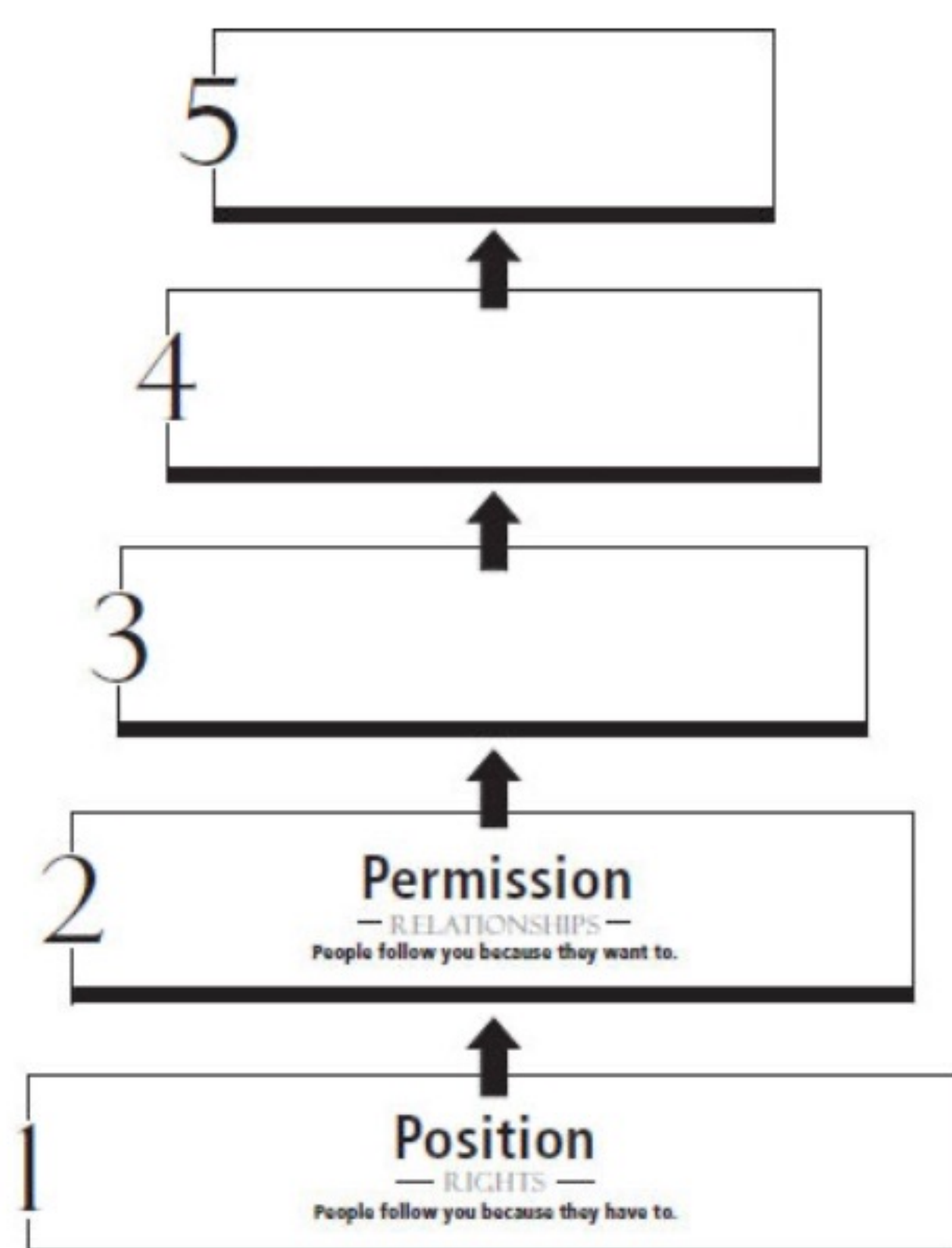




Level 2: PERMISSION

You Can't Lead People

Until You Like People



Making the shift from Position to Permission brings a person's first real step into leadership. Why do I say that? Because leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less. Leaders who rely on their positions to move people rarely develop influence with them. If their subordinates do what they are asked, it's usually because they think they *have* to—to





2. Leadership Permission Increases the Energy Level

What happens when you spend time with people you don't especially like or who don't like you? Doesn't it drain you of energy? That kind of environment brings most people down. Even in a neutral environment, if you are with people you don't know very well, doesn't it require a lot of energy to get to know them? Connecting with others always takes energy. Conversely, what happens when you spend time with people you know and like? Doesn't it give you energy? I know it does me. Spending time with the people I love—whether at work, at home, or while playing—is my greatest joy, and it always energizes me.

Good relationships create energy, and they give people's interaction a positive tone. When you invest time and effort to get to know people and build good relationships, it actually pays off with greater energy once the relationships are built. And in that kind of positive, energetic environment, people are





Level 2 leadership is relationally driven. That is only possible when people respect and value one another. It is impossible to relate well with those you don't respect. When respect lessens in a relationship, the relationship diminishes. You can care for people without leading them, but you cannot lead them effectively beyond Level 1 without caring for them.

All great leaders value people. And they lift the value bar in their organizations. One of the greatest leaders in our lifetime is Nelson Mandela. He continually modeled a leadership





5. Leadership Permission Nurtures Trust

Leaders who move up from Level 1 to Level 2 stop trying to impress others to maintain their position and start developing trust to maintain their relationships. That can be tough, because too often leaders place a higher value on impressing others than on having integrity with them. A story in a book by my friend Bill Hybels is a classic illustration of what can happen when leaders want others to be impressed. Bill writes,

A newly promoted colonel... had moved into a recently built makeshift office during the Gulf War. He had just arrived and was just getting things organized when out of the corner of his eye, he saw a private coming his way, carrying a tool box.

Wanting to seem important, he quickly spun around and picked up his phone. "Yes, General Schwarzkopf, yes, yes of course. I think that's an excellent plan."





environment. The workplace becomes more friendly. People begin to like each other. Chemistry starts to develop on the team. People no longer possess a “have to” mind-set. Instead it turns to “want to.” The workplace becomes more enjoyable for everyone—leaders and followers alike.

**Leaders who move up
to Level 2 shift their
focus from *me* to *we*.**

The key to moving up to the Permission level is having the right attitude. Level 2 leaders exemplify the words of J. Donald Walters, who asserted, “Leadership is an opportunity to serve.”

Permissional leaders like people and want to help them. They want to see them succeed. The prevalent attitude is one of serving others and bringing out the best in the people they work with.

I'm sorry to say that in my first professional





I believe most leaders are naturally better at talking than listening. I know that was true for me when I was early in my leadership journey. I was intent on communicating my vision to others and making sure they understood my agenda. I wanted communication to go only one way—from me to them. The result was that few people bought into my leadership or my vision. I failed to realize that the road to vision buy-in was a two-way communication. That meant I had to learn how to listen.

Recently I came across an explanation of the Chinese symbol for the verb “to listen.” I thought it gave tremendous insight into the concept. The word, pronounced “ting,” is made up of smaller symbols with specific meanings:³

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The Upside of Permission

The Workplace Has Become More Pleasant for Everyone

There are many upsides to Level 2 because the focus on relationship building opens up so many new avenues of leadership. Here are my top five:

1. Leadership Permission Makes Work More Enjoyable

Positional leaders often focus their efforts on serving themselves or their organization, with too little regard for others. However, leaders who move up to Level 2 shift their focus from *me* to *we*. They like people and treat them like individuals. They develop relationships and win people over with interaction instead of





with leaders they
get along with.

In contrast, when a leader learns to function on the Permission level, everything changes. People do more than merely comply with orders. They actually start to follow. And they do so because they really *want* to. Why? Because the leader begins to influence people with *relationship*, not just position. Building relationships develops a foundation for effectively leading others. It also starts to break down organizational silos as people connect across the lines between their job descriptions or departments. The more barriers come down and relationships deepen, the broader the foundation for leading others becomes. When people feel liked, cared for, included, valued, and trusted, they begin to work together with their leader and each other. And that can change the entire working environment. The old saying is really true: people go along with leaders they get along with.

Relationships: The Foundation for Effective Leadership





3. Leadership Permission Opens Up Channels of Communication

On Level 2, top-down positional leadership is replaced with side-by-side relationships.

On Level 2, top-down positional leadership is replaced with side-by-side relationships. That requires and cultivates good communication. On the Permission level, leaders listen to their people, and their people listen to them.

The interplay of communication between good leaders and their people on Level 2 can be found in a quote by former General Electric CEO Jack Welch. He describes an ideal leader as

somebody who can develop a vision of what he or she wants their business unit, their activity to do and be. Somebody who is able to articulate to the entire unit

