People Leave Managers... Not Organizations
Chapter One: Leadership and Performance

Courtesy Of:

"We'll camp here!"

— Rooster Cogburn, True Grit

Saddle Up

For many of us, when the "Duke" rode onto the silver screen and into our childhoods, the moments were memorable. Sure it was playacting, but John Wayne's portrayals showed us our leverage was in our workers and that leadership qualities could mobilize people in a focused effort to produce, to overcome, to change, and to succeed.

We remember the most complicated order the Duke ever gave was "Saddle up!" However, when the order was given, people saddled up. No one complained, no one argued over which horse to take, no one grumbled about why, and there were no hesitations. Today, decision making is deemed a critical leadership skill, and the Duke can be our benchmark. In the movie True Grit, he was leading a young woman and a ranger on a mission of considerable importance. Riding along, he drank from a flask and got drunk enough to fall from his horse. As he was lying there in a stupor, his two followers looked over at him. He made eye contact with them and commanded, "We'll camp here." And camp they did!

The Duke's leadership was simple and elegant. The good guys (the good performers) always won, and the bad guys (the poor performers) always lost. If it were only that easy! However, we know that leaders and followers in the real world don't have scripts to guide them that result in mutual success. And in the real world, sometimes the poor performers not only escape being held accountable, but they are allowed to contaminate the workplace. We also know that effective and appropriate leadership and performance management skills remain key factors in determining the quality of performance in an organization. Further, the person an employee reports to has the greatest influence on the quality of work life and employee loyalty.

The obligation of leading and managing people is an awesome responsibility. There are concepts that can be learned and adapted to your own personal style that will inspire outstanding performance. So, "saddle up," and take a journey through the following pages to learn about excellence in leadership and performance management.

People Leave Managers...Not Organizations

People Leave Managers...Not Organizations!

The manager sets the tone and is the major influence on the employee in the work environment.

At a fundamental level, we have always known that your immediate supervisor or manager plays the determining role regarding employee retention and the quality of employee performance. Now we have research to validate those gut-level feelings. Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman provided insight into employee productivity and employee retention in their landmark book, First Break All the Rules. This insight, based on over twenty-five years of research by the Gallup Organization, identified the relationship between the employee and his or her direct supervisor or manager as the number one influence on how long an employee stays and how productive he or she is. The conclusion is that people leave managers, not organizations!

Citing thousands of employees, these authors found links between employee opinion of the work environment and employee tenure, employee productivity, and business unit performance. These

links support the breakthrough thinking discussed in the next pages regarding the issues around successful leadership and outstanding employee performance. Also, our organizational assessments over the last fifteen years highly correlate with the issues of what talented employees look for in their jobs. It is very clear that the issue is the supervisor or manager to whom employees report directly. In this regard, the responsibility of the local supervisor or manager to his or her organization can be daunting. The profound impact of this person on the working life of others and performance possibilities is critical to an organization's success. Practical and effective leadership skills are the lifeblood of the organization.

Issues that correlate with employee retention and productivity*

- Performance expectations must be clear
- People must have the resources to do the job right.
- People must be able to make a difference and contribute (do what they do best) every day.
- People must receive recognition for their contributions and efforts.
- People need to be cared about as individuals.
- People must have meaningful participation at work.
- People need others to encourage their growth and development.
- People need leaders and managers who are adaptable to individual follower performance needs.

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* hook (hook) n. 2 to be fastened or caught by a hook — hook up to connect to — hooked up connected, linked together, attached; see JOINED. (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003.)

Throughout this book we will offer "hooks," highlighted in shaded boxes, to connect important ideas and concepts for your immediate recall.

* From organizational assessments and manager and employee interviews over the last fifteen years. People leave managers…not organizations.* The manager sets the tone and is the major influence on the employee in the work environment.

A Method to the Madness

For years, a major complaint in organizations has been the inconsistency or poor quality of leadership and management skills. Our assessments of leadership and management practices in organizations have found a variety of philosophies, ideas, and practices in play. While consulting and training managers, we have found no focused, coherent discussion or dialogue regarding leading people. There are as many opinions and assumptions as there are managers.

When employees move from one department to another or when their manager changes, adapting to the new style and management ways of the new boss occupies the majority of time during the first few months. In many ways, boss watching is the number one sport in organizations. People want to know how to win—that is, how to please the person who has the

greatest impact on their work day. The lack of predictability, consistency, and understanding leads to a type of madness that pervades the hallways of our organizations.

Boss Watching

- "How will I be managed now?"
- "How will my performance be evaluated?"
- "What are my manager's expectations?"
- What is it like to work for this person?

These questions are often asked as employees try to figure out the leadership and performance management practices of their supervisors and managers… how to win with their boss!

Perhaps the lack of a method* is responsible. We believe so. The renowned quality expert Edward Deming always advised that, without a method, results are out of control and unpredictable. This is true in any line of work from accounting to engineering to sales. Other disciplines have adopted methods that can be practiced, replicated, and critiqued for improved results. A method allows a degree of discipline and rigor to be applied to skills and talents. To produce better employee performance results, managers need to adopt a method on which they can rely.

• * method (meth'cd) n. ((<Fr <Gr meta, after + hodos, a way)) 1. a way of doing anything: process 2. a system in doing things or handling ideas (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster, 2003.

One Size Does Not Fit All…But!

There is no best way to lead. One size does not fit all. To think so assumes that everyone who is to be lead is the same. This demeans the individual and restricts the application of his or her strengths. By method we don't mean a rigid set of specific behavioral steps or scripts that managers must follow. Nor do we mean that managers must forego their natural personality styles and strengths. By method we mean a thought process grounded in a set of fundamental principles that provide supervisors and managers with a replicable process when leading people. The key is to learn the method so it can be practiced within the individual styles and personalities that managers possess. The method then is a basic routine to which leaders apply their personal style and strengths, a basic routine that is grounded in principles that correlate with effective performance management.

Shared Language

With a method for leadership and performance management, managers in the organization adopt a common language regarding leading people and managing results. This fosters joint problem solving and teamwork among managers because they have a shared framework to work through

performance issues and difficulties. While managers retain their own personality style, they can use the method to stay on the same page when dealing with performance.

Likewise, a method allows managers to share with employees what they can expect regarding leadership and management practices. We have often wondered why managers don't make part of every employee orientation a discussion about what the employee can expect regarding the way the manager manages people and the process the manager uses for managing performance. Again, perhaps it is the lack of a practical method that makes leadership and performance management so ambiguous when it comes to how individual managers lead others.

Condition or Problem

Human performance is a condition that requires ongoing treatment,
not a problem that can be fixed!

We know that managers will offer employees advice on how they deal with people. However, generic commentaries about "getting along" and "generalized expectations" are the rule. Although these types of statements do offer advice, they do not provide any specifics or give any understanding to the

employee regarding how the manager manages. The employees cannot take any proactive measures to influence how they are treated by the manager. The employees are constantly reacting to the manager's reactions. What is needed is the combinations of flexibility and individuality that taps into each manager's strengths and the application of a method for leadership and performance management. Such a method, understood by employees, will allow them to be proactive in their relationship with their manager and in their approach to their own performance objectives.

Performance Management: Condition or Problem?

In medicine, professionals are astute in differentiating between a condition and a problem. Problems, such as a broken bone in the arm, can be fixed. Once completely fixed, no further attention is necessary. On the other hand, a condition, such as asthma, can't be fixed. A condition requires ongoing treatment. The type of treatment changes as the degree of the condition changes. To some degree, a condition requires some type of treatment all of the time.

Most often managers approach performance issues in organizations as though they were problems. Performance problems are the topic of many training programs. The underlying assumption is that performance issues are problems that require fixing. This is a mistake. The performance of individuals and teams in organizations is a condition. The condition of performance at any onetime is the result of a myriad of factors relating to the abilities, attitudes, and cooperation of the performers. Optimizing human performance is an ongoing condition of a manager's life and requires constant treatment to produce desired results. Approaching performance issues as problems to be fixed or solved is a recipe for frustration and failure.

How to Get Along

- "Do your job well and bring a good attitude and we will get along fine."
- "Give 100% and we won't have any problems."
- "Do your best and remember, come to me if you have any problems."

Statements such as these capture the way that many managers articulate to employees what it will be like working for them.

As in treating any condition, applying a knee-jerk or reactive approach will not produce favorable results. Managers must adopt a proactive method that can be called upon instantaneously and reliably to deal with performance issues.

Unlearning Our Scripts

The generations populating organizations today differ significantly from past generations. Although children in past generations have been imprinted and socialized by parents, family members, church, school, books, and newspapers, the present working generations have had another profound influence in their early years. They have been continually exposed to high intensity bombardment from the visual media. Movies and television, the "electronic babysitter," have played a significant role in programming young people since the 1950s.

The electronic media have the power to touch the senses in a powerful way. However, there are limitations on detailed information and thus content is provided in a condensed manner. Through media filters, people have been programmed on many lessons of life: how to live, how to deal with gender and race relations, how to get along with others, what is right, what is wrong, and so on. In a large sense, our cultural mythology is passed on, generation to generation, through the stories and roles conveyed through the electronic media. Much like the ancient campfires where youth would sit on elders' knees and listen to the stories of the culture, the movie theater and the TV den are today's cultural classrooms.

Through movies and, especially, television—where the programming of values was mainlined into our living rooms—we were provided with models and lessons about what roles worked best for a successful life. Were these models really representative of adult family or work life? Or did these images produce expectations that would never be met? Either way, we were programmed with ideas of what roles in life people should play, and generations have been programmed similarly ever since.

Some Life Lessons

- Did father really know best? (only until you got married!)
- And what about Ozzie Nelson? He didn't have a job, never had any worries (except when they ran out of ice cream), and lived in a wonderful house in a nice neighborhood.
- And the Cleaver brothers? Beaver and Wally…no sibling rivalries, no unmanageable spats. Was this reality?
- Everything always works out for the best when Bill Cosby is the Dad!
- With three crime scene investigations on prime time, we continue to have three males in the dominate leader roles (at least women have advanced from nonactive roles to sidekicks!).

In addition to family issues, a significant lesson learned from story lines and themes in television and movies was how to lead people. We were taught how to take charge, what role the leader played, and what people in charge did to succeed. We watched westerns, detective stories, dramas, and sitcoms that all provided models of what people do when they are in charge. It didn't matter which program we tuned in to; they were all clones, and the leadership message was always the same. The person in charge has been portrayed as the rugged individualist who solves problems that mere mortals can't. Although we have admired the leadership qualities portrayed by the electronic media, there are lessons in these portrayals that don't do us a lot of good today.

Larry Miller, noted business author, often talks of growing up with the Lone Ranger, whose stereotypical role conveys one of the many cloned leadership messages.. For those who may have watched just one of the Lone Ranger programs or any of the other cloned variations on the theme, you have seen them all. The story line is always the same: there is a problem down on the ranch (or somewhere). The bewildered victims who got themselves into this situation have no ideas or means to solve their own problems. These normal people always seem to represent the bottom of the gene pool. And then, over the dusty prairie, wearing white leotards and a black mask, rides the Lone Ranger. With his super instincts, he always knows that there is a problem down on the ranch. To validate his analysis, he sends his ethnic sidekick, Tonto, into town to investigate. (It is instructive to note that Tonto or his clones on other shows seem to be of minority persuasion and their roles are secondary to the leader and major problem solver.) And sure enough, every week Tonto finds out that there is in fact a problem down on the ranch. And every week Tonto gets his butt kicked finding out.

The rest of the roles are also stereotypes. The rancher is normally the senior citizen who can never figure things out. The rancher usually has a granddaughter who only gets to cook, clean, serve coffee, and ring the dinner triangle. And finally there is the grandson who always seems to be into mischief or causing trouble of some kind. These roles are not productive or contributory, and the messages are clear.

Every week, the Lone Ranger, with his profound leadership skills, figured out the problem, diagnosed who the bad guys were, solved the problem by himself, and put the bad guys in jail. In thirty minutes, the problem was solved, the day was saved. There was no problem too difficult for the leader.

Lone Ranger Leadership

The individualistic, authoritarian leader has all the answers, creating dependency in the followers.

And at the end of every show, the other players validated their lesser status. There was always a party at the ranch to celebrate their new beginning, and, for some reason, the Lone Ranger slipped away unnoticed. Now how could anyone dressed like that slip away unnoticed? And, to top that, during the time he helped these people with the biggest problem of their lives, no one bothered to ask his name!

"Who was that masked man?" This is the question asked at the end of every show. And someone speaks out, "Why that was the Lone Ranger!" The room is silent with awe. At this point, you can see the problem created by this type of leadership. The look on the faces of the players when they realize the Lone Ranger is gone is one of despair. They seem to be thinking, "Oh boy, now what? What if we have another problem next week?"

Inappropriate Lessons from the Lone Ranger

- There is always a problem down on the ranch.
- The people who have the problem are unable to solve it.
- The leader is the only one skilled at problem solving.
- Problems are solved within very short time periods.
- Leadership is an individual, authoritarian role.
- Males dominate leader roles.

You see, the Lone Ranger never rode into town and conducted ranger classes. The performance of others was never an issue. The powers of leadership, problem solving, and performance were vested only in the leader. And the leader took great personal satisfaction from the role. And we all learned vicariously, through observation and reinforcement, the role of the leader and the various roles of the followers.

Today, we see our mythology regarding leadership, management, and "being in charge" replayed again and again. The western heroes have been replaced with new action heroes and comic book heroes. Watch and listen as the lessons of Lone Ranger management are played out on the silver screen and television. Only the names have changed: Spider-Man, Bat-Man, James Bond, The Terminator, Dare-Devil, Dirty Harry, Gandolf, Jason Bourne, Dumbledore, and real people who portray many of the "take charge" leader roles such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis, Steven Seagal, and Clint Eastwood. Over time, our leader mythology stays the course.

These lessons, while enjoyable and entertaining, are not productive for today's leaders and managers. Consensus building, developing others, joint problem solving, and empowerment are talents that leaders and managers need to master to deal with organizational issues. The reliance on one person to make all the decisions and to formulate all plans is a recipe for failure. Most issues are too complex, the need to change is too commonplace, the demand for real time performance is too routine, and the requirement for speed is too constant. The real world that managers face does not resemble the scripted world of the Lone Ranger and his contemporary replacements.

Leadership Realities

- Performance issues are usually conditions, not problems to be solved.
- People have the capacity to do well, contribute, and solve their own issues.
- Leadership is about developing others, not individualism.
- All roles are dignified and have meaning.

Whether the performance issue is a condition that needs treatment or a problem that can be solved, people have an enormous capacity to solve their own problems and perform on their own two feet in the context of appropriate leadership practices. The true measure of leadership is in the behavior of the followers. As Max DePree, former CEO of Herman Miller Co., wrote,

"The signs of leadership are among the followers: Are they reaching their potential? Are they learning? Are they achieving the desired results? Are they serving? Do they manage change gracefully, and do they manage conflict?"

Success in today's business environment calls for superior performance from every role. New leadership scripts are needed; old scripts must be unlearned. The major obligation that leadership has to the organization is to influence the performance of others. For this reason, a leadership method that focuses on the performance needs of others is critical.

Follower Driven

One constant we have gleaned from observing leadership and assessing organizations is how often managers treat employees with a style or approach that is comfortable to the manager but not to the employees. For example, a manager who is comfortable delegating to others uses delegation as a primary approach, regardless of the employee's ability or confidence regarding the task or assignment delegated. The manager will tend to rationalize this approach as attempts to stretch and challenge the employee. Even though the employee may struggle and his or her confidence may suffer, the leader continues to manage in his or her own most comfortable manner. The manager takes the approach that employees must adapt and "get used to me."

This approach is akin to a doctor prescribing "pink pills" for every ailment he or she comes across, regardless of what is best for the patient. In medicine, this would be mal-practice. What should we call it in management?

This "managerial comfort zone" approach to managing people creates a culture in which the relationship between manager and employee is leader driven: that is, employees have to adapt constantly to the comfort zone of their managers. In this situation, some employees develop (those whose ability and confidence match up with the manager's comfort zone approach), some stagnate (those whose ability and confidence don't quite match up), and some regress (those whose ability and confidence are significantly out of alignment with the manager's comfort zone approach).

For leadership and performance management to be successful and impact both employee productivity and retention in a positive way, management practices should be follower driven. It is the manager that needs the adaptability skills to deal effectively with the various abilities and attitude characteristics that individuals bring to different tasks and assignments. To force the employees to adapt is problematic in that their unique abilities and attitudes are what they are at any given point in time on any given task. Success requires the manager to be the one who adapts to the performance needs of employees. Managers have an obligation to direct performance towards the accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives by inspiring the talents of employees, in order to maximize individual and team performance capabilities. This is an obligation that cannot be done haphazardly. The application of a sound method that allows replication, reliability, and expertise in performance management situations is the responsibility of each manager.