

BUILDING LEADERS

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP GOO!



Ever think about how the most powerful people in your organization have comparatively little control over their calendars? Everybody wants to see them, and most – if not all – of those requests are accompanied by some semblance of defensible business rationale. For example, we worked with an executive a few years back who shared that, before she made one discretionary decision regarding her upcoming work week, she was booked into 40 hours of prioritized meetings.

Since you are in the middle of considering these things: What exactly is power? And perhaps more importantly: If you are a learning professional who seeks to develop strategies to help those that have the potential to become those powerful people, how do you proceed?

To answer those questions, it may be helpful to consider power and its relationship to leadership. Power is influence potential. Think of it as a reservoir of dormant energy waiting to be deployed. Comparatively, leadership is an attempt to influence. Think of it as the kinetic energy a leader puts in motion to get things done through others.

Those of us responsible for designing and implementing strategies to develop leaders have been actively studying that energy for a long time. For instance, we have known since the 15th century and the documented observations of Niccolò Machiavelli that the source of power emanates from two highly interdependent sources:

- **Legitimacy:** The power of your position. It includes your ability to formally reward or sanction others, as well as the decision authority that comes with your title. In general, people are promoted into positions of legitimate power based on their ability to deliver results, build trust and develop relevant expertise. They lose that power when they fail to properly exercise their authority or make decisions that are not aligned with organizational strategy or cultural imperative.
- **Referent:** The power of trust and credibility. Do people “identify” with you? Do they candidly tell you the truth, especially when there is perceived risk attached to that transparency? Typically, people earn referent power with others gradually. They can lose referent power almost instantly when the actions they take or the decisions they make are not aligned with the reputations they have built over time.

Energy in motion – leadership – has always been difficult to define (which is probably the reason there are nearly 7,000 definitions). So consider a description we recently came across while listening to two radio talk show hosts discussing the leadership attributes of Dan Mullen, football coach for the University of Florida:

- Host 1: He may not be the smartest guy when it comes to X's and O's, but he has this leadership goo that just sort of sticks to you every time he walks into a room.
- Host 2: Leadership goo?

- Host 1: Yeah! I don't care who you are, or what you are trying to do; when you are in his presence you feel a surge of confidence that you simply don't feel when he isn't around.

LEADERSHIP IS THE KINETIC ENERGY A LEADER PUTS IN MOTION TO GET THINGS DONE THROUGH OTHERS.

All of that is to say, if you want to develop leaders in your organization, at minimum, do these four things:

1. Identify the leaders who deploy energy in your organization. They have the goo!
2. Identify the people who are drawn to that energy and seek to source it themselves. They want the goo!
3. Put them in a room together as often as possible (in full recognition of the scheduling challenges identified previously).
4. Fight the urge to establish air-tight objectives or construct an agenda for these exchanges. Simply sit in the back of the room – whether physical or virtual – and watch the energy start to flow. 🔄

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