

# Leadership

## Introduction

We have been discussing the social setting within which people organize: who are the actors and what are their interests, their resources, and their power to act on their interests. Sometimes people gain the “power to” mobilize resources they need by developing greater interdependence around common interests and shared resources (collaboration). In other cases, people challenge the “power over” them of others who deny them needed resources (claims making). In either case, the first step toward problem solving is to engage people with one another to discern their common interests and develop the capacity to act on them. This is what leaders do. And that’s why organizers focus on identifying, recruiting, and developing leaders.

## What Leaders Do

Who is a leader? Many of us call to mind historic figures like Dr. Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Jane Addams, Robert Kennedy or President Reagan. In reality, we find leaders everywhere - linking together networks through which we work to achieve common purposes. In every community, church, classroom, and organization hundreds of people are doing the work of leadership without which these efforts would not survive.

So what do leaders do that makes them leaders? Leaders accept the responsibility for enabling others to achieve their purposes in an uncertain world. Leaders choose to accept this responsibility. The responsibility they accept is for engaging with others, their constituency. The challenge they accept is one of enabling their constituency to define and achieve desired goals. When we know exactly what to do, when there are no surprises, no new challenges to face, and we’re following a routine, what need do we have of leadership? It’s when we enter the domain where the rules don’t quite work, where we don’t know which rules apply, where we’re trying to do something that hasn’t been done before – or that we haven’t done before - that’s when leadership enters the picture.

So what is it exactly that leaders do to earn leadership? How do they “enable” others to engage with uncertainty successfully? What is the work they do? And why is it so important?

Most of us have had lots of experience in “disorganizations,” as shown in Leadership Chart #1. What are they like?

- They are divided. Factions and divisions fragment the organization and sap it of its resources.
- They are confused. Each person has a different story about what's going on. There is a lot of gossip, but not very much good information.
- They are passive. Most "members" do very little so one or two people do most of the work.
- They are reactive. They are always trying to respond to some unanticipated new development.
- They are inactive. No one comes to meetings. No one shows up for activities.
- And they drift. There is little purposefulness to meetings, actions, or decisions as things "drift" from one meeting to the next.

Being part of a disorganization can be pretty discouraging, demotivating, and disengaging.

On the other hand, some of us may have had experience with organizations that really work.

- They are united. They have learned to manage their differences well enough that they can unite to accomplish the purposes for which they were formed. Differences are openly debated, discussed, and resolved.
- They share understanding. There is a widely shared understanding of what's going on, what the challenges are, what the program is and why what is being done had to be done.
- People participate. Lots of people in the organization are active - not just going to meetings, but also getting the work of the organization done.
- They take initiative. Rather than reacting to whatever happens in their environment, they are proactive in their environment.
- They act. People do the work they must to make things happen.
- They share a sense of purpose. There is purposefulness about meetings, actions, and decisions and a sense of forward momentum as work gets done.

So what makes the difference? Why are some groups disorganizations and other groups organizations? It is the quality of the work that leaders get done within them that makes groups work.

- Leaders turn division into solidarity by building, maintaining, and developing relationships among those who form the organization.
- Leaders turn confusion into understanding by facilitating interpretation of what is going on in the work of the organization.
- Leaders turn passivity into participation by motivating - inspiring people to commit to the action required to accomplish the group's goals.

- Leaders turn reaction into initiative by strategizing – engaging others in thinking through how the organization can use its resources to achieve its goals.
- Leaders challenge inaction by mobilizing people to specific actions that turn their resources into the means by which they can achieve their goals.
- Leaders transform drift into purpose by accepting responsibility for doing the leadership work necessary for the group to succeed. Leaders challenge others to accept their responsibility as well.

In each of the upcoming sessions, we will look at how leadership is exercised as relationship building, motivation, strategy, and action.

Leadership: Charts 1, 2, 3



### Leadership as Relationship

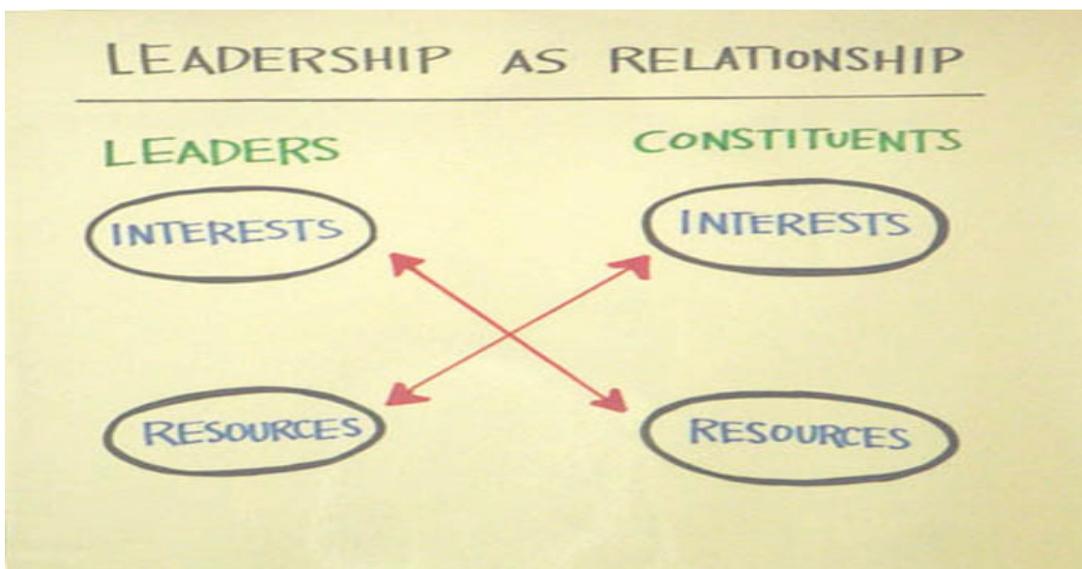
Although we will discuss relationships in more depth next week, what is particular about the relationship among leaders and their constituents? James McGregor Burns argues leadership can be understood as a relationship that emerges from repeated “exchanges” or “transactions”

between leaders and followers or constituents.<sup>i</sup> Leaders provide resources that constituents need to address their interests and constituents provide resources that leaders need to address their interests in turn. (Leadership Chart #5) These relationships are not limited to a single leader and a single “follower”, but include relationships between a leader and a team, a group, a community or a constituency whom the leader enables to work effectively together.

What do we exchange in this kind of relationship? Constituents may get a sense of empowerment, access to resources, help solving a problem, etc. Leaders may get the same things - and they get something that is worth accepting the responsibilities that come with leadership. Dr. King describes this as the “drum major instinct” - a desire to be first, to be recognized, and even to be praised. As much as we may not want to admit it, this might sound familiar. Rather than condemn it - it is, after all, part of us - Dr. King argues it can be a good thing, depending on what we do to earn the recognition we seek. He quotes Jesus as saying to James and John, “if you want to be my disciples you not only “can” be first, you must be first - first in love and first in service.”<sup>ii</sup>

Based on this view of leadership, then, who makes leaders? Can they be self-anointed? Can I decide one day that I am a leader? Or do I earn leadership by entering into relationship with those who can make me a leader - my constituents? This makes it easy to recognize leaders. There is one simple test. Do they have followers? Fine speeches, a wonderful appearance, lovely awards and excellent work aside - no constituency, no leaders.

Leadership: Chart 4



## Leadership and Structure

Many of us may not want to think of ourselves as followers or as leaders for that matter. Often we are told, especially in elite institutions, that we are all leaders...or we should be. Leadership is highly praised, but no one says anything about being a good constituent, collaborator...or citizen. But organizations that depend on collective action can be effective only if people accept both leadership and follower ship roles. Leading and following are not expressions of who we “are” but of what we “do” - in a specific meeting, committee, project, organization, or institution. We may play a leadership role with respect to one project and a followership role with respect to another.

What are the differences in those roles? Most importantly, leaders accept responsibility for the “whole” – the whole team, the whole project, the whole job - while a team member, constituent, or collaborator accept responsibility for a “part” of the whole. Leaders accept responsibility for seeing to the work that a group must do to work together successfully. Doing the work that enables group efforts to succeed is how leaders earn their leadership.

On the other hand, some of us question the whole concept of leadership. Shouldn't everyone be considered a leader? Is leadership really necessary? Isn't it repressively hierarchical? Why do we need this kind of structure at all? Can't we just “come together”?

In her *Tyranny of Structurelessness*, feminist sociologist Jo Freeman argues that organization (or collaboration of any kind) simply doesn't work if we don't have ways to assign clear responsibilities and hold ourselves accountable for fulfilling them.<sup>iii</sup> The idea of a structureless group, she writes, “becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others.” And, ““for everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit.”<sup>iv</sup>

Although leadership can be exercised by individuals working in a team - a leadership team can bring complementary strengths to bear on solving a problem - the responsibility of seeing to the team itself still has to rest somewhere. And effective leadership doesn't imply domination. Effective leaders facilitate interdependence and collaboration to create more “power to,” based on the interests of all parties. Domination is the exercise of “power over,” a relationship that meets interests of the “power wielder” at the expense of everyone else. Leadership can turn into domination if we fail to hold it accountable.

## **Leadership and Authority**

We are also wise to distinguish “authority” from “leadership.” Authority is a “legitimacy” of command usually attached to specific social positions, offices, or roles - legitimacy supported by cultural beliefs as well as coercive resources. An organization is a way to formalize authority relations among the participants – people’s rights and their obligations. Bureaucracies structure authority as a set of rules according to which managers direct subordinates. Markets structure authority as a set of rules according to which entrepreneurs can design incentives for persons to make enforceable choices based on their individual economic resources. Civic associations – organizations we are focusing on in this course – usually structure authority democratically in that leaders are accountable to the constituents whom they serve. Exercising leadership in a civic context can require more skill than the other settings because it depends more on persuasion than on command.

Most of us have been in situations in which those with authority have not earned their leadership, but try to compel cooperation based solely on their legitimacy or “power over”. In these circumstances, to what extent do we think our interests are acknowledged and addressed? How does this affect our motivation and performance?

Cultures have institutionalized beliefs about who is “authorized” to lead and who isn’t that can bar certain “kinds” of people from the opportunity to earn leadership. Leaders who develop under these conditions constitute a challenge to conventional ideas of authority. Authority can also be a resource a person can draw upon to earn their leadership. And sometimes leaders find authority has been conferred upon them as a result of their having earned their leadership. But leadership and authority is not the same thing.

Finally, we can distinguish leaders from “activists.” Hard working activists show up every day to staff the phone bank, pass out leaflets, and put up posters, and make critical contributions to the work of any volunteer organization. This is not the same, however, as engaging others in doing the work of the organization. Leadership is exercised through relational work.

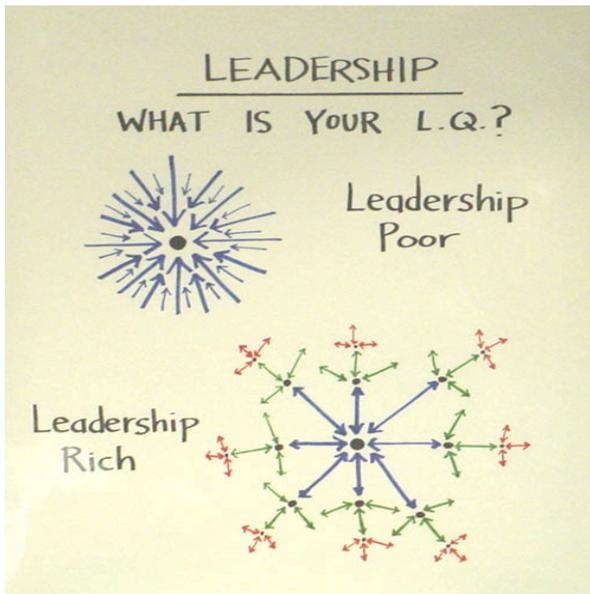
## **Leadership Development**

So if leaders are so important to organizations, how can organizations make sure they have the leaders needed to accomplish its mission? Organized people are empowered to make lots of things happen - especially new organizations learning to do new things - not by the efficiency of

their systems, but by the depth of their leadership capacity. This is particularly true of civic associations that bring people together, facilitate their understanding of one another, and enable them to act together on common interests.

Take a look at the “leadership quotient” of your organization. How many leaders do you see doing leadership work? Is there one “leader” with everyone else linked to that leader like spokes to the hub of a wheel? Or are there lots of “leaders” linked with each other and with other members, multiple centers of coordination, inspiration and action. Are some people “followers” in relation to some “leaders” but “leaders” in relation to other “followers”? Or are some people always “leaders” and others always “followers”? Is it "leadership rich" or is it "leadership poor"?

Leadership Chart #5



### **Giving Up Control to Build Power**

So why aren't “leadership rich” organizations an everyday thing? Why is it that so often we wind up the dot in the middle of all the arrows? What does it take to develop a “leadership rich” organization? It's not a new problem. As recounted in Exodus, Moses required the intervention of his father-in-law Jethro, who had his own interest in the matter to begin getting the picture.<sup>V</sup> He was trying to do it all himself, but why? Because he was hungry for the power? Because he needed to keep himself busy? A more likely explanation is that, like many of us, he wanted it done right, and he thought that meant that he had to do it himself. But as long as he was trying to

do it all himself, it couldn't be done well, much would not get done at all. The belief that holding onto all the control would ensure all was done well was an illusion. So Jethro offered him a way out. Find the courage to let go of some of the control and risk letting others share in the responsibility for leading. But not just anyone – he urged him to find people with leadership potential, people who were “capable, God-fearing, and honest”.

Far more fundamental than how we structure our organization, what kind of training programs we have, and what kind of awards banquets we hold is coming to terms with this fundamental question: are we willing, and able, to let go of enough control to let others lead? Can we let go of enough control to allow our organization to build the power that can only be achieved by letting it grow leadership rich?

And if we are ready, how do we make it work?

**Leadership Development Cycle:  
Identify, Recruit, Develop**

Leadership development work occurs as a cycle, as shown in Chart #6: identifying potential leaders (opportunities for them to emerge), recruiting them into leadership positions (opportunities for leadership to be earned), and creating opportunities for them to develop their capacity (opportunities for leaders to grow) on an ongoing basis. It requires learning how to delegate - and mean it; creating a supportive organizational structure; and providing coaching.

Identifying leaders requires looking for them. Who are people with followers? Who brings others to the meetings? Who encourages others to participate? Who attracts others to work with them? Who do other people tell you to “look for?” Alinsky writes about community networks knit together by “native” leaders - people who take the responsibility for helping a community do its work out of their homes, small businesses, neighborhood hangouts, etc. They can be found coaching athletic teams, organizing little leagues, serving in their churches, and surfacing in other informal “schools” of leadership. Where would you look for these kinds of leaders around here?

Although leading is a matter of “doing” and not “being” – and people do leadership work in different ways - there are some clues you may want to attend to, especially when looking for people that will make good organizers. It is hard for a person who has not learned to be a *good listener* to become a good organizer. You have to understand the interests of your constituency if you are to help them act on those interests. Listening means learning to attend to feelings -

*empathy* - as well as to ideas because the way we feel about things affects our actions more than what we think about them. *Curiosity* helps us see the novel as interesting rather than threatening, enabling us to learn how to face new challenges that are always a part of organizational life. A good *imagination* helps because strategizing is a matter of imagining different futures and possible ways to get to them. A sense of *humor* helps you from taking yourself and your troubles too seriously and helps keep things in perspective. A *healthy ego* is very important. Arrogance and a wish to dominate others are usually signs of a weak ego constantly in need of reassurance. Leadership also requires *courage* - the willingness to take risks, make choices, and accept the consequences.

Recruiting leaders requires giving people an opportunity to earn leadership. Since followers create leaders, they can't appoint themselves and you can't appoint them. What you can do is create opportunities for people to accept the responsibilities of leadership and support them in learning how to fulfill these responsibilities. If you have to get the word out for a meeting, you can get three of your friends to help you pass out leaflets in the Yard one day or you can find one or two people in each House who will take responsibility for recruiting 5 people from their House to attend. They earn their leadership by bringing the people to the meeting. What other ways can you think of that you can give people the opportunity to earn leadership?

No matter how careful you are, leadership development requires coming to terms with the fact that it entails risk. Risk small failures early in the life of a project in order to avoid big failures later on. If you take the risks required to learn to delegate, you will learn how to do it and you will learn who "comes through" and who doesn't. It is important to learn this with a small meeting at stake and not the monster rally of 5000 at which only 50 people show up. One reason to set up quantifiable goals, regular reports, and ongoing evaluation is to detect early failure and success so they become "learning opportunities" for everyone. "So, Mary, why did that work so well?" "So, Sam, what happened there? What could you have done differently?" Don't assume everyone is going to do everything right from the very beginning because it never happens. Also, it is often not completely clear what the "right" way is at the beginning of a project. Think about how to turn this fact to your advantage. Where can you get the courage to take the risk of letting other people share in the responsibility for outcomes you care about?

We only develop good judgment about whom to select by taking risks, making choices, experiencing success and failures, and learning from this experience - and we will still be surprised. On the other hand, the more experienced we are the better judgment we can begin to develop. There is no "rule book" to go to on this, but if you are afraid to risk making choices, you

never learn to make good choices. Here are some questions you might ask yourself. How do you select to whom to delegate? How do you know who the right person is? How can you find out ahead of time? How do you know when a person is ready for a big job? Are you selecting them because they are easily available or because they are the right people for the job? Are you selecting them because they already know what to do because you have worked together before or because they "look as if they can learn what to do" with some good coaching? Or did you select them because you "heard" they were good? Where did you hear that? Who told you? Should you believe them? How do you know?

Developing leaders requires structuring the work of the organization so it affords as many people as possible the opportunity to learn to lead - *delegation*. Distributing the leaflets through House Committees, for example, shares the responsibility for engaging others with many people. It is true organizing the work in this way can be risky. You may delegate to the wrong people; they may let you down; etc. But as Moses learned from Jethro, if you fear delegating, the strength of the community is stifled and can never grow. But you can do things to increase the chances of success. Leadership training sessions help clarify what is expected of leaders in your organization, give people the confidence to accept leadership responsibilities, and express the value your organization places on leadership development.

Developing leaders is not about assigning tasks, but offering responsibility. It is different to ask: "would you make these 50 phone calls telling people about the meeting?" versus "would you take responsibility for getting 10 people to come to the meeting? You will? Great! Here's some things that may help you contact them and get them there -- a list of names and phone numbers of people who said they were interested, 100 leaflets, some posters, and some sign-up sheets you could use to get commits." Do you see the difference? With the "task," the person can become a kind of yo-yo: go do this, come back for what's next, go do that, come back for what's next. They are "helping" you with your responsibility. With a "responsibility," the person takes it and runs with it, and you can help them meet "their" responsibility. But when looking for someone to take responsibility, don't make the responsibility easier, and easier, and easier...until there's nothing left. The challenge is in learning to motivate people to accept the level of responsibility needed to get the job done. And when a person has accepted responsibility, the motivation work continues. Keeping others motivated, keeping yourself motivated, and getting the work done go together. All are based on real accountability, lots of coaching, and lots of recognition of success.

Responsibility is only real, however, if the person is clearly accountable for the responsibility he or she accepted. Accountability should be regular, specific, and timely. The point of

accountability is not to catch someone to punish them, but to learn what kind of results they are getting so everyone can learn from them. If someone is having trouble, we need to learn why so we can figure out what to do about it. If someone is being successful, we need to learn why so we can try the same thing in other places. Without accountability the most important learning we can do in the course of a campaign - systematic reflection on our own experience - is impossible. You cannot expect a person to take responsibility without authority. If you want someone to take the responsibility to get 10 people to a meeting, hold them accountable, provide training, offer support - but give them the authority to do what they've been asked to do. If you see or hear of them making a mistake - or think you can do it better - this means going directly to them, not around them or taking care of it for them. It is really a matter of basic respect.

Finally, as Hackman shows, you can provide "coaching" that helps new leaders strategize about their responsibilities and encourages them as they deal with difficult situations.<sup>vi</sup> Once a person accepts responsibility, it is in your interest to offer her as much support as she wants to ensure her success. The challenge is learning to offer support without taking back the responsibility. "Oh, you'll get the ten people to come? Great! Let's sit down for a few minutes and "role play" just what you're going to say to them." Or "give me a call to tell me how it's going - or if you run into problems." A regular coaching session means you want to meet not because you think they are in trouble, but because you are interested in their work. These sessions can be very useful for learning what's really going on out there as well. And coaching is, of course, one of the best ways to make mentoring real.

## Leadership Chart #6



### Leadership Team or "Lone Ranger"

The most successful organizers are those who form a leadership team with whom to work early on in their campaign. Although it can be a mistake to recruit people to act as an "organizing committee" too early - especially if you are not careful to recruit people drawn from the constituency whom that community views as leaders or, at least, potential leaders - organizers more often err in delaying too long. The sooner you have a team of people with whom to work, the sooner the "I" of the organizer becomes the "we" of the new organization. Once you have formed a leadership team you can more easily establish a rhythm of regular meetings, clear decisions and visible accountability that will help make things actually happen. You don't build an organization of 500 people by recruiting them all yourself. You build it by finding people willing and able to commit to help building it with you. If you don't have a leadership team working with you by midterm, it's time to look very closely at why.

## Conclusion

Although identifying, recruiting and developing leaders is critical to the capacity - or power - of most organizations, it is the particular focus of organizers whose work is to be leaders of leaders. The primary responsibility of an organizer is to develop the leadership capacities of others and, in this way, of the organizations through which their constituents act on their common interests.

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## Helpful Hint #2



## QUESTIONS

### Leadership

1. Have you developed a leadership team? If yes, how are you exercising leadership within this team? If no, what is your leadership role within your project?
2. Who else exercises leadership in your project/organization? How do you know they are leaders? How do they exercise leadership? How do they earn leadership?
3. What kind of organizational structures, procedures, or programs have contributed to the development of the leaders? Who put them in place? How well do they work?
4. Are you delegating leadership? What is being delegating to whom? What have you found to be the challenges of delegating leadership? The rewards?
5. Do you, or others in your project/organization, have conscious strategies for identifying, recruiting and developing leadership? What are they?

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<sup>i</sup> J. M. Burns (1978). Leadership. (New York, Harper and Row).

<sup>ii</sup> Martin Luther King, J., (1986 (1991)), The Drum-Major Instinct (4 February 1968). A Testament of Hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., (New York, HarperCollins) 259-267.

<sup>iii</sup> J. Freeman, (1970), "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." Women's liberation movement, USA.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> The Bible, Exodus 18.

<sup>vi</sup> J. R. Hackman and R. E. Walton, (1986), "Leading Groups in Organizations". Designing Effective Work Groups. P. S. Goodman. (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass), 72-119.