





# You Are a Leader

Whether you know it or not, whether you want to be one or not.

BY JIM BOUCHARD

You inspire people—whether you know it or not.

You empower people, sometimes even if you're not trying to.

You guide people—whether you want to or not.

What is your definition of “leader”? Before you go any further, let's see if we're singing in harmony. If not—there's no point in pursuing this venture any further. Here's the definition adopted for this article; let's see if you fundamentally agree. A leader is simply someone with the ability to attract *willing* followers. And again, whether you know it or not, or whether you're willing or not, there are people who follow your lead of their own free will.

The best leaders are people who have the will to serve their followers and give them the tools they need to make their lives better.

Something else we should clarify is that you need no specific number of followers to be a leader. You can lead one or you can lead millions. And you can change the world for the better or cause incredible damage by your influence on just one person.

## Leadership is a responsibility, and it's a responsibility we all share.

What defines us as leaders is whether we choose to accept or attempt to shirk our responsibilities—and in which direction we decide to lead.

Let's dig a little deeper into the fundamentals. These are the essential disciplines of the leader:

**Inspire.** You touch other people's hearts. Whether you know it or not, and whether you want to or not. You can inspire love or fear. You can make someone's heart or break it. If you've been on this planet for any significant time, you've probably done both.

**Empower.** You give people tools. Again, whether you know it or want to, you share many things with people. One of the most important ways to empower others is to encourage them—and you do. The bigger question is what, exactly, are you encouraging others to do?

**Guide.** You show the way. Through your words, your actions, and who you choose to take under your wing. It's a fact. Someone looks to you for guidance—whether you know it or not, whether you choose to or not. Where are you guiding them?





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You are a leader. You might not be the boss—that's the excuse given most often by people who still hesitate or even refuse to accept that they are leaders. That excuse supports the toughest argument still faced when trying to change people's minds about leadership. The plain fact is that some people cling to one or more of the following faulty beliefs:

- Leaders are born, not made.
- *Everyone* can't be the leader.
- There are too many leaders and not enough followers.

First of all, you might not be the boss, but leadership has nothing to do with rank, title, or position of authority. It has to do with how you inspire, empower, and guide others. Everyone knows tremendous leaders who have no title or rank. These people usually have little power or authority in the traditional sense, but they have influence. They inspire, empower, and guide people—sometimes even those at the top. If you doubt that,

watch "Undercover Boss" sometime.

And of course, you all know people with incredible power and authority who just aren't any good at it. You all know people who have the rank or the title but little or no respect, trust, or loyalty from the people "below" them.

### Let's address some of those excuses

**Leaders are born.** In fact, everyone is a born leader. Many of the mental health issues people face are due to a significant degree of the real or perceived inability to influence others at any given time. If you don't make a difference in other people's lives, you don't feel healthy. Having said that, it does take a lot of work to be a good leader. And for the best leaders, this work never ends. The most effective leaders are those who accept that perfection is not a destination but a never-ending process. The best of the best are obsessed with continual self-improvement as leaders and as people.

**Everyone can't be the leader.** This one can get a little complicated. The traditional model of command and control is dead. It is now understood that the roles of leader and follower are not fixed positions, but rather dynamic roles. In self-directed teams, people flow back and forth in these roles seamlessly, depending on the situation and the talents, skills, and experience needed to take charge or manage decisions. Everyone can't be the leader, but anyone can be the leader in the right situation.

**Too many leaders, not enough followers.** Some will still say there are too many leaders, but leaders are people who inspire, empower, and guide others to their very best—people like you. We can never have enough. ■

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