

A True Leader, by Dee Hock

Leader presumes follower. Follower presumes choice. One who is coerced to the purposes, objectives, or preferences of another is not a follower in any true sense of the word, but an object of manipulation. Nor is the relationship materially altered if both parties accept dominance and coercion. True leading and following presume perpetual liberty of both leader and follower to sever the relationship and pursue another path. A true leader cannot be bound to lead. A true follower cannot be bound to follow. The moment they are bound, they are no longer leader or follower. The terms leader and follower imply the freedom and independent judgment of both. If the behavior of either is compelled, whether by force, economic necessity, or contractual arrangement, the relationship is altered to one of superior/subordinate, management/employee, master/servant, or owner/slave. All such relationships are materially different than leader-follower.

Induced behavior is the essence of leader-follower. Compelled behavior is the essence of all the others. Where behavior is compelled, there lies tyranny, however benign. Mere behavior is induced, there lies leadership, however powerful. Leadership does not imply constructive, ethical, open conduct. It is entirely possible to induce destructive, malign, devious behavior and to do so by corrupt means. Therefore, a clear, meaningful purpose and compelling ethical principles evoked from all participants should be the essence of every relationship, and every institution.

A compelling question is how to ensure that those who lead are constructive, ethical, open, and honest. The answer is to follow those who will behave in that manner. It comes down to both the individual and collective sense of where and how people choose to be led. In a very real sense, followers lead by choosing where to be led. Where a community will be led is inseparable from the conscious, shared values and beliefs of the individuals of which it is composed.

True leaders are those who epitomize the general sense of the community — who symbolize, legitimize, and strengthen behavior in accordance with the sense of the community — who enable its conscious, shared values and beliefs to emerge, expand, and be transmitted from generation to generation—who enable that which is trying to happen to come into being. The true leader's behavior is induced by the behavior of every individual who chooses where they will be led.

--Dee Hock

