

***“The challenge of leadership is to be strong, but not rude; to be kind, but not weak; to be bold, but not bully; to be thoughtful, but not lazy; to have humor, but without folly. To be humble, but not timid; to be proud, but not arrogant;”***

*Well said Mr. Rohn.*

How about Jim Collins' "Level 5 Leadership?" Read p.13 of his book **Good to Great** and let me know if it surprises you like it surprised me! The first 16 pages of that book should be required reading for EVERYONE.

I work with associations and member organizations that are *trapped in mediocrity* largely because of **the way they think!**

About what's possible and impossible.

One of those associations I work with has gone from less than 600 members to over 2500 and *become the largest association of its kind in THE NATION in just over 2 years!*

How'd they do it?

## ***By changing the thinking of the leadership and finding the right HOW!***

The leader of that organization has met with considerable "cold shoulders" as the new kid on the block who became #1. Envy, jealousy, and excuses on "why our organization didn't do that."

Or worse, why it CAN'T do that!

Isn't it amazing how so often that is the response to RADICAL results or BIG improvement?

I've seen the same thing so many times.

*"Well the only reason they're #1 is blah, blah, blah,"*

*"We are better quality...We don't have this or that...  
It won't last...They'll find out it's not that easy all the time..."  
Whatever!*

Excuses and jealousy is COMMON!

Radical growth and improvement, UNCOMMON!

### **Understanding SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

The "servant" part of leadership is where the real treasure is buried. That's the missing puzzle piece for many aspiring (or even those who think they've arrived) leaders. Misconceptions abound, that leaders should be ruthless or isolated or untouchable or unapproachable or intimidating or have it all figured out by now (see Mr. Rohn's wisdom above), and that's just not true.

True servant leadership is found in examples that are thousands of years old (Read the Old Testament account of Nehemiah's "wall rebuilding project") or as current as the leadership philosophies of Starbucks' Howard Schulz or Rick Warren and Saddleback Church (one of the largest thriving "member-organizations" in this marketplace). The wisdom of these servant leaders is evident to any true student who cares enough to seek out the clues of leadership these and other leading edge individuals have left behind.

***"We're not in the coffee business..."*** says Schulz, "we're in the PEOPLE business, serving coffee." And food, and music, and whatever's next.

***Ring a bell? If you're a leader,  
you're in the people business as  
well.***

***Rick Warren says the greatest  
obstacle for most individuals  
today is "SHORT-TERM  
THINKING."***

And again an ancient script offers more leadership wisdom here when we read that "without VISION (read: Big Picture Thinking), the people perish, or wither away."

Know anyone (even a "leader") who's stuck in a rut?

Vision, big-picture thinking, long-term goals, etc. leads aspiring leaders back to growing themselves in preparation of leading others...or PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT!

And personal development really is PERSONAL. You have very personal reasons for why you're here reading this and caring enough to engage in personally improving your skills and abilities, striving for an uncommon measure of success, and thinking like a leader.

## **The 4 Cornerstones of Leading Edge Individuals**

Think of these 4 cornerstones in building your “leading edge” life:

### **1. Purpose**

What’s YOURS? And how can you assist (lead) others in finding theirs? Purpose is simply LIFE, and life is bigger than work. Not everyone got the memo on that one. Many people are all about work and then they just try and fit life in somewhere. For more clues on this one see my book ***The 10 Commitments***.

### **2. Performance**

Performance is the work part of life. It’s what we’re paid for. How well we add value or exchange our services for compensation in the marketplace. Improve your performance, and the performance of others and the marketplace will notice and write you bigger checks.

### **3. Plan**

Do you have one? Plans, goals, and targets become your map that leads to the treasure. Most everyone can use a refresher course in this area. Watch the movie “National Treasure” and see how complex clues can become simpler and lead to something really BIG for you!

### **4. Passion**

This is simply your HOW...How you do all of the above.  
How do you live your life and perform on your stage everyday?

Believe it or not, you’re known for something right now by those around you. Ask and go to work on whatever you do with daily discipline and passion. That brings commitment, and commitment is stronger than motivation.

Congratulations, on caring enough to separate yourself from the common thoughts and ideas and complaints of so many, and pursuing with passion the treasure of true servant leadership that is so desperately needed in this marketplace today.

***What so many seem to have forgotten is the history lesson offered by countless leaders who have gone before. And that is, America is not the land of “jobs,” it has always been and remains today, the Land of Opportunity.***

Here's to your UNCOMMON SUCCESS,  
Michael

p.s. If you'd like the rest of my “short list” on LEADERSHIP LESSONS email me at [leader@MichaelYork.com](mailto:leader@MichaelYork.com)

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**Michael York** is the author of **BECOMING UNCOMMON** and **The 10 Commitments** along with a host of E books and audio programs. He is the “Chief Learning Officer” and consultant to a variety of selling organizations and speaks to over 60 audiences each year on winning in today's marketplace. Find out more about him at [www.MichaelYork.com](http://www.MichaelYork.com)

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