



Leaders vs. Losers

"Show me a good loser and I will show you a loser."

-Paul Newman

Can anything good come out of a recession? There are a few positives going forward. One positive outcome of a bad economy is that it separates the leaders from the losers. You can spot them at a glance where in prosperous times even the worst executives looked good from a distance. The other day I got into a discussion with some leaders I meet with on a regular basis about the differences between real leaders and those who are just in a position someone else put them in. The result I came up with is this list of Leaders vs. Losers.

- **Leaders think "Yes" - losers think "No."** Most successful leaders know they are in their position because of the dominating positive thoughts that are in their minds and not their accomplishments. If you are resting on your laurels be careful that they don't wilt under the pressure of your ego. Henry Ford challenged his engineers to develop an 8 cylinder motor in a day that it was unheard of. Time and time again they came back to him saying it was impossible. But Ford would stubbornly say, "Go back and try again." He was convinced that it could be done and nothing would deter him. Eventually he was proved right by the same people that spent their time thinking of ways it couldn't be done. How about you? Losers take their eyes off of the customer and concentrate on the competition. They don't think there are enough customers to go around. They hoard and are jealous. Remember Etta James' negative remarks after Beyonce sang "her song" at the presidential inauguration? As author Larry Winget says: "Stop whining, shut up and get a life!" That leads us to...

- **Leaders are confident in themselves - losers are insecure.** Losers spend their time trying to hold on to the territory and play defense. They view the world through scarcity. Their battle cry is: "There's not enough to go around!" Leaders view the world through an abundance mentality: "There will always be enough to go around." People who try to hold their position don't hold it for long. Their insecurities become evident and they lose followers. If you are spending your time reinforcing yourself you will quickly run out of support and supplies. The great generals have always been known for the territory they took and battles

they won, not the things they did when no one was fighting. Leaders know their strengths and abilities. They know their weak points and how to compensate; how to put the right people in the right places to cover the gaping holes. They live by the Vidal Sassoon motto: "If YOU look good, WE look good." That way the credit gets passed around. A loser wants all the credit for themselves in a vain effort to reinforce their role as "leader."

- **Leaders see the big picture - losers try to get a snapshot.** Leaders see a downturn in the economy and look for ways to make it work to their advantage. They know their place and constantly try to make the universe a better place through their influence. It is lonely at the top but the view is much better. At the top you can see how one decision affects another and how it will play in your overall vision for the organization. Losers, fearful of doing too much and making waves take in only sections of the big picture and rarely venture beyond the borders of the mat (much less the frame). There is a *Seinfeld* episode where Elaine's boss, Mr. Pitt is unable to see a 3-D picture because he can't focus his eyes correctly. It is an illustration of the mistakes he is making in running the company Elaine works for. Losers are afraid of making decisions and wait on the economy to turn around. Leaders steer the boat to safer waters. Losers are just along for the ride.

- **Leaders think about the next decade - losers think about the weekend.** A true leader is always thinking several steps ahead of his/her people. Constantly scanning the horizon for new territory to take and opportunities to seize, they see to the fifth and sixth generations of leadership and how to best influence it from where they are. It was said that Alexander the Great wept when he marched his army off the known map for there were no more lands in sight to conquer. Leaders want to leave a legacy. Losers don't want to equip someone else to succeed them. They fear that they will be replaced by someone better. I speak with executives every year who fear equipping their subordinates out of the fear that they will become greater than themselves. John Maxwell says, "There is no success without a successor." Losers think about how they are going to spend their weekend relaxing and playing. They spend their time in trivial pursuits wondering what is going to happen to them next. Which brings us to...

- **Leaders make things happen - losers have things happen to them.** It's the difference between "actionary" and reactionary leadership. Leaders see themselves as part of the solution while losers become part of the problem. Leadership is all about making decisions that other fear to make. It's about stepping out on faith or your gut instinct and being willing to take the blame for the results. Losers only want credit for success. Leaders can admit their failures because they use them to learn and move ahead in life. John F. Kennedy earned respect when he came on national television admitting the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. It allowed him to move to a higher level of leadership. Today we have many leaders on both sides of the political landscape who won't admit their failures and then they wonder why people are hesitant to follow their guidance.

• **Leaders get close to the ones they want to grow – losers distance themselves from their staff.** Frank Lloyd Wright, the American architect who re-wrote all the rules of design in the Twentieth Century would always have the newest apprentices move their desks closest to his own. He wanted them to learn from his example and he poured his knowledge into them. Why wouldn't you want the new guy or girl to turn out successful like you? As a result the success ratio of his staff was far above that of any of his contemporaries and in fact, anyone to this day. Losers start the new people at the bottom of the pecking order and force them to work their own way up. Most often "newbies" drop out on the way up the corporate ladder of bureaucracy. If you want someone to succeed, keep them close to you and model the behavior you want them to replicate.

• **Leaders develop healthy relationships with people - losers "date" people looking for the like-minded.** Leaders know that you can't cast vision to people who aren't close to you. If you were going to find someone to dedicate your life to, would you bar-hop until the right person came along, or spend time building relationships with individuals to deepen the commitment level? Organizations are too full of people dating prospects and failing to build relationships. As my friend Don Hicks in Missouri puts it, "There is a difference between having sales and having clients." Sales leaders develop deep, healthy relationships on which future business can be built. Losers go from one job to the next just trying to stay alive. A friend of mine has a sign in his office that reads: *"I don't have to survive, I can thrive!"* Are you thriving or surviving? The relationships you build will help you to thrive and grow for years to come.

• **Leaders inspire - losers perspire (then expire).** You can always tell a leader by the vision she/he is able to cast and the followers it gathers. John Maxwell says if anyone says they are leading but has no followers, they are merely taking a walk! Look behind you once in a while. Is anyone following? Are you able to whip everyone into motivation by your leading ability? Tenure contributes much to this as the longer you are with people the more they can reflect on what you have done for them and the organization. At this point you have risen to a new level of leadership. Losers inspire no one and eventually run out of steam and have to function on dry hot air. In the last days of the American Revolution when his generals were trying to revolt against congress, George Washington was able to inspire them to put their trust in him and his leadership and fight on.

• **Leaders model - losers "phone it in."** Leaders know the way and show the way. They are at the forefront modeling what they want their followers to do. Losers are hiding in the background waiting for someone else to take charge; waiting for someone else to make the first move. They fear the problems even success brings so they hang in the background to "Check the barometer" before acting. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King believed in peaceful resistance, and they led out front. They modeled what they believed in and it still inspires

millions today. You never saw them in a room while their supporters marched or protested. You always saw them out front resisting peacefully - no matter how violent their adversaries became. When Hitler's Third Reich was crumbling he was in a bunker. When times are tough a true leader will model the behavior and attitude they teach. They become a walking talking picture of what they want their followers to become.

- **Leaders generate motivation – losers generate stagnation.** Leaders empowered with a vision know how to go to all the right people and cast that vision. They go one-on-one and to groups looking for discontent with the status quo and use that to instill a desire for change. Losers prefer to maintain the status quo. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” And “We’ve never tried that before,” are their mottos. They fear the unknown and usually hope someone else will step up and take the reins. Losers don’t want to go one-on-one for fear that they will be discovered as lacking the ability to lead. Nothing grows and everyone goes – away. Abraham Lincoln motivated everyone he met during his presidency. He personally went out in the field to coach new generals. He would venture to the Union Station in Washington, DC to greet and say “farewell” to the soldiers being shipped out to the battlefield. The result was the undying support of each and every soldier who felt personally motivated by the President of the United States.

- **Leaders embrace failure – losers avoid it at all costs.** Again Frank Lloyd Wright constantly experimented with ideas that ultimately failed. “How else can you succeed unless you try something new and learn from it?” More of his designs were built than his two top architectural rivals combined. He pushed his apprentices to learn from their mistakes. When they would write him from overseas job sites about difficulties they faced saying, “How do you solve X problem?” he would wait several weeks then write them back with the reply, “How do YOU solve X problem?” Only through repeated trial and error do you learn and grow. Thomas Edison experimented with over 10,000 substances before finding the solution to a working light bulb. When asked why he didn’t quit he answered, “I simply have found 10,000 ways it won’t work.” Losers are so afraid that they will fail they risk nothing, learn nothing and fail to grow.

- **Leaders listen to others – losers talk about themselves and their accomplishments.** Mark Twain once said that a wise man says nothing; the fool talks and reveals to everyone he is a fool. Leaders know that they must constantly hear new ideas from people who have never had an opportunity to share them with anyone. Your greatest skill in leadership is the ability to keep your ear to the ground for trends, ideas and opinions. Listen more than you talk and you will learn more. Talk more and others will quit talking to you. President John F. Kennedy surrounded himself with advisors that were smarter than he in areas he knew nothing about so that he would get the best advice when he needed it.

Want to be a Leader? Be a risk-taker, defy the status quo, succeed through

others, and keep casting the vision. As my friend, Joe Bonura says, "You will succeed in direct proportion to your desire to come out of your comfort zone."

Lead on!

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