The most appropriate leader today is one who can lead others to lead themselves. The more traditional image of a leader as a striking figure on a rearing white horse, crying "Follow me!," may represent an incomplete view of leadership.

SuperLeadership: Beyond the Myth of Heroic Leadership

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When most of us think of leadership, we think of one person doing something to another person. This is "influence," and a leader is someone who has the capacity to influence another. Words like "charismatic" and "heroic" are sometimes used to describe a leader. The word "leader" itself conjures up visions of a striking figure on a rearing white horse who is crying "Follow me!" The leader is the one who has either the power or the authority to command others.

Many historical figures fit this mold: Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Washington, Churchill. Even today, the turnaround of Chrysler Corporation by Lee Iacocca might be thought of as an act of contemporary heroic leadership. It's not difficult to think of Iacocca astride a white horse, and he is frequently thought of as "charismatic."

But is this heroic figure of the leader the most appropriate image of the organizational leader of today? Is there another model? We believe there is. In many modern situations, the most appropriate leader is one who can lead others to lead themselves. We call this powerful new kind of leadership "Superleadership."

Our viewpoint represents a departure from the dominant and, we think, incomplete view of leadership. Our position is that true leadership comes mainly from within a person, not from outside. At its best, external leadership provides a spark and supports the flame of the true inner leadership that dwells within each person. At its worst, it disrupts this internal process, causing damage to the person and the constituencies he or she serves.

Our focus is on a new form of leadership that is designed to facilitate the self-leadership energy within each person. This perspective suggests a new measure of a leader's strength—one's ability to maximize the contributions of others through recognition of their right to guide their own destiny, rather than the lead-
er's ability to bend the will of others to his or her own. The challenge for organizations is to understand how to go about bringing out the wealth of talent that each employee possesses. Many still operate under a quasi-military model that encourages conformity and adherence rather than one that emphasizes how leaders can lead others to lead themselves.

WHY IS SUPERLEADERSHIP AN IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVE?

This SuperLeadership perspective is especially important today because of several recent trends facing American businesses. First, the challenge to United States corporations from world competition has pressured companies to utilize more fully their human resources. Second, the workforce itself has changed a great deal in recent decades—for instance, "baby boomers" have carried into their organization roles elevated expectations and a need for greater meaning in their work lives.

As a consequence of these kinds of pressures, organizations have increasingly experimented with innovative work designs. Widespread introduction of modern management techniques, such as quality circles, self-managed work teams, Japanese business practices, and flatter organization structures, has led to the inherent dilemma of trying to provide strong leadership for workers who are being encouraged and allowed to become increasingly self-managed. The result is a major knowledge gap about appropriate new leadership approaches under conditions of increasing employee participation. The SuperLeadership approach is designed to meet these kinds of challenges.

Before presenting specific steps for becoming a SuperLeader, it is useful to contrast SuperLeadership with other views of leadership.

Viewpoints on what constitutes successful leadership in organizations have changed significantly over time. A simplified historical perspective on different approaches to leadership is presented in Figure 1. As it suggests, four different types of leader can be distinguished: the "strong man," the "transactor," the "visionary hero," and the "SuperLeader."

The strong-man view of leadership is perhaps the earliest dominant form in our culture. The emphasis with this autocratic view is on the strength of the leader. We use the masculine noun purposely because when this leadership approach was most prevalent it was almost a completely male-dominated process.

The strong-man view of leadership still exists today in many organizations (and is still widely reserved for males), although it is not as highly regarded as it once was.

The strong-man view of leadership creates an image of a John Wayne type who is not afraid to "knock some heads" to get followers to do what he wants done. The expertise for knowing what should be done rests almost entirely in the leader. It is he who sizes up the situation and, based on some seemingly superior strength, skill, and courage, delivers firm commands to the workers. If the job is not performed as commanded, inevitably some significant form of punishment will be delivered by the leader to the guilty party. The focus is on the leader whose power stems primarily from his position in the organization. He is the primary source of wisdom and direction—strong direction. Subordinates simply comply.

One would think that the day of the strong-man leader has passed, but one apparently managed to work his way up the corporate hierarchy at Kellogg Co. This venerable Battle Creek cereal maker recently terminated its president in an unusual action. Accounts printed in the Wall Street Journal described this person as "abrasive and often unwilling
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to listen . . . , very abrupt . . . , more inclined to manage without being questioned." He was known for deriding unimpressive presentations as a "CE"—career ending—performance. As another example, we suspect that the majority of employees at Eastern Airlines would describe CEO Frank Lorenzo as a prototypical strong man.

The second view of leadership is that of a transactor.

As time passed in our culture, the dominance of the strong-man view of leadership lessened somewhat. Women began to find themselves more frequently in leadership positions. With the development of knowledge of the power of rewards (such as that coming from research on behavior modification), a different view of influence began to emerge. With this view, the emphasis was increasingly placed on a rational exchange approach (exchange of rewards for work performed) in order to get workers to do their work. Even Taylor’s views on scientific management, which still influence significantly many organizations in many industries, emphasized the importance of providing incentives to get workers to do work.

With the transactor type of leader, the focus is on goals and rewards; the leader’s power stems from the ability to provide rewards for followers doing what the leader thinks should be done. The source of wisdom and direction still rests with the leader. Subordinates will tend to take a calculative view of their work. "I will do what he (or she) asks as long as the rewards keep coming."

Perhaps one of the most prototypical (and successful) transactor organizations in the world today is PEPSICO. Fortune described the company with phrases like "... boot camp, ... sixty-hour weeks ... , back breaking standards that are methodically raised." Those who can’t compete are washed out. Those who do compete successfully are rewarded very handsomely—first-class air
travel, fully loaded company cars, stock options, bonuses that can hit 90% of salary. Those who are comfortable and effective in this culture receive the spoils. Those who are not comfortable tend to leave early in their career.

Perhaps the ultimate transactor leader is Chairman Larry Phillips of Phillips Van Heusen, manufacturer of shirts, sweaters, and casual shoes. Phillips has set up a scheme whereby the 11 senior executives will each earn a $1 million bonus if the company's earnings per share grow at a 35% compound annual rate during the four years ending in January 1992. Not surprisingly, company executives are actively absorbed in striving to meet this goal.

The next type of leader, which probably represents the most popular view today, is that of the visionary hero. Here the focus is on the leader's ability to create highly motivating and absorbing visions. The leader represents a kind of heroic figure who is somehow able to create an almost larger-than-life vision for the workforce to follow. The promise is that if organizations can just find those leaders that are able to capture what's important in the world and wrap it up into some kind of purposeful vision, then the rest of the workforce will have the clarifying beacon that will light the way to the promised land.

With the visionary hero, the focus is on the leader's vision, and the leader's power is based on followers' desire to relate to the vision and to the leader himself or herself. Once again, the leader represents the source of wisdom and direction. Followers, at least in theory, are expected to commit to the vision and the leader.

The notion of the visionary hero seems to have received considerable attention lately, but the idea has not gone without criticism. Peter Drucker, for example, believes that charisma becomes the undoing of leaders. He believes they become inflexible, convinced of their own infallibility, and slow to really

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change. Instead, Drucker suggests that the most effective leaders are those not afraid of developing strength in their subordinates and associates. One wonders how Chrysler will fare when Iacocca is gone.

The final view of leadership included in our figure represents the focus of this article—the SuperLeader. We do not use the word “Super” to create an image of a larger-than-life figure who has all the answers and is able to bend others’ wills to his or her own. On the contrary, with this type of leader, the focus is largely on the followers. Leaders become “super”—that is, can possess the strength and wisdom of many persons—by helping to unleash the abilities of the “followers” (self-leaders) that surround them.

The focus of this leadership view is on the followers who become self-leaders. Power is more evenly shared by leaders and followers. The leader’s task becomes largely that of helping followers to develop the necessary skills for work, especially self-leadership, to be able to contribute more fully to the organization. Thus, leaders and subordinates (that are becoming strong self-leaders) together represent
the source of wisdom and direction. Followers (self-leaders), in turn, experience commitment and ownership of their work.

SEVEN STEPS TO SUPERLEADERSHIP

For the SuperLeader, the essence of the challenge is to lead followers to discover the potentialities that lie within themselves. How can a SuperLeader lead others to become positive effective self-leaders? How can a SuperLeader lead others to lead themselves?

We will present seven steps to accomplish these ends. As we will see, some of the elements included in the other leadership views summarized above are a part of SuperLeadership (for instance, the use of rewards) but as Figure 1 indicates, the focus of the leadership process and the basis of power and the relationship of the SuperLeader with followers are very different.

Step 1—Becoming a Self-Leader

Before learning how to lead others, it is important—to first learn how to lead ourselves. Consequently, the first step to becoming a SuperLeader is to become an effective self-leader.

In a taped interview from the historical files of Hewlett Packard, David Packard, co-founder of Hewlett-Packard, described how, as a young man, he used a daily schedule as a strategy to organize his own efforts. "I was resolved that I was going to have everything organized so, when I was a freshman, I had a schedule set for every day . . . what I was going to do every hour of the day . . . and times set up in the morning to study certain things . . . You did have to allocate your time. . . ." At a very young age, David Packard was developing the self-leadership skills that became so critical to his later success as an executive.

Self-leadership is the influence we exert on ourselves to achieve the self-motivation and self-direction we need to perform. The process of self-leadership consists of an array of behavioral and cognitive strategies for enhancing our own personal effectiveness.

Self-leadership is also the essence of effective followership. As one Ford Motor Co. executive exclaimed to us, "We started participative management, but we didn't know what that meant for the subordinate!" What are the responsibilities of the follower? How does he or she behave in a participative management situation? Developing self-leadership skills is the answer to this question. From a SuperLeadership perspective, effective followers are leaders in their own right—they are skilled at leading themselves.

We will address two classes of self-leadership strategies. The first focuses mainly on effective behavior and action—"behavioral focused strategies"; the second focuses on effective thinking and feeling—"cognitive focused strategies." A summary of these strategies is provided in Figure 2.

Behavioral focused strategies. These self-leadership actions are designed to help individuals organize and direct their own work more effectively. Specifically, these strategies include self-observation, self-goal setting, cue management, self-reward, constructive self-punishment or self-criticism, and rehearsal.

The necessity for self-observation, for example, was dramatically brought forward at Harley Davidson, when the American motorcycle manufacturer instituted a Just-in-Time/employee involvement program. Management had to train workers to use statistical tools to monitor and control the quality of their own work—an effective prerequisite for helping employees to design and conduct their own self-observation system. The Harley story is a resounding success. This is one American company that has been extraordinarily successful in dealing with the Japanese incursion into their markets.
Behavior-Focused Strategies

*Self-Observation*—observing and gathering information about specific behaviors that you have targeted for change

*Self-Set Goals*—setting goals for your own work efforts

*Management of Cues*—arranging and altering cues in the work environment to facilitate your desired personal behaviors

*Rehearsal*—physical or mental practice of work activities before you actually perform them

*Self-Reward*—providing yourself with personally valued rewards for completing desirable behaviors

*Self-Punishment/Criticism*—administering punishments to yourself for behaving in undesirable ways

Cognitive-Focused Strategies

*Building Natural Rewards into Tasks*—self-redesign of where and how you do your work to increase the level of natural rewards in your job. Natural rewards that are part of rather than separate from the work (i.e., the work, like a hobby, becomes the reward) result from activities that cause you to feel:
- a sense of competence
- a sense of self-control
- a sense of purpose

*Focusing Thinking on Natural Rewards*—purposely focusing your thinking on the naturally rewarding features of your work

*Establishment of Effective Thought Patterns*—establishing constructive and effective habits or patterns in your thinking (e.g., a tendency to search for opportunities rather than obstacles embedded in challenges) by managing your:
- beliefs and assumptions
- mental imagery
- internal self-talk

Each of these strategies, with the exception of self-criticism, when practiced consistently and effectively, has been found to be significantly related to higher performance. While self-criticism can at times serve a useful purpose, it tends to have a demoralizing and destructive impact when overused. Nevertheless, constructive self-criticism can sometimes send a signal to others that we are ready to accept responsibility for our own actions—and that we are sometimes human and make a mistake. Recently, basketball coach John Thompson of Georgetown University was ejected from a game when he protested too vigorously to game officials. Later he commented, “It was probably my fault more than the officials’ fault. I have respect for all three of those men. I probably let my competitive juices overflow... I made a mistake.” Thompson’s willingness to recognize some of his own flaws is one reason he is so widely respected.

Cognitive-focused strategies. In addition to behaviorally focused strategies, we can help ourselves to become more effective through the application of self-leadership strategies that promote effective thinking.

First, effective self-leaders can both physically and mentally redesign their own tasks to make them more naturally rewarding; that is, they can create ways to do tasks so that significant natural reward value is obtained from the enjoyment of doing the job itself. Natural rewards are derived from performing tasks in a way that allows us to experience (1) a sense of competence, (2) a sense of self-
control, and (3) a sense of purpose. An example of this notion is embodied in the reply of a young girl featured in a recent news story who was asked why she had made a rock collection, and why she had tried to understand all about rocks. She replied, "Because it makes me feel good in my mind."

Other cognitive strategies help us by establishing constructive and effective habits or patterns of thinking—such as "opportunity thinking" as opposed to "obstacle thinking." For example, by studying and managing our beliefs and assumptions, we can begin to develop the ability to find opportunities in each new work challenge. Until managers began to believe that employees could be important participating partners in the success of American industry, much opportunity for progress was being wasted.

In summary, it's important to remember that if we want to lead others to be self-leaders, we must first practice self-leadership ourselves. If you want to lead somebody, the first critical step is to lead yourself.

**Step 2—Modeling Self-Leadership**

Once we have mastered self-leadership ourselves, the next step is to demonstrate these skills to subordinate employees; that is, our own self-leadership behaviors serve as a model from which others can learn. As Max DePree, chairman of Herman Miller, the office furniture maker, says, "It's not what you preach, but how you behave."

Modeling can be used to develop subordinate self-leadership on a day-to-day basis in two ways. The first use is to establish new behaviors—specifically self-leadership behaviors. The main point is that an employee can learn an entirely new behavior, especially self-leadership, without actually performing it. Executives that are self-starters and well-organized are likely to have subordinates who, in turn, are self-starters and well-organized. Executives, in particular, have a special responsibility to serve as the kind of self-leadership example that they wish subordinate employees to emulate.

The second use involves strengthening the probability of previously learned self-leadership behaviors. Self-leadership behaviors can be enhanced through observation of positive rewards received by others for desired behaviors. We observed, for example, an older woman react with delight when presented with a special achievement award for developing a new inspection procedure at Tandem Computer. She had developed this procedure using her own initiative—she had acted as a self-leader.

This incident served as a symbolic model for other employees at Tandem. Management made it clear that initiating the development of innovative cuing strategies (the inspection procedure) is desirable and that these types of actions are encouraged and rewarded. The hope and intention are that other employees will perceive innovative behavior to be desirable and potentially rewarding. Over time, the objective is to encourage and stimulate widespread incidents of innovative self-leadership.

The lesson from the Tandem incident is straightforward. Employees learn from and are motivated when they see rewards given to others for the performance of self-leadership behaviors. Public recognition to enhance a self-leadership model can be a powerful motivating force for others to initiate self-leadership actions.

Many learn the art of self-leadership from senior executives whom they admire and respect. The book *Eisenhower: Portrait of a Hero* by Peter Lyon (Little Brown, 1974) suggests that General Dwight Eisenhower formulated his own self-leadership style under the guidance of General George Marshall. "What General Marshall wanted most..." were senior officers who would take the responsibility..."
ity for action in their own areas of competence without coming to him for the final decision; officers who in their turn would have enough sense to delegate the details of their decisions to their subordinates.” Learning to lead from those above him, Ike later carried this sense of delegation and control into his own military leadership style.

Sometimes a model of self-leadership can be inspiring. Who can forget the image of Jimmy Carter as he humbly went about building low-cost housing with his own hammer and nails. The sight of a former U.S. President actually engaging in a relatively minor self-leadership behavior had more influence than anything he could have said. Carter seems to be garnering more admiration as a former President than he acquired as a President.

**Step 3—Encouraging Self-Set Goals.**

Goal setting, in general, has been one of the most actively investigated aspects of employee behavior and performance. Several general principles have been derived from this extensive research.

First, virtually any kind of goal setting seems to be better than none at all. The mere existence of a goal serves to focus employee attention and energy. This is one of the most pervasive findings of all organizational psychological research. Further, specific goals seem to be better than ambiguous or “fuzzy” ones. Also, in general, more difficult goals result in higher performance—provided the goals are accepted by the employee.

Last but not least, many believe that participation in setting goals will also enhance performance. The logic is that if an employee sees the goal as his or her own, the employee is more likely to give the effort required to attain the goal. Of course, the idea of participation is very closely connected with the essence of SuperLeadership.

Since the main aim of the SuperLeader is to improve the performance of subordinates through the development of their own self-leadership capabilities, employee self-goal setting is a key element. An important point to note is that goal setting is a learned behavior; that is, it is a skill or sequence of actions that an employee can develop over a period of time, not an innate behavior that every new employee brings to the job. Since self-goal setting is something to be learned, the role of the SuperLeader is to serve as a model, coach, and teacher. The SuperLeader helps employees learn to effectively set specific challenging goals for themselves.

Among the more interesting and extreme examples of institutionalized self-set goals is the “Research Fellows” program at IBM. These high-status, high-performing scientists make their own decisions about how substantial resources will be allocated. Obviously, IBM believes its investment in the self-leadership capabilities of these eminent scientists will pay off in the long run. Other organizations would do well to learn from their example.

These ideas also have currency at the level of the shop floor. In a recent *Business Week* article (August 21, 1989), Alvin K. Allison, leader of a team of mechanics at Monsanto’s Greenwood, South Carolina plant, says, “I knew 20 years ago that I could direct my own job, but nobody wanted to hear what I had to say.” Today, Allison is a part of the upside-down revolution that seems to be driving dramatic improvements in quality and productivity at the Greenwood plant.

**Step 4—Create Positive Thought Patterns**

Constructive thought patterns are an important element in successful self-leadership. Part of the SuperLeader role is to transmit positive thought patterns to subordinates. Especially important is the process of
facilitating positive self-expectation in subordinates.

Sometimes, but especially in the early stages of a new job, employees do not have adequate natural habits of constructive thinking about themselves. They have doubts and fears—a general lack of confidence in themselves. At this stage, the actions of the SuperLeader are critical: His or her positive comments must serve as a temporary surrogate for the employee's own constructive thought patterns. As indicated in a recent Fortune article (March 26, 1990), Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, thinks this issue is critical: "We need to drive self-confidence deep into the organization. . . . We have to undo a 100-year-old concept and convince our managers that their role is not to control people and stay 'on top' of things but rather to guide, energize, and excite."

The notion of constructing positive thought patterns may also be particularly critical when things are not going well. In the book Joe Paterno: Football My Way by Hyman & White (Collier, 1971), the very successful football coach emphasized that enhancing self-esteem is an important part of the equation: "When the staff is down. . . . when the squad is down. . . . when they are starting to doubt themselves. . . . then it's gotta be a positive approach. The minute I have the feeling they have doubts concerning. . . . [their] ability to do it. . . . then I immediately want to jump in there and. . . . talk about how good the kids are and what a great job they've done." He emphasizes confidence and pride: "A coach must be able to develop three things [in a team member] . . . pride, poise, and confidence in himself."

The SuperLeader creates productive thought patterns by carefully expressing confidence in the employee's ability to extend his or her present level of competence. Support and encouragement are necessary. In many ways, this expression of confidence is the essence of the "guided-participation" phase in which SuperLeaders teach each employee to lead himself or herself. We discuss this phase later in this article.

This SuperLeadership behavior is well founded in the results of research on the self-fulfilling prophecy: If a person believes something can be done, that belief makes it more likely that it will be done. Perhaps the SuperLeader plays "Professor Higgins" to an employee's "Eliza." Most of all, through expressions of confidence, the SuperLeader helps to create productive patterns of thinking—new constructive thought habits.

**Step 5 — Develop Self-Leadership Through Reward and Constructive Reprimand**

One of the SuperLeader's most potent strategies in developing employee self-leadership is reward and reinforcement. For the most part, conventional viewpoints about using organizational rewards tend to focus on so-called extrinsic rewards as a means of reinforcing performance. One example is incentive pay systems.

We are basically in sympathy with this behavioral-management viewpoint and generally believe that material rewards should be used to reinforce desirable job-related behaviors. However, rewards take on a new perspective when seen through the eyes of the SuperLeader. If the purpose of the SuperLeader is to lead others to self-leadership, then an essential ingredient is to teach employees how to reward themselves and to build natural rewards into their own work. The SuperLeader attempts to construct a reward system that emphasizes self-administered and natural rewards and, in a comparative sense, de-emphasizes externally administered rewards. Thus the focus shifts from material types of rewards to a stronger emphasis on natural rewards that stem more from the task itself and on self-administration of rewards.
This usually means that people need to have the freedom to do their jobs in the ways they most value and can thrive in; that is, in the ways that they find most naturally rewarding. In the book *Our Story So Far* (3M Co., 1977), William McKnight, former CEO of 3M Company during perhaps 3M's most critical years in becoming an organizational success story, was quoted on the need for employees to do their jobs the way they want to do them. He stated, "Those men and women to whom we delegate authority and responsibility, if they are good people, are going to want to do their jobs in their own way. These are characteristics we want and should be encouraging."

In addition, a new type of reprimand is appropriate to develop employee self-leadership. We know that reprimand, in the short term, can keep somebody's nose to the grindstone, but the effectiveness of this mode of behavior is limited. Author Ken Blanchard was quoted in the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* (May 27, 1987) as saying, "Most managers can get things done when they are around to nag and push. However, the real test of leadership is when management isn't present . . . which is about 70 percent of the time."

From a behavioral viewpoint, reprimand should be easy to understand. When an employee does something wrong, the manager provides a contingent aversive consequence, and the undesirable employee behavior should be reduced or eliminated. However, the long-term efficacy of reprimand is much more complex and leaves much to be desired. Most of all, a complex and sometimes confusing set of emotions typically accompanies reprimand, sometimes even leading to aggressive and disruptive behavior.

Reprimand is usually the opposite of what needs to be done to develop productive thought patterns in others. One objective of the SuperLeader is to encourage constructive self-confidence as an important part of the transition to self-leadership, but reprimand induces guilt and depression and diminishes self-confidence. On the other hand, if a SuperLeader treats a mistake as a learning opportunity, then employee self-esteem can be enhanced. After all, one sign of self-confidence is an individual objectively realizing that he has "made every mistake in the book" and has the experience and confidence to handle surprising situations.

We do recognize that reprimand is sometimes a necessary element in a SuperLeader's repertoire of behaviors, especially with careless or chronic underperformers. The most important lesson to remember is that the careless use of reprimand can be very discouraging to employees who are in their transition to self-leadership. The main focus should be to treat a mistake as a learning opportunity, to provide positive acceptance of the person despite the mistake, and to remember how the opportunity to make mistakes was a critical element in the SuperLeader's own development. Following these tips will result in a constructive feedback process that is more effective than the traditional use of reprimand and that positively influences employee self-leadership and long-term effectiveness.

**Step 6—Promote Self-Leadership Through Teamwork**

One of the more interesting examples of self-leadership systems is the team-oriented system at Volvo. Volvo has considerable experience with team assembly concepts, which were pioneered at its Kalmar plant. Further, the automobile assembly approach has been completely scrapped in the design of the new $315 million plant at Uddevalla. The key organizational philosophy at this plant is the work team, and the technical system has been designed to match the team concept. As Peter Gyllenhammar, Volvo's CEO, says, "I want the people in a team to be able to go home at
night and really say, "I built that car."

In the U.S., the self-managing team concept has had a slow but steady start. More recent media interest seems to indicate that the team idea is about to take off. The dramatic success of the team approach at the GM-Toyota joint venture in Fremont, California has been instructive to the U.S. automotive industry in general. In our own research, we have documented the leader characteristics that are necessary to make a team effort successful, the core of which are the basic principles of SuperLeadership.

Top-management teams are also important, as represented by this quote that appeared in Fortune (August, 1987) from Tom Watson, Jr., former CEO of IBM: "My most important contribution to IBM was my ability to pick strong and intelligent men and then hold the team together. . . ."

One of the more interesting indicators of a self-leadership culture is the presence of quite a few teams. The types of teams (not all work groups are called teams) include product teams, top-executive teams, ad hoc teams, and shop-floor self-managing teams. Of course, teams require a good deal of self-leadership at the group level to function correctly.

Teamwork is important at Hewlett-Packard when it comes to the precision timing and integration required for successful new product release. At H-P, a committee called "board of directors" serves to drive the process to completion. Representatives from every department involved in the project serve on these committees.

**Step 7—Facilitate a Self-Leadership Culture**

A major factor in developing SuperLeadership is the challenge of designing an integrated organizational culture that is conducive to high performance. Organizations will find it difficult to obtain initiative and innovation from employees without providing a pervasive environment that facilitates those elements of self-leadership.

For the most part, we focus on the one-on-one relationship between a SuperLeader and an employee: How can an executive lead that employee to lead himself or herself? For an organization, however, the best results derive from a total integrated system that is deliberately intended to encourage, support, and reinforce self-leadership throughout the system. Most of all, this is an issue that addresses the question of how top executives can create self-leadership cultures.

One company that has shown demonstrable results of an effort to develop a self-leadership culture is Xerox Corporation, recent winner of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The award recognizes companies that attain preeminent leadership in quality control. At Xerox, the quality effort includes plant-level employee "family groups" that work with little direct supervision. But most of all, the award recognizes the effort of Xerox to build a total quality culture based on bottom-up employee involvement.

At another company, Dana Corporation, highly visible symbolic acts were instrumental in turning the organizational culture around. One of Rene McPherson's first concerns was to indicate the importance of giving discretion to make decisions down through the ranks. The most famous story is about one of his first actions: eliminating the procedures manual. According to one account, the procedures manual had risen to a height of 22.5 inches. McPherson was said to have dumped it in a wastebasket and replaced it with a one-page policy statement.

Rene McPherson used the following metaphor to describe his philosophy of a decentralized self-leadership culture at Dana as reported in an article in Management Review entitled "Hell Week—Or How Dana Makes its Managers Money Conscious" (1984). "You
can control a business in one of two ways: You can institute a kind of martial law, with troops stationed in each hamlet or village standing guard; or you can sit back and let each village be self-governing . . . . What we are after is to help that person [the division manager] to be [his own] . . . manager.” McPherson said of his division managers, “We didn’t tell the guys what they were gonna do—they came in and told us!”

Through his radical change in culture, McPherson has left a meaningful legacy for Dana Corporation. He transformed a top-heavy, bureaucratic, sluggish organization into one of the most successful and competitive manufacturing businesses in the United States today. Self-leadership was a key ingredient: Rene McPherson demonstrated a special capacity to lead others to lead themselves.

SuperLeadership at the top requires the creation of positive organizational cultures within which self-leadership can flourish. Such environments consist of a host of factors, some observable and concrete, others more subtle and symbolic. Culture becomes particularly important when it comes to balancing the needs of individualism with the needs for organized, coordinated effort. As Peter Drucker put it in the July 3, 1989 issue of Fortune “. . . it is important to build up the oboist as an oboist, but it is even more important to build up the oboist’s pride in the performance of the orchestra . . . it puts a tremendous premium on having very clear goals and a very clear and demanding mission for the enterprise.” Overreaching organizational values that support self-leadership are perhaps the most important factor.

Ford Motor Company, for example, has developed a set of guidelines that is widely circulated throughout the corporation and known as its “Mission, Values and Guiding Principles.” Among other things, they identify employee involvement and teamwork as Ford’s “core human values”.

In addition, training and development efforts that equip employees with both task-performance and self-leadership capabilities are important means of stimulating cultures based on leading others to lead themselves. Thus the SuperLeader’s challenge is not limited to direct one-on-one leadership; the SuperLeader must also foster an integrated world in which self-leadership can survive and grow; in which self-leadership becomes an exciting, motivating, and accepted way of life. At lower levels, the challenge for aspiring SuperLeaders is to develop subcultures within their own control that stimulate the unique self-leadership strengths of subordinates.

**THE TRANSITION TO SELF-LEADERSHIP**

Three basic assumptions underlie our ideas on self-leadership. First, everyone practices self-leadership to some degree, but not everyone is an effective self-leader. Second, self-leadership can be learned, and thus is not restricted to people who are “born” to be self-starters or self-motivated. And third, self-leadership is relevant to executives, managers, and all employees—that is, to everyone who works.

Few employees are capable of highly effective self-leadership the moment they enter a job situation. Especially at the beginning, the SuperLeader must provide orientation, guidance, and direction. The need for specific direction at the beginning stages of employment stems from two sources. First, the new employee is unfamiliar with the objectives, tasks, and procedures of his or her position. He or she will probably not yet have fully developed task capabilities. But more pertinent, the new employee may not yet have an adequate set of self-leadership skills. For the SuperLeader, the challenge lies in shifting employees to self-leadership. Thus the role of the SuperLeader becomes critical; He or she must lead others to lead themselves.
Throughout the entire process of leading others to lead themselves, aspects of SuperLeadership are involved that do not necessarily represent a distinct step but that are nevertheless quite important. For example, encouragement of followers to exercise initiative, take on responsibility, and to use self-leadership strategies in an effective way to lead themselves, is an important feature that runs through the entire process. Also, a feature we call guided participation is very important to SuperLeadership. This involves facilitating the gradual shifting of followers from dependence to independent self-leadership through a combination of initial instruction, questions that stimulate thinking about self-leadership (e.g., what are you shooting for? . . . what is your goal. How well do you think you’re doing?), and increasing participation of followers.

Consider the goal setting process as an example of how the transition to self-leadership unfolds. Teaching an employee how to set goals can follow a simple procedure: First, an employee is provided with a model to emulate; second, he or she is allowed guided participation; and finally, he or she assumes the targeted self-leadership skill, which in this case is goal setting. Once again modeling is an especially key element in learning this skill. Because of their formal position of authority, SuperLeaders have a special responsibility to personally demonstrate goal setting behavior that can be emulated by other employees. Furthermore, goals need to be coordinated among the different levels of the hierarchy. Subordinate goals, even those that are self-set, need to be consistent with superior and organizational goals.

A SuperLeader takes into account the employee's time and experience on the job, as well as the degree of the employee's skill and capabilities. For a new employee, whose job-related and self-leadership skills may yet be undeveloped, an executive may wish to begin with assigned goals, while modeling self-set goals for himself or herself. Within a short period of time, the SuperLeader endeavors to move toward interactive goals. Usually the best way to accomplish this is by "guided participation," which includes asking the employee to propose his or her own goals. At this stage, the SuperLeader still retains significant influence over goal setting, actively proposing and perhaps imposing some of the goals. Usually, this is the give and take that is typical of the traditional MBO approach.

Finally, for true self-leadership to develop and flourish, the SuperLeader will deliberately move toward employee self-set goals. In this situation, the SuperLeader serves as a source of information and experience, as a sounding board, and as the transmitter of overall organizational goals. In the end, in a true self-leadership situation, the employee is given substantial latitude to establish his or her own goals.

We have found that sharing goal setting with subordinates is frequently one of the most difficult transitions for traditional leaders to understand and accept on their road to effective SuperLeadership. Often, an executive is reluctant to provide the full opportunity for a subordinate to lead himself or herself because it seems the executive is losing control.

One of the most interesting aspects of Coach Joe Paterno is his ability to be introspective about this dilemma of overcontrol and under control. Hyman and White quoted him as follows: "It's difficult," he candidly admits, "for me to handle people in the way I think they want to be handled . . . because I have a tendency to want complete control. . . . In the early part of my career, . . . I would plot every offensive and defensive move we would use in a ball game and try to devise the game play by myself . . . . I felt that I had to have input in everything that went on every minute of the day and every day
of the week." Paterno seems destined to deal with the classic dilemma between his natural "hands on" activist leadership style and the behaviors required of a SuperLeader. There seems to be a conflict between his emotional self, which has a strong desire to control—perhaps over-control—the situation, versus his intellectual self, which realizes the necessity and benefit of providing more opportunity for his assistant coaches. The "natural" self says, "Hey, I gotta get in there and do it myself," while the intellectual self says, "I have to stand back and give them an opportunity to do it." In the end, the important thing, he says, "is still keeping control but knowing when you don't have to have control."

Good leaders intuitively understand the effects on performance of "knowing where they are going." During subordinate employees' critical transition from traditional external leadership to self-leadership, previous dependency on superior authority needs to be unlearned. In its place, employees must develop a strong sense of confidence in their own abilities to set realistic and challenging goals on their own.

Frequently this transition is not very smooth, leaving the employee wondering why "the boss" is not providing more help, and the executive biting his lip to avoid telling the employee to do the "right thing." Employees need to have some latitude in making mistakes during this critical period.

Reprimand takes on special importance during the critical transition phase, when the superior-subordinate relationship is very delicate. Careless use of reprimand can seriously set back the employee's transition to self-leadership. The issue becomes especially salient when employees make mistakes—sometimes serious mistakes. In our experience, during the transition to self-leadership, some mistakes are inevitable and should be expected as an employee reaches out. The way the SuperLeader responds to the mistakes can ensure or thwart a successful transition. Again, in 3M's historical book Our Story So Far, former CEO William McKnight commented on the issue this way, "Mistakes will be made, but if a person is essentially right, the mistakes he or she makes are not as serious in the long run as the mistakes management will make if it is dictatorial and undertakes to tell those under its authority exactly how they must do their job . . . . Management that is destructively critical when mistakes are made kills initiative and it is essential that we have many people with initiative if we're going to grow."

Andrew Grove, CEO of chip maker Intel Corporation, discussed the issue of how to react when an employee seems to be making a mistake. Reacting too soon or too harshly can result in a serious setback in efforts to develop employee self-leadership. According to Grove, the manager needs to consider the degree to which the error can be tolerated or not. For example, if the task is an analysis for internal use, the experience the employee receives may be well worth some wasted work and delay. However, if the error involves a shipment to a customer, the customer should not bear the expense of boosting the employee further down the learning curve.

Sometimes the SuperLeader might deliberately hold back goals or decisions that, at other times, in other places, he or she would be more than willing to provide. Self-led employees must learn to stand on their own.

Once through this critical transition phase, the effects on the self-led employee's performance can be remarkable. Effectively leading themselves produces a motivation and psychological commitment that energizes employees to greater and greater achievements. SuperLeaders who have successfully unleashed the power of self-led employees understand the ultimate reward and satisfaction of managing these individuals.
SUPERLEADERSHIP: A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK

It should be clear by now that we are addressing a different approach to leadership, radically unlike many of the classic stereotypes of strong leadership. Most of all, we believe that SuperLeadership is a process that can be learned, that is not restricted to a few "special" individuals that are born with an unusual capability. Granted, some seem to have more to learn than others, but the potential for SuperLeadership seems to be almost universal.

Figure 3 is a representation of the separate components of SuperLeadership, brought together in an organized framework with self-leadership at the core. The logic is that each SuperLeadership component is of central importance to the development of the self-leadership system within each employee. The potential payoffs include increased employee performance and innovation flowing from enhanced commitment, motivation, and employee capability.

It seems clear that an essential ingredient to SuperLeadership is a boundless optimism about the potential of ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. In the March 26, 1990 issue of Fortune, Max DePree, Herman Miller chairman, put it this way: "Take a 33-year old man who assembles chairs. He’s been doing it several years. He has a wife and
two children. He knows what to do when the children have earaches, and how to get them through school. He probably serves on a volunteer board, and when he comes to work we give him a supervisor. . . . He doesn’t need one.” This positive viewpoint of man in general is a fairly common characteristic of SuperLeaders. They seem to have unlimited faith that, if given the opportunity to perform, most people will come through for them.

SuperLeadership is not all that unusual if we just know where to look for it. The Peace Corps, for example, has been an organization in the business of producing SuperLeaders for years, even though they don’t use the term. Consider the young woman, Patty, who organizes health education events for the women and children of a third-world community. Eventually, the community decides itself to build community latrines, and within a year, 15 latrines have been constructed. Health improves. Now, building latrines doesn’t sound much like the stuff of leadership, but this young Peace Corps volunteer was indeed a SuperLeader by leading others to lead themselves to accomplish something of critical importance to all those who were involved.

It’s all too easy to underestimate the capability of seemingly ordinary people. Lincoln Electric, the highly successful welding manufacturer, found some special capabilities among its employees when its sales were sagging in 1982. Faced with a no-layoff policy, management asked its factory workers for some help. Fifty of their production workers volunteered to help out in sales.

After a quickie sales training course, the former production workers started calling on body shops all over the country. They concentrated on small shops that would be able to use the company’s Model SP200, a small welder. The end of the story is that their efforts brought in $10 million in new sales and established the small arc welder as one of Lincoln’s best-selling items.

Lincoln Electric was relying on the idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Like real SuperLeaders, they were willing to take a risk on people; and the risk frequently becomes self-fulfilling. Lincoln carries this philosophy throughout all parts of the organization. As one example, it manages to produce the lowest cost, highest quality welders in the industry with a supervisor to worker ratio of 1 to 100. Yes, that’s right—one supervisor for every 100 workers. Clearly, this would not be possible unless every employee was considered to be a true self-leader. At Lincoln, every employee is evaluated on the ability to work without supervision.

Ideally, the SuperLeader comes to be surrounded by strong people—self-leaders in their own right—who pursue exceptional achievement because they love to. The SuperLeader’s strength is greatly enhanced because it is drawn from the strength of many people who have been encouraged to grow, flourish, and become important contributors. The SuperLeader becomes “Super” through the talents and capabilities of others. As self-leadership is nurtured, the power for progress is unleashed. In the March 26, 1990 issue of Fortune, Colgate-Palmolive CEO Ruben Mark put it this way: “I see business moving away from the authoritarian approach and toward a shared decision-making approach. . . . making partnership with our own people.”

SuperLeadership offers the most viable mechanism for establishing exceptional self-leading followers. True excellence can be achieved by facilitating the self-leadership system that operates within each person—by challenging each person to reach deep inside for the best each has to offer. Employee compliance is not enough. Leading others to lead themselves is the key to tapping the intelligence, the spirit, the creativity, the commitment, and most of all the tremendous unique
potential of each individual.

To us, the message is clear: Excellence is achievable, but only if leaders are dedicated to tapping the vast potential within each individual. Most of all, this does not mean that more so-called charismatic or transformational leaders are needed to influence followers to comply with and carry out the vision of the leader. Rather, the vision itself needs to reflect and draw upon the vast resources contained within individual employees.

The currently popular notion that excellent leaders need to be visionary and charismatic may be a trap if taken too far. Wisdom on leadership for centuries has warned us about this potential trap. Remember what Abraham Lincoln said, "You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves." Remember, also, the timeless words, "Give a man a fish and he will be fed for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will be fed for a lifetime."

It is time to transcend the notion of leaders as heroes and to focus instead on leaders as hero-makers. Is the spotlight on the leader, or on the achievements of the followers? To discover this new breed of leader, look not at the leader but at the followers. SuperLeaders have Super Followers that are dynamic self-leaders. The SuperLeader leads others to lead themselves. Perhaps this spirit was captured most succinctly by Lao-tzu, a sixth-century B.C. Chinese philosopher, when he wrote the following:

A leader is best
When people barely know he exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him.
Worse when they despise him.
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will say:
We did it ourselves.

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