



## THREE CIRCLES OF LEADERSHIP

Most leadership courses discuss ways to improve the leader. Topics include developing more effective interpersonal skills, liaison abilities, motivational skills, and the like. While such skills are very important elements in expanding leader effectiveness, they are not enough.

You see, leadership is more than just a leader's traits, attributes, skills, or abilities. Leadership is a relationship between leaders and followers. As the saying goes, if you think you are leading and look over your shoulder to find no one there, you are just out for a Sunday walk. Effective leaders lead different people differently. As Ken Blanchard wrote in *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*, "There is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals" (p. 33). Effective leaders take the appropriate time to understand the individual needs, skills, and maturity of their constituents.

There is another aspect regarding the relationship between leaders and followers. While the word *follower* may imply a passive role, being a follower is hardly passive. Followers play an active role in the leadership process. They must be willing to learn and improve themselves and be open to new ideas and change. Most important, they must be willing to actively engage in the leadership process themselves. As leadership is about influence at any level, followers sometimes lead and leaders sometimes follow.

The process toward effective leadership does not stop here. Have you ever observed a leader use the same leadership style with similar constituents and enjoy success with one group but failure with the other? Effective leaders understand that leadership is a relationship among leaders, followers, and context. Context may be a situation, circumstance, event, person, or even era. Context may refer to societal, organizational, or other cultural perspectives. Context also may be viewed in terms of how leaders influence—organizationally, in a group, or one-on-one.

No leadership skill or set of skills will work with every audience in every context. Effective leaders understand that leadership is action. It is making positive influence with a thoughtful understanding of behavior and skills of the leader, needs and expectations of the follower, and the context of the potential intervention.

### REFERENCES

Blanchard, K., & Zigarmi, P. (1985). *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*. New York: William Morrow.

### CREDITS

*Subject Matter Expert:* Dr. Jeff Green

*Interactive Design:* LaVonne Carlson

*Instructional Design:* Lee Scholder

*Project Management:* Alan Campbell