

Why Should Followers Help You?

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON

People do things for their own reasons, not yours. There may be no compelling reason for volunteers to help you accomplish your goals and objectives unless you give them a reason that is important to them.

Today's followers can choose to actively help you, do just the minimum, work against you or ignore you. If you want others to volunteer their energy, effort, and resources, your leadership approach must focus on providing a reason for others to follow you that is too compelling to ignore.

Three Reasons People Will Help

The traditional leadership models based on the power of your position are no longer relevant in a world where followers choose the level of their commitment. There are three basic reasons why others would willingly help you succeed as a leader.

- 1) **They believe in the mission, goal or objective.** IRWA volunteers who give their time to plan and execute the Annual International Education Conference are an excellent example of the power of shared mission and purpose. They willingly take on this important role in addition to their regular jobs because of their strong connection to the organization's mission.
- 2) **They fear the outcome of inaction.** When tied to their belief in the mission or purpose, a self-imposed concern about not helping can be a powerful motivator for action. The results are often different, however, if an individual's fear is based on what the leader will do if they don't pitch in to help. Imposed fear leads to mere compliance rather than commitment.
- 3) **They value their relationship with you.** The number one reason why most people say yes to a volunteer opportunity is because they are asked by someone they know and respect. This principle applies to every leadership situation. Others will readily follow and help you achieve your goals when they are influenced by their trust in your character, competence and credibility.

Things You Can Do Now

Leaders engage others and earn the right to be followed when they do the following:

Connect with the greater mission, purpose and values. There is no greater power than a group of individuals bound together by a common purpose that is greater than themselves. But you need to provide a compelling reason to break the inertia that keeps most of us doing what we've always done.

Use—but never abuse—a good crisis. Crisis generates the tension between a desired future and impending reality that causes people to act. In the face of crisis, people will do things that they had never considered possible or even plausible. Think about someone overweight who becomes a health fanatic after a heart attack or the company that becomes an advocate for good business practices after a brush with failure.

You can't, however, turn everything into a crisis or generate a false crisis where none exists. If everything is presented as a crisis, then followers learn that that nothing is a real crisis. And a false crisis destroys your credibility the next time a real emergency surfaces.

Build relationships based on credibility and trust. You can't have too much credibility and trust. This is the well you dig long before you need the water. Credibility comes from being competent and demonstrating good character. Trust comes from investing time in helping others understand your motives, get to know you as a person, and showing genuine concern in the aspirations and feelings of others.

Empower action. Involve people early and often. Give them control and allow them to try. They will make mistakes. That is what people do when they are trying something new or different. People support you - and the purpose - when they help create the solution.

You cannot succeed without actively engaged and committed followers. It is a privilege that is earned when you embrace the notion that the leader's job is to provide the compelling reason for others to help. ☺

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