

## Chapter 1

### WHAT MAKES YOU THE BOSS?

I am writing this book based on thirty years of work and consulting experience in business. What might make my perspective on leadership different from other authors' is that my vantage point in many of these companies was not from the boardroom or the executive suite, but from the other end of the company—in the offices and on the factory floors. It was not until several years into my work life that I began to move my way up through organizations and eventually occupy executive leadership positions. From there, I began to realize the significant disconnect between many executives and those they are entrusted to lead. Like pieces in a puzzle, my last three decades in the businesses I have been fortunate enough to lead or build have provided me a level of understanding about leadership, and more important about what it takes to help people and to help business move forward.

The title of this book, *Simply Forward*, seemed to be all too perfect for describing something as simple and genuine as leading people. What I have witnessed in businesses from the automotive plants in the United States to the building products companies of Eastern China is how complicated business has become for so many people. It is for that very reason that I decided to write this book, as I have always found that leading others, if approached from the right perspective, with the intention of providing universal benefit, is fulfilling and worth the journey.

I guess I should start by saying that I believe leadership is an art, not a science. I am sure you have heard people say that this or that person is a “born leader.” Well, some people are born with inherent or learned traits and behaviors that are essential for effective leadership. We will cover those later in the book. But leadership is something you practice and rehearse much like a doctor practices medicine or a comic rehearses the delivery of his punch line. Leadership is something you learn by witnessing your own achievements or defeats and those of others in business or in everyday life. Leadership is also very subtle; and many times when people are being lead effectively they do not realize it until after they are separated from the leader. And contrary to most thoughts on this topic, leadership is almost never one way. By far I have learned more about leadership and about myself from those seeking my support than what they have learned from me.

Although my early formal education was concentrated in manufacturing engineering, my largest concentration of study, and the one that has provided the greatest benefit and inspiration, is the study of people. People, all people, are and will always be the greatest asset to any organization. However, it has been my experience that leaders who fail in their quest to accomplish great things with others often forget to acknowledge this very simple and obvious fact: People will

follow knowledge or experience, but they would rather follow passion. They want to know that:

- the leader believes in what he or she is saying and pursuing;
- the leader is invested in their issues;
- there is a place for them in the pursuit of success;
- they have a way forward and are willing and able to take action if needed; and
- they will be the catalyst for positive change in a direction and at a pace that works for everyone.

People want to contribute, but they need a platform of opportunity from which they can stand and reach to invest their talents and help themselves and others to move forward. Those platforms of opportunity are at different levels and in various sizes as every person has unique abilities, desires, and expectations of themselves and others. Great leaders create great opportunities for individuals to obtain personal growth while helping their organization and their team to achieve success.

### What Makes You the Boss?

In the late 1990s I facilitated leadership training to a large group of middle managers at a medical device manufacturing company in New Hampshire. After nearly thirty years of business the company had recruited me to help convert the management and departmental structure of this two-shift, 800-person business to a team-based environment.

On the first day of training managers from all departments filed in, filling nearly all of the forty seats in the classroom. On the screen in the front of the room was the first of my five-slide presentation—an all black background with a question in big white letters, “What makes you the boss?” As the managers sat there pondering this question I went to the side of the room and sat in silence. Some snickered, others chatted among themselves, and a steady tone of discussion filled the room. After a minute I stood and said, “What makes you the boss?” Everyone stopped talking, and looked at each other as if they had never thought about the question before. After thirty seconds and without receiving any credible answer to this rhetorical question, I reached up to the wall switch and turned off the lights. I asked again, “What makes you the boss?” After a few seconds a voice from the back of the room said, “Because my boss promoted me and said I was.” “Because I know more than anyone in my department, and they needed me to make sure everything is done correctly,” from the opposite end of the room. The frequency of responses increased and before long a steady delivery of different but similar answers began to cascade out of the darkness. Finally from the back of the room I heard the question I was waiting for, “So, Mr. Glover, what would you say makes you the boss?”

I turned the lights back on and the discussion stopped.

My title will not help me to give you the insight you will need to be a great leader. My knowledge of business or our industry alone will not help this company to triple sales and profits. The real opportunity for me is to help you understand the power each of you has to move others forward. When I first asked you the question “What makes you the boss?” no one wanted to answer. I knew if I could get one of you to answer most or all of you would contribute, so I turned off the lights. Understanding people, I know with the lights off people are less intimidated to respond. In the safety of darkness someone answered and that paved the way for others to contribute. Therefore, maybe what I provided was opportunity, not directive.

This slide and question is one I use often as a catalyst for discussions into the difference between management and leadership. It underscores a host of issues I feel continue to stifle the innovation and continuous improvement needed by organizations to flourish in today’s global economy. I believe that there are many ways to minimize the success of any organization and only one way an organization can perform to its greatest potential. The continuous pursuit of that best way should consume the talents, energies, and ideas of everyone in the organization, every single day. This leads me to my first critical element of helping people and organizations to move forward.

### Creating the Active Social Network

Some might argue—judging from the responses of these participants—that this collection of middle managers to whom I provided leadership training is not representative of today’s brightest leaders, that somehow this group will not be the demographic leading the charge of global business development into the future. I assure you they are. Your message as a leader of an organization is only as good, as inspiring, as compelling as those helping you to deliver it. I’ve grown to understand that a leader’s ability or inability to package and deliver a message that is transportable through the active social network in an organization will be the difference between forward motion and no motion at all.

Let’s begin by discussing the interaction between people and positions in organizations. I am not sure when it happened, but over the last twenty years it seems that society has created an artificial differentiation between the academic and non-academic paths into business. I do not use the word artificial because the paths are not really different, but more to illustrate that society has identified academics as a key criterion for elevating a person’s standing, intelligence, capabilities, and worth, not only in business but in society itself. This artificial elevation of status, intelligence, and worth is one of the core contributors to the division in today’s

organizations. Those entering the workforce from the university systems are informed and believe that their hard work and financial investment elevates their preparation for business positions above those who did not receive “higher education.” Those entering the workforce from high school, who have worked on the job learning their industry or craft during the same time frame, feel their hands-on experience has provided a real-world knowledge that can’t be offered in the classroom. The reality is that without both of these groups and bases of knowledge the organization, in any industry, will have limited success.

Some might consider this an obvious and easy conclusion to make. But I find that leaders who fail to achieve great things in their organizations fail to approach all levels of their organizations with this deep understanding. I have worked with people on factory floors and in back offices all over the U.S. and in China. When I ask people what they want most from their leaders and from the companies they work for they tell me two things most often: One, they want to be respected not only as a person but also for the knowledge they have gained through their life’s work, and two, they want to contribute work that is meaningful, work that will help their company be successful. This is the element they connect to job security.

My position in this book is not to dismiss or support either path into business or any individual’s pursuit into a chosen vocation or career. What I am saying is that in order for people to connect and coexist, in order for two or more people to reach consensus and move forward they must find common ground.

I have seen this debate between academics and non-academics as the seed of division that can grow and fester in business. As companies have developed more sophisticated hiring requirements for key management positions, they have increasingly utilized education as a critical differentiator and key component for leadership positions. Many times the academic component is so important that individuals who possess the very skills needed to execute successfully in leadership positions are filtered out in the electronic process. With this filtering and separation, a slow and deliberate migration has divided most organizations into three groups: Navigators, Drivers, and Transmitters. I will explain these groups later in this chapter.

It’s likely my attitude toward leading or helping others to move forward was altered by my non-traditional path to leadership. Instead of taking the more celebrated path of a formal college education, my journey began from the back of a broom, onto the factory floor, through middle management, and finally into executive leadership. It was my perception early in my twenties that I would never be able to lead people, improve systems, or help organizations to move forward if I didn’t understand how people worked, what they thought, and how they processed information. Although I attended several years of college in the evenings while I worked in industry during the day, my fascination with people and how they responded to various leadership styles made the greatest impact on me. My observation working my way up through organizations is that the challenges, the motivators, and the understanding of business are very different depending on someone’s social, economic, or

professional situation. These differences can neutralize even the best and well-thought-through strategies, and consequently forward motion is usually below expectations.

I've always operated by some guiding principles that have been successful for me:

1. People do not work for leaders, leaders work with people in pursuit of a common purpose for the betterment of its company's stakeholders.
2. Leaders offer the same level of respect and professional courtesy to all people at all levels in the organization.
3. All people, regardless of education, experience, race, gender, or social status, have equal intellectual and physical capacity to help people and organizations to move forward.

### Navigators, Drivers, and Transmitters

Now, let's dig into the three organizational groups mentioned earlier: Navigators, Drivers, and Transmitters. If you are a Board Member or the CEO of an organization your vantage point, your challenges, your motivators, and your understanding of the business and business climate are much different from even those on your executive team. But, quite often, executive leadership at the President and Vice President level are brought into the fold and so they too share in this "homogenizing" of information and a common executive language. We will call this group the *Navigators*.

If you work in an operations, sales, service, or administrative function in a non-supervisory position your vantage point, your challenges, your motivators, and your understanding of the business and business climate are much different from those of the Navigators. The access to information is limited, and the view of the business challenges and successes is either not provided or filtered significantly. We will call this group the *Drivers*.

If you are at a director, manager, or supervisor level in an organization your vantage point, your challenges, your motivators, and your understanding of the business and business climate are typically a combination or hybrid of both the Navigators and the Drivers. We will call this group the *Transmitters*.

Each of these groups not only interacts with the organization differently, it also approaches its work differently. The influences of internal business interests versus external business interests are different. The expectation of what level of commitment the group is willing to provide is also different. The language is different, or I should say the style or way in which each group communicates within its own group and to each of the other groups is different.

Why is any of this relevant? Every business or group hinges its strategy for success on critical strategic elements with which it will market itself, sell itself, and compete

against industry rivals in order to survive in today's tough global business climate. Executing and sustaining the critical strategic elements needed to leverage value propositions cannot be attained unless they are clearly communicated, understood, and pursued every single day by all positions at all levels in your business. Navigators need to ensure the Drivers in the organization are not only able to connect those critical elements to long-term success, but also to connect how their active involvement can directly impact the business's probability of success.

It is between these two groups, the Navigators (executives) and the Drivers (non-managerial staff), that I see the largest breakdown in communication for many companies.

#### A Breakdown in Communication

This breakdown occurs for many reasons and the result is that the company's strategy, message, intended execution, and speed of action are subpar.

First, today's organizations have a larger array of challenges facing them than they did twenty or thirty years ago. The global economy has expanded the level of competition in every industry. Technology has provided the consumer with a vehicle to research and find new sources of products globally. Companies today must do more than simply make great products; they must put as many resources as possible into the promotion and positioning of their products in the marketplace. These escalating demands on organizations have expanded the organizational structure and the specialization of departments and executives needed to lead them. This expansion and specialization has added difficulty to delivering a consistent message and strategy throughout the firm.

Second, twenty or thirty years ago individuals worked at companies for a longer time and progressed in their careers by "working their way up." This provided a broader understanding of the company and over a period of time garnered them credibility with their peers. I can testify that people who work their way up through companies often tend to develop the trust and respect needed to implement new company initiatives. Because they worked over a period of years in each of the three groups they learned the various languages and understood the groups' respective needs. This allowed them to deliver the objectives, the reasoning, and the path to all levels effectively.

With today's more demanding and complex businesses, Navigators need to have ready an *active social network* that will transmit, reinforce, and help sustain and support the pursuit of these critical strategic elements to the Drivers of the business.

This is why middle management, supervisors, or team leaders (Transmitters) are critical ambassadors for high-performance change in business. They can help bridge the gap between what executives are trying to say and what employees are hearing. These Transmitters present and reinforce a leader's message when he or she is not

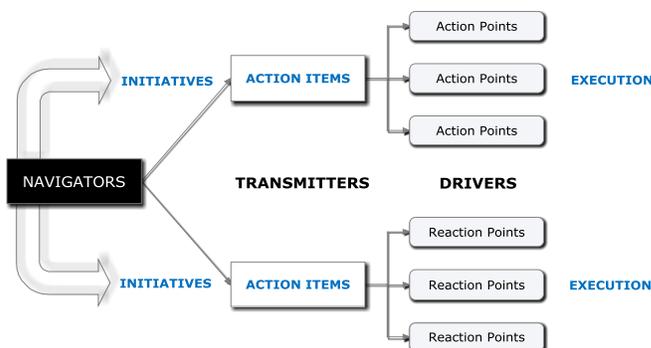
there to do so. Most important, this philosophy promotes the transition from autocratic tendencies to leadership tendencies for executives as they prepare and entrust Transmitters to deliver the critical strategic elements to the Drivers in the organization. In turn, Transmitters deliver these elements and entrust the execution to the Drivers at the action points and reaction points.

For example, say you are the Chief Financial Officer of an organization working as part of the executive group (Navigators) to oversee the financial performance and well being of the company. It is often from the Navigator's vantage point that fiscal budgets must be cut or held in check in order to maintain a company's financial requirements. This message, in its simplest form, is transmitted through middle management and in time alters the communication to Drivers in all disciplines throughout the business. Sometimes, however, the focus on finances or the inability of Navigators to effectively deliver the message down through the social network exacerbates the very issues executive are trying to correct. Many times I have seen companies who are networked to accomplish great things only get sidetracked by financial metrics. Yes, financial performance is critical to thriving companies, but too much emphasis on finance or any one discipline in the organization is not healthy.

The transmission of critical strategic elements from Navigators to Transmitters and then from Transmitters to Drivers is effectively done by eliminating management tendencies and developing leadership at the Navigator and Transmitter levels. Management of anything is required only in the absence of leadership. It is the pursuit of extending management responsibility to the Drivers at the action and reaction points of your business that propels creativity and forward motion toward business achievement. Thus, the art of packaging complexity into simplicity for delegation from Navigators to Transmitters and from Transmitters to Drivers is an essential skill for today's leaders.

### Action Points and Reaction Points

There are what I like to call two roads of action in every business, one that leads to the customer and one that leads to the factory floor or back offices. The action points are those positions where data in your business are created: the point of sale and the point of service or production. Every other position in a business is a



reaction point, including leadership. To state this another way, in every business there are those who make the news and those who report it. Consider a machine operator or a fork truck operator loading and shipping products. Those individuals are performing action points in the business and making the news of

the day. The sales person calling on a customer or delivering a presentation to potential buyers is again performing action points in the business. The production scheduler, quality control inspector, and sales manager are performing reaction point activities for the business—reporting the news.

For every leader or person of authority in any group or business there are on average from six to ten individuals who look to them for direction. If the head of an organization delivers a new direction through his or her key administrators it is only the beginning of the communication process. No matter how good the plan, the line of thinking, or its importance in the conduit of delivery to the difference-makers in the organization it is a long and complicated path through a series of cultural, generational, educational, racial, and gender barriers.

The word leadership creates the image of being in front of or ahead of the group. Yes, if you are speaking of the planning stage or development of business strategy I would agree you are out front and viewing your business or project in advance. But that portion of leadership is quite small relative to moving organizations forward. It is my opinion that once the plan is created leadership is best executed from the back of the bus. What I mean by this is that if you're in the front of the bus you can see where you're going but not what's happening in the bus. From the back of the bus you can see both.

Leadership is really a progressive and timely series of small adjustments that allow you to effectively navigate the level and quality of work done by others. Adjustments to your communications, organizational structure, processes, reporting, training tools, work distribution, or incentives can only be made when you can see the results of the leadership you've already provided. With this style of leadership you are effectively liberating your workforce to pursue critical elements of the business strategy. This consultative style of leadership is an effective way of transferring the critical knowledge you have as an executive or middle manager to the drivers in the organization.

This style creates a collaboration among the levels of the organization, each one contributing its professional ingredient to the process. To do this, however, each group has to develop understanding with the other, and trust and commitment that allows it to willingly provide information and autonomy to support forward motion in the organization. The information needs to be carefully constructed and presented so that it provides the most value as it passes down through the social network. Like a writer or presenter, Navigators need to consider their audience when preparing the information and its transfer. This is very difficult for some groups or segments of groups in organizations. Sometimes the delivery of information is poorly communicated and the results have unexpected consequences.

Reflecting on this lesson and others I will share in this book, I've come to understand that leadership is as much of an opportunity to learn from the journey as it is to provide direction to others. It is the collection of knowledge both learned

and experienced that lays the foundation for collective achievement. The transfer of knowledge in its most accurate and clearest form can provide those entrusted to perform the work of the organization the greatest opportunity for success. And a focus on any one discipline that shadows the light of invention or progress inhibits the natural instincts and common sense needed to simply move forward.

So I ask again, “What makes you the boss?” If you are the Navigator, what makes you the boss is your ability to decipher the multitude of complex factors acting on your organization and your ability to establish strategic initiatives that will solidify your success in the future. If you are the Transmitter, what makes you the boss is your ability to break down and organize these initiatives into focused actions for Drivers, and your ability to provide them the consultative leadership they will need to overcome limitations in pursuit of them. If you are the Driver what makes you the boss is your ability to comprehend the actions needed and use your collective skills, knowledge, and innovation to execute them. In the end, it is not authority but achievement that will define you and your organization.