

Leaders: A Definition

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In times of crisis - and we're in a time of crisis - the need for leaders is more important than ever. We are seeing many individuals step up and take on the task of leading, and it's worth asking - *What is a leader?*

When I looked around the table at the group of guys assembled for my sixtieth birthday party, I noticed the one thing most of them had in common. They were leaders. Twenty-five guys, and almost every one of them had demonstrated great leadership over the course of their life. Most were in significant positions of leadership. Their leadership was wide spread, including entrepreneurs, corporate c-suites, government and ministry.

Perhaps the most significant thing to come out of that evening was the creation of *The Timothy Foundation*. I realized that the first sixty years of my life had been about investing in young leaders and I wanted to double down; I wanted the next years of my life to be focused on investing in the next generation of Christian leaders. (www.thetimothyfoundation.com)

The first question was: "How will we be able to identify leaders?" I should have given this a lot of thought, but honestly, I didn't have to. I shouldn't have to. After years of working with leaders and non-leaders I know the answer.

I spent a lot of years beating my head against the wall trying to get non leaders to lead. Take them a seminar. Try a new training. Read a book on leadership. On and on it goes and you know what? Non leaders will never lead.

They can't. They don't. They aren't. They never will.

I've been surprised over the years. People I thought could never lead turned out to be great leaders and some whom I thought would be slam-dunk leaders - guys I would have followed if they had led - never were.

There is the one sure-fire way you can identify a leader. They have followers. It is that simple. No need for an assessment test. No need for power points on "becoming a leader," it's really simple. Leaders have followers. By definition!

With The Timothy Foundation we are looking for one leadership characteristic in our applicants. Only one thing matters. Only one question really determines if they are leaders. That question is: ***Do they have followers?*** Does anyone follow them? Who? Can they name them? Can they point to individuals and say, “that person follows me.”

There is a difference between real leaders with followers, and people who merely have a position and title. You can have the position of leadership but not have followers. Just because you have the position and the title doesn't make you a leader. You can even have people who obey you, but it doesn't mean they follow you.

The inverse is also true. Just because you don't have the title or position doesn't mean you don't lead. Plenty of great leaders have led without the title. I'm not looking for people who have the position of leadership, I'm looking for people who have followers.

A young man had been referred to *The Timothy Foundation* by a friend who strongly suggested I meet with him. I was getting ready to go out of town and my schedule was tight, so I agreed to meet him for 30 minutes over a glass of wine at the Union League. As we moved quickly through the small talk, I finally said to him, “Who follows you?” He looked at me with a quizzical expression on his face as if to say, “no one asks that question. What do you mean?” I said, “Look, I'm really sorry, but I don't have a lot of time and we are looking for leaders. The one characteristic of a leader is they have followers. So, who follows you?” He thought for a moment and then quickly began to name names. A couple of guys on his hall where he was the RA. A couple of guys in his small group. Another guy in his Sr. Project.” “OK, I said. You should apply.”

His sponsor verified that people do indeed follow him and today he is one of our Fellows. I couldn't be more excited to have him be part of the Fellows program and I look forward to the ways in which he is going to lead in the future. Because he is going to lead in the future. That's what leaders do.

When you invest in leaders know this: Someone or something is going to shape their leadership. Someone or something is going to influence the way they think and what they think about. Someone or something is going to reach into the deep areas of their life and influence the leader they already are. If it's not you, then who will it be? In your organization who is doing the leading, and

who is leading the leaders?

They are going to lead. They can't not lead. The questions become:

1. What will form their leadership?
2. Where will they lead people to?
3. Where will they lead people from?

Not everyone is a leader and not everyone has to be – or should be.

The world needs managers and followers just as much as it needs leaders. Know the difference between them and put the right people in the right seats on the bus.

Invest in everyone, but make sure you are making the right investment in the right people. Leaders need one kind of investing; managers need another, and followers need another.

Stop beating your head against the wall of non-leaders hoping that one day they will have followers. They won't. Instead, identify the leaders, invest in them and give them the space to lead.

Know who you are and be it!