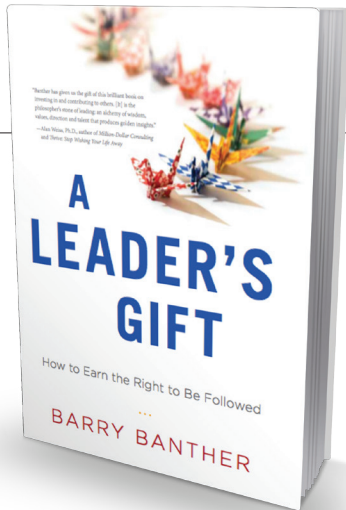


A Leader's Gift

How to Earn the Right to Be Followed

by Barry Banther



Greenleaf Book Group Press
© 2014, Barry Banther
ISBN: 9781626340565
197 pages, \$19.95

SUCCESS Points

A few things you'll learn from this book:

- Why lasting leadership has little to do with titles or authority
- How to measure and improve your effectiveness as a leader
- What to do when you've made a mistake
- Why getting to know your team members is a priority
- Why encouragement should be delivered during (not after) a crisis

What Are You Giving Your People?

Your time and attention could be your greatest contribution.

QUICK OVERVIEW

"Leadership isn't something you do," writes Barry Banther, "it's someone you become." With that philosophy in mind, his book, which outlines five key qualities of leadership, focuses on the gifts you give to your followers—gifts such as encouragement, appreciation, focused attention, openness and a willingness to discover and help them reach their goals. Each of those gifts requires time, energy and, most important, growth on your part as the leader.

Using a consistent chapter structure, Banther explains how to find each gift within yourself. Then, after creating buy-in, he offers practical advice on how to wrap (develop), and then give the gift to your followers. Leaders might feel daunted at the prospect of finding the time to master and implement each with every member of their team, but Banther insists that finding time to lead well must be any manager's first work. "The only way to succeed," he writes, "is to develop and enable your team to their highest potential. Otherwise, the tactical work you are doing will be of little importance."

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

It's easy to encourage people and show appreciation for a job well done. But in the midst of challenging or frustrating situations, encouraging words are often few and far between. In *A Leader's Gift*, Banther advises leaders to offer positive advice and encouragement in the dark times—as well as the moments of success. "Encouragement works when it is delivered in the midst of the fire. Everybody will know what to do after the fact. It's only encouragement if it arrives when you need it!" he writes.

Don't wait to encourage people. If someone on your team is struggling, ask, "How can I encourage this person?" Why? "Encouragement breeds confidence," Banther notes. And confidence is the key to helping your team members become more positive, productive and successful.

SUMMARY

A LEADER'S GIFT

A few months after I opened my management consulting practice, I was writing a leadership development program for a *Fortune* 100 company. Suddenly, the pieces of the lasting leadership puzzle fell into place.

I had been asking myself for years: what were the traits that lasting leaders had in common? What were the things I was missing as a young leader that led to my failure as a manager? And what had I observed that seemed to motivate employees to extraordinary performance?

In a moment I realized that great leaders don't focus on *getting*. They're all about giving something away, freely and frequently. They give something away that money can't buy and that the receiver wouldn't sell for any price.

They give the gift of themselves.

THE 5 GIFTS OF A LASTING LEADER

These 5 qualities are gifts because it's only when we give them away freely to everyone in our path that they create in us the life qualities of a lasting leader. The 5 qualities you'll learn to give away are:

- The Gift of Being Open to other people
- The Gift of Investing Time in other people
- The Gift of Listening to other people
- The Gift of Offering Encouragement to other people
- The Gift of Expressing Appreciation for other people

These gifts appear to be simple, perhaps even obvious. Anything truly inspirational always does. But it is their simplicity that requires more than just a passing nod from us. It's not enough to applaud them. To become a lasting leader means you have to embrace them while still focusing on the metrics that define your progress. The two are linked together. You can't choose which one to follow because without both of them your leadership experience will be just another story of "what might have been."

These qualities aren't things you have; rather, they are things you give away. They require you to become someone who can give freely, without reservation, to the people you lead. Lasting leaders, by definition, devote their energy toward the people they lead—*first*. (When you put others first, you won't become second. On the contrary, you will become more valuable to your team, your company, than any authority could ever mandate!) Leaders who are held in the highest esteem for their success on both the bottom line and with the people they lead epitomize these five qualities. And the really great news is that it's never too late to embrace them as gifts. Not gifts you possess but, rather, gifts you will freely give to others.

The Gift of Being Open to Others

What would it be like to work for someone who was open to who you are? Not who they want you to be or the role they want you to play but the real you. What if you sensed that it mattered to them where you came from, what motivated you, and what your innermost hopes and dreams were? And what if you believed that they could be trusted with those truths about you and would only use them to bring out the best in you and align you with their goals for joint success?

You would consider that a gift and you would consider yourself blessed! You would place much higher value on that relationship and be more prone to preserve it through your improved performance. That's the gift of *openness*.

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people they lead—*first*.**

The Gift of Investing Time in Others

What would it be like to have a boss who had time for you? Not just when they wanted something, but as a matter of routine they dropped by your workspace? And what if they didn't have any certain agenda; they just thought it would be valuable to spend more of their time with you? I am necessarily not talking about out-of-the-office time. I am thinking of a boss who chooses to invest time in you as a priority in his or her workday.

How would that affect the way you valued your role at work? You couldn't help but feel as though you were important to them, right? And there is the high likelihood that over time you would return this gift by showing a return on the leader's investment of time in you.

We all have differing amounts of money and wealth. But we all possess exactly the same amount of time each day. When a leader chooses to spend moments with you, that's the gift of *time invested in you*.

The Gift of Listening to Others

What would it be like to work for someone who listened to you? I am not talking about whether or not they heard your words. I mean they genuinely listened. Listeners send the clear message that your thoughts are valuable and what you think is important to them.

The Gift of Openness

Lasting leaders find the gift of openness by first looking inside themselves and admitting that they tend to discriminate against certain people. Then they make a commitment to not make that mistake again. Be honest with yourself. Give everyone who reports to you an opportunity to be heard, to be understood, and to be a part of what you are trying to accomplish.

Being open to others means being careful not to make assumptions. Instead, take the time to find out about them by asking questions such as these:

- Who are they?
- Where did they come from?
- What has shaped their life and how they approach work?
- What skills are they good at?
- What unique knowledge do they possess?
- What motivates them?
- What's important to them right now?
- How do they make decisions?
- What are they afraid of?
- What's their hidden dream?
- What matters most to them?

Do you know the answers to those questions about your current employees? Half of them? If not, then you are not open and you are not earning the right to be followed.

How would it feel to have a boss who solicited your opinion while suspending judgment as to whether you were right or wrong? If you were able to have a candid conversation and were confident your thoughts would be given consideration before a decision was made, how would that impact your self-perception at work?

When we believe someone is really paying attention to us and hearing what we say, we automatically give that person credibility as a leader and are much more prone to listen the same way in return when they are speaking. It's painfully obvious that most people don't listen like this, and we've come not to expect it. When a leader does so we realize it is truly a gift. It's the gift of *listening*.

The Gift of Offering Encouragement to Others

What would it be like to work for a leader who knew of your weaknesses and your daily challenges? Would it affect you positively for that same leader to encourage you that you can break through your barriers? What if that leader was able to articulate where you are in your performance and where you need to get to—all the while expressing total confidence that you were going to be able to do it? Would it make a difference if you felt that the leader would be there to cheer you on or help remove unforeseen obstacles?

Most of us work for someone who is more adept at catching us doing something wrong and pointing it out! Having a leader who encouraged us unconditionally would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, a gift. The gift of *encouragement*.

The Gift of Expressing Appreciation for Others

Would it make any difference to you if you worked for someone who was constantly pointing out what you had done well to contribute to your company's success? What if that person frequently praised you in public for your individual effort that was positively impacting the entire team? How would it feel to work for someone whose communication with you routinely included "Thank you very much"?

Most of us go through our adult lives with no one paying enough attention to us to even recognize when we do something well. We typically only hear from people when we have messed something up and it's impacting them. Working for someone who was constantly trying to catch us doing something right would be the gift of *appreciation*.

Most people, like I did, fail to embrace the five qualities because they require effort, sacrifice, and discipline. We would much rather have a "quick-fix trick" with which to wring out the last bit of productivity from the people who report to us.

But once you embrace them, and thus transition from who you are now to someone who is living and giving these qualities away, people will follow you with enthusiasm and loyalty. Not everyone, but far more followers than you ever dreamed possible.

THE GIFT OF TIME: IT'S YOURS TO PRIORITIZE

Should you decide you want to give the gift of your time to your associates, you have to wrap your mind around an entirely new paradigm. Simply put, you have to believe that you can make no better investment of the limited time you have than to spend it with the people you lead.

Track your time with each associate just like you would an investment.

The number-one reason employees voluntarily leave an employer in the first 18 to 24 months after being hired is the lack of coaching. Profitable, proactive companies beat that average by expecting managers to spend time with associates: getting to know them, helping them understand company goals and objectives, and enabling them to create their own accomplishments.

Time invested by you with the people you lead pays!

It's your actions, not your intentions.

"Whatever gets measured gets done!" It's hard to pin down who said this. Drucker? Peters? Deming? Regardless of who said it first, it works! And most of us accept that it holds true about daily work tasks.

But are we willing to measure the "softer" side of working and leading? Would you be willing to keep a spreadsheet on the amount of time you spend with each of your associates to ensure that you are making an adequate investment? If you believe this time spent is like any other investment, then you will have no trouble motivating yourself to create this spreadsheet and start measuring time with your team. Because what gets measured gets done!

I have learned through my clients and by managing my own professional services firm that there are three distinct segments of time you have to plan for, measure, and evaluate. Track your time with each associate just like you would an investment.

1. The employees who report to you need time daily. Make sure you spend 60 seconds with every one of your direct reports. Vary your pattern—don't make it seem like a ritual. Just make sure every associate gets at least that much time with you daily. This is not meeting time or customer review time. This is time where you are listening to each individual. It can be either personal or professional.

2. Your direct reports need time every week. Based on the number, this can be between fifteen and thirty minutes. It can be over lunch. It can be in your office or theirs. But it needs to be one-on-one for up to half an hour. Should you have direct reports who are geographically dispersed then do these sessions by phone or tele-call (Skype, etc.). But do them.

3. Your direct reports need time monthly. Invest 1 hour—just sixty minutes—each month in everyone who reports to you. I can hear the push back. "Barry, I have ten direct reports. Are you telling me I have to spend ten hours a month investing in these men and women?!" Yes, that is exactly what I am saying.

You will either spend that one hour a month now, or you will spend multiple hours later on when you're trying to fix a problem that could have been avoided

if you'd invested in your direct reports. Or when you're trying to get their

replacement(s) up to speed when the predecessor failed from lack of attention.

Don't fudge and count group meetings or spontaneous discussions about customer issues as these interactions. This is you and your employees' one-on-one. And each interaction should be a broad conversation with you mostly doing the listening, not the speaking.

You can't guess ahead of time which member of your team will take the time you invest in him or her and grow from it. That's why you, as the leader, have to be willing to take the risk and invest some time in *everyone you lead*. For many it may not make any lasting difference. But for some it will make all the difference in their life and they will continue to thank you for the rest of your life.

THE GIFT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The slightest thing we can say in a given moment can be the very encouragement someone else needs.

The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson captured the secret desire of all of us when he wrote, "Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be." Do you want to be the source of that encouragement to your associates? If you don't then those employees will be tempted to look elsewhere for a leader who lifts them up rather than ignores them. Lasting leaders who develop and retain star performers on their team learn how to bring confidence, courage, and hope to their employees.

Today's uncertain global competitive environment challenges workers every single day, bringing both new obstacles and new opportunities. Knowledge is important, but without the confidence to take a risk, the courage to attempt something new, and the hope that they can succeed, they won't.

Those are the three reasons why an employee needs your encouragement. When the obstacle seems impossible to get over, an employee can lose *confidence* and just do enough to get by. When they are going to have to face a difficult client or a demanding customer, they can lack the *courage* to meet the challenge without giving away too much. And when employees face relentless setbacks—either individually or in their team—they will begin to lose *hope*.

This is when a lasting leader steps up with encouraging words. Some leaders choose to hold their encouragement until after a tough situation

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has passed. They foolishly think it is better to let associates learn on their own. Would you want hospitals to follow that kind of management practice? On the contrary, encouragement in the midst of a crisis will do more to resolve the situation and strengthen your employee than will hours of praise after the fact.

A popular story is told about Paul "Bear" Bryant, the legendary coach of the University of Alabama football team. A newspaper reporter allegedly asked Bryant if he would ever take advice or encouragement from someone else about how to coach his football team. Bryant was quick to respond. "Of course I will. Anybody in the state of Alabama is free to give me advice. I only have two rules. Rule number 1, you have to give me that advice on a Saturday afternoon between two and four o'clock, and rule number 2, you've got five seconds!" Encouragement works when it is delivered in the midst of the fire. Everybody will know what to do after the fact. It's only encouragement if it arrives when you need it!

Nothing inspires men and women to perform better as a team than the encouraging words of those who lead them. Encouragement breeds confidence, and confidence is the root of all proactive customer-centered action.

The slightest thing we can say in a given moment can be the very encouragement someone else needs.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Every leader leaves a legacy. We just don't always realize it in time to do something about what type it is! But a legacy is not something you are building simply for others to admire. It's the pinnacle of years of work, and the good news is that your legacy is up to you. And the best way to ensure that you leave a tradition of success is to nurture the five gifts that lasting leaders have in common. Looking back on your life is inevitable, but what you see when you look back is a matter of the choices you have made one day at a time.

Bring Out the Best in Others

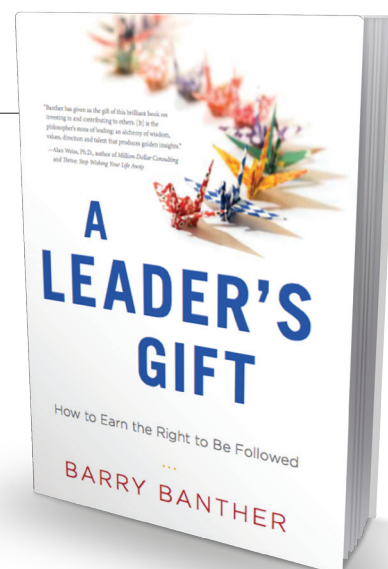
A giving life inspires followers to embrace both you and your goals. Perhaps no one has evidenced that more than Frances Hesselbein. Between 1965 and 1976 she went from being a volunteer Girl Scout leader to becoming the nonprofit's CEO—the first to come from within the ranks in 67 years. She held that job for more than fourteen years, during which time she is widely credited with turning the organization around while growing membership to 2.25 million and a workforce in excess of 700,000.

Years ago Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, was asked who he thought was the greatest leader in America. Since he had consulted with the likes of Jack Welch and most of the *Fortune* 100 leaders, his answer came as a surprise. Without hesitancy Drucker replied, "Frances Hesselbein, the CEO of the American Girl Scout movement. She could manage any company in America."

And now the real question, how did she do it? Hesselbein has been quoted repeatedly saying that one of her secrets is, "The first item in your budget should be learning, education, and development of your people." And she developed the now legendary approach of "circular management," where the leader sat in the middle of the organization chart, not at the top. From that perspective, the leader can better plan, guide, and inspire performance. Our current economic realities now require that kind of leadership.

About the Author

Barry Banther has four decades of hands-on leadership experience. He has consulted clients including Rockwell Collins, Pfizer and Eli Lilly, and has written more than 50 leadership development programs used in industries from health care and manufacturing to distribution and broadcasting.



Action Steps

Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you've learned. Here are a few questions, thoughts and activities to get you started.

1. Review the five gifts of leadership. Which of the five do you give away freely as a leader?
2. Which of the five gifts do you need to develop?
3. Do you proactively spend time with your team members? Take Banther's advice and track your time with each direct report or key team member this week.
4. Banther notes that the No. 1 reason people quit in the first 18–24 months in a new role is lack of coaching. Do you (or your company) have a system for coaching your new team members? Do you consistently implement that system?
5. How can you encourage your team members to succeed or push through a current struggle?
6. Read the sidebar, "The Gift of Openness." Do you know the answers your team members would give to the listed questions?
7. What legacy is your current leadership going to leave? Are you satisfied with that legacy or do you want to increase your impact?

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed the summary of **A Leader's Gift**, you may also want to check out these titles:

Thanks for the Feedback by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen

Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek

Execution IS the Strategy by Laura Stack

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