

IMAGE ONE

[ The Joshua Problem ]



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## *The Joshua Problem*

MOSES TRAINED JOSHUA AS AN APPRENTICE. SADLY, JOSHUA NEVER TRAINED A JOSHUA. LEADERS MUST SEE THAT A CENTRAL PART OF THEIR JOB IS TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION TO LEAD BEHIND THEM. LEADERS MULTIPLY.

I don't know if you've read much Hebrew history, but I bet you know the story of Moses and Joshua. Four thousand years ago, Moses was the greatest Patriarch of the Jewish people. If you've never read about him—my guess is you've seen the movie. Cecil B. DeMille directed the classic film decades ago called *The Ten Commandments*, in which Charlton Heston played the lead role of Moses, the leader and deliverer of Israel. It was unforgettable.

In the story, Moses leads the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness, right up to the banks of the Jordan River. At this point, he stops. He doesn't finish the job of taking the Hebrew population into the "Promised Land." He is old and gray and ready to die. Fortunately, for several years Moses had equipped an apprentice named Joshua. Once Moses passed away, Joshua took the reins of leadership and led the people across the river into the land "flowing with milk and honey." He was ready for the job, and consequently, the nation of Israel didn't have to slow down one step as they crossed the Jordan and claimed the land God had promised them. Although it took years, one by one, they entered the cities and began to settle. Thankfully Moses had a "Joshua" to finish the job he was unable to complete.

The problem was—Joshua didn't have a Joshua. As far as we can tell from the reading of the Pentateuch and other contemporary writings, Joshua never duplicated the gift Moses had given him. He never took a young leader under his wing and prepared him to lead. Sadly, when Joshua died, Israel entered the worst period of her history—the period of the Judges—where they experienced chaos. Twice we read these words:

*"And there was no king in Israel in those days and everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

Why is it we see this dilemma—this Joshua Problem—repeated thousands of times each year in organizations around the world? I'm not sure if leaders are just lazy, or ignorant or shortsighted, but many of them last one generation, then leave their teams in shambles, wishing their leader was still around. As we ponder changing the culture we live in, our first consideration must be the development of next-generation leaders. Leaders are carriers of the culture. I believe we must be biased toward leader development. Unless we are, we'll take the easy route and focus on our tasks at hand. The "urgent" will replace the "ultimate." Dwight Moody once said, "It's better to train a hundred men than to do the work of a hundred men. But it is harder."

## LEADERSHIP CULT OR CULTURE?

In our turbulent world today, organizations tend to focus on finding and hiring one great leader to take them to the next level. Everyone seems to be looking for a "Moses" to lead them to their Promised Land. Far too often, if they find that special leader, he or she becomes irreplaceable. Unfortunately, when a leader is hired from the outside rather than being developed from within the company, the organization inevitably will face another talent crisis when the leader departs. "Twenty years ago," says Jeff Sonnenfeld, associate dean at Yale School of Organization and Management, "only 7 percent of U.S. firms hired CEOs from the outside. Now it's 50 percent." We tend to just plug holes rather than meet the real need of building leaders. It's time we get out of crisis management and prevent this problem. We must build a fence at the top of the cliff rather than a hospital at the bottom.

When key leaders fail to develop other leaders, and instead maintain control themselves—the organization tends to look more like a *leadership cult* than a *leadership culture*. Everyone looks to the leader for answers: for vision, for encouragement, and for resources. It's all about the leader. They become a "Moses" for the team. What folks fail to realize is that Moses' greatest achievement might have been the years he invested mentoring young Joshua. Somehow he knew what Dr. Carl Henry has summarized so well: "Success without a successor is a failure."

### A LEADERSHIP CULTURE:

*At "Growing Leaders" we define a leadership culture as an environment of shared values, behaviors and language that contagiously affects team members to think and act like authentic leaders.*

A study by Stanford researchers Jim Collins and Jerry Porras found that organizations that maintained stellar performance and endured through the 20th century had one essential ingredient: a culture of succession management. In short, they developed a leadership culture rather than a personal cult of one leader. Collins and Porras went on to write their best-selling book, *Built To Last*, reporting that visionary companies like Procter and Gamble, General Electric, Wal-Mart,

3M, and Sony preserve their culture by developing, promoting, and carefully selecting home-grown talent. The organization is a training ground for leaders, not just a retailer that sells merchandise. They don't just do programs or distribute products—they develop people.<sup>1</sup>

Tesco, one of the world's most admired grocery store chains, achieved leadership in the U.K. market under CEO Ian McLaurin. When he retired, some predicted that Tesco would go into decline. Instead, under the leadership of Terry Leahy, it has gone from strong to stronger. They are now successful in Eastern Europe and Asia.<sup>2</sup> Why? Terry and others like him had been groomed at Tesco, so they would be ready at any moment to lead. Leaders are at every level.<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, the Disney Empire said goodbye to Michael Eisner. Many thought Disney would have to look outside for a new leader who could handle such an amazing company. Despite great candidates like Meg Whitman from eBay, Terry Semel from Yahoo, and Paul Pressler from The Gap, Disney's board realized they had great leaders right under their nose. Disney concluded that leaders and organizations (just like all species) reproduce after their own kind. So, they hired Disney veteran Robert Iger. He breathed the culture at Disney, after being groomed for nine years.<sup>3</sup> It worked like a farm club for Major League baseball players. Each management experience was designed to prepare team members for the next level—from Single A, to Double A, to Triple A, to the Majors. Bob Iger was ready. He was simply a “Joshua” ready to take the lead at Disney.

## BUILDING THE FARM CLUB

So what does a “Moses” do to prepare a “Joshua”? This entire *Habitudes* book is about changing a culture, and to do that, you'll have to multiply leaders who will be the carriers of the culture. However, for now I want to focus on some practical “gifts” a leader can give to a potential leader in the organization. In addition to forming work teams, try meeting in groups of four to ten people for leadership mentoring. In these clusters, give away these gifts:

1. **ACCOUNTABILITY** – Gain permission to talk about their growth and help them stay committed.
2. **ASSESSMENT** – Evaluate their present state, providing perspective on strengths and weaknesses.
3. **ACCEPTANCE** – Empower them to be themselves and not try to imitate the strengths of others.
4. **ADVICE** – Furnish words of direction, wise counsel and options as they make decisions.
5. **AFFIRMATION** – Offer encouragement and support for them as they stretch in new areas.

- 6. **ADMONISHMENT** – Lend words of caution, warning them about pitfalls and correcting mistakes.
- 7. **ASSETS** – Provide tangible resources you have such as books, CDs, articles, personal contacts.
- 8. **APPLICATION** – Give them first-hand experiences and opportunities to apply what they learn.

Years ago, the late Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch became a ship captain by the age of twenty. That’s quite a feat in itself. Fortunately, Nathaniel didn’t consider this his crowning achievement. He was determined to fill the oceans with competent sailors. At twenty-one years old, he sailed on an East Indian voyage. It was on that trip he took the pains to instruct every crew member on board in the art of navigation; he mentored them in how to lead a ship. Afterward, every sailor on that voyage became a captain of his own ship. What’s more, many of those captains went on to train others.<sup>4</sup> There was no “Joshua Problem” here. Nathaniel built his career on this belief: “I start with the premise that the chief goal of the leader is not to build followers, but to build more leaders.”

**REFLECT AND RESPOND**

1. Why do you believe so many organizations simply look outside for new leadership when a current leader resigns? Why do they fail to develop new leaders from within?

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2. When current leaders develop a new set of potential leaders, they prepare them this way:

- a. Endorsement and authority  
(The current leader lends the new leader their influence)
- b. Experience and opportunities  
(The current leader exposes them to real challenges)
- c. Equipping and instruction  
(The current leader mentors them on solving problems)

How do you think this preparation helps the new “Joshua” get over his/her anxiety?

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Where have you seen current leaders prepare new leaders?

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Why does mentoring leaders become difficult after two generations?

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## SELF-ASSESSMENT

Think of the last potential leader you mentored. Evaluate how you did with these four practices:

### CONVERSE

Did you discuss any principles you wanted them to learn?

< NEVER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 OFTEN >

### SHADOW

Did you allow them to follow you around and watch you practice leadership?

< NEVER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 OFTEN >

### APPRENTICE

Did you allow them to take on responsibilities as an apprentice under your care?

< NEVER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 OFTEN >

### DEBRIEF

Did you take time to follow up and evaluate their progress?

< NEVER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 OFTEN >

## EXERCISE

Reflect this week, and choose one potential “Joshua” that you could invest in. Invite them to meet with you on a regular basis and experience the four practices above. Talk about how well you do these four practices. Discover what other “gifts” they need in order to become a confident leader.