Follow The Leader

If your childhood was anything like mine, it was packed full of games of "follow the leader." I especially loved the bike version. My friends and I would saddle up on our Schwinn Sting-Rays — banana seats, baseball cards clothes-pinned to the spokes — and take turns leading the way. Launching off curbs. Slamming on the brakes to create fishtails. Inventing imaginary obstacle courses. On the long days of summer, we'd ride for hours until the streetlights came on, signaling the close of business.

Looking back, that childhood game was a pretty equal-opportunity endeavor. If you wanted to be the leader, all you had to do was show up and wait your turn. No interview needed. No qualifications required. No dotted line to sign.

But what works on the streets of suburban Los Angeles can become a train wreck in other settings. Any serious initiative requires more from its leaders than just showing up and waiting for their number to be called to run the show.

We've all tasted both the agony and the ecstasy of leadership. We've watched people get handed the helm and run the ship aground in short order. And we've watched others rise to the occasion and deliver something exceptional.

John Maxwell's book *The 5 Levels of Leadership* has helped me think through why that is. He outlines five stages:

- **Level 1 — Position Leadership:** People follow leaders because they're obligated to.
- **Level 2 — Permission Leadership:** Encourages people to follow willingly through trust and respect.
- **Level 3 — Production Leadership:** Leverages success to inspire and attract high performers.
- **Level 4 — People Development Leadership:** Mentors and empowers team members to grow into leaders themselves.
- **Level 5 — Pinnacle Leadership:** People follow leaders who exemplify core values.

Level 5 Pinnacle Leadership is what we are after. People follow a leader that they are drawn to –- not because of what they do, but because of who they are. It's inside-out. It's leading with your life.

As I like to say, the weight of your leadership is in direct proportion to the depth of your character.

If you thumb through the Old Testament, you'll find Daniel was this kind of leader. Tucked in the middle of the book that bears his name is this line: *Daniel began distinguishing himself… because he possessed an extraordinary spirit*. Trace the through-line of his life and leadership, and you'll see a man with character that was uncompromising, convictions that were unwavering, and confidence in God that was unconditional.

That, my friends, is leading with your life.

So — what kind of leader do you want to follow?

And more importantly: what kind of leader do you want to be?

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