

# Reluctant Leader, Reluctant Follower

*Kent Beck, Three Rivers Institute*

I started using the word “partners” to describe the leader/follower pair. Does this help? Please look for more opportunities to use “partner”.

I’d like illustrations for the patterns. Please recommend pictures that illustrate the points being made.

I’m looking for stories where you actually tried a pattern straight out of the book. Positives and negatives are both welcome.

The patterns are completely unordered. Please suggest sections and the patterns to go in them.

“But where the leader himself becomes a servant, there are no rival claimants for leadership.” M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, p. 447-448.

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# Preface

The authors of all the leadership books in history could choose sides, make gigantic forts out of all the leadership books ever published, and have a fabulous series of battles to decide whose book is best. All of which is my way of saying there are a lot of leadership books out there. In spite of that, here is another book on leadership. Why should you read it?

There are leadership books out there that take a historical perspective, a military perspective, a psychological perspective, a cultural perspective, a corporate perspective about leading from positions of visibility and power, a revolutionary perspective about leading without explicit power, a smugly superior perspective about getting and maintaining the power you so richly deserve. I set out to write my thoughts on leadership, and discovered that I had mostly covered ground well trodden by others. Why I had left, though, the little bit of seemingly unique leadership material, was the bits that talked about leadership for those who don't particularly want to lead and followership (every bit as rich a subject) for those who don't particularly want to follow.

What does "reluctant" mean? It means that the leaders and followers reading this book don't see themselves primarily as leaders or followers. You are trying to get work done. You work in teams. You have to influence and be influenced by others on your team. But influence isn't your identity. You work. And then, sometimes, you have to influence or be influenced.

Writing for reluctant leaders and followers seems, even to me, a peculiarly suicidal marketing position, about like writing "Teetotalers Guide to Beer". However, imagine a team where every person understands that it is part of their job, however uncomfortable, to influence others and be influenced by others. Leadership for the reluctant leader and followership for the reluctant follower are not easy. Where some folks seem born with the ambition to influence, the reluctant leader feels forced into influence. Some folks seem content to be influenced, others have to have their inadequacies pointed out to them in graphic detail before they are ready.

I threw away my first, nearly completed, draft, and started over. The new, limited, scope implies that this won't be *the* leadership book for the ages. Kings and potentates in ages to come won't cite reading this book as the seminal moment in their lives. Ah, well. I'll adjust.

What's left is a theory of individual leadership and followership, as a temporary shift of authority and responsibility, and a set of patterns supporting both sides of this shift. Read and practice it to learn how to take full part in the life of the team, making your full contribution and reaping the full benefits.

# Acknowledgements

Thanks to my reviewers, some of whom are listed here, others of whom I accidentally left out—Chet Hendrickson, Tom DeMarco, Ken Auer, Frank Westphal, Adeline Honnas, Jim Buswell, Dave Cleal, David Farber, Peter Sommerlad, Bill Caputo, Jeff Langr, Phil Goodwin, Russ Rufer, Tracy Bialik, Yulia Rubinchik, David Vydra, Jeff Miller, Andy Sen, John Brewer, Patrick Manion, Chris Lopez, Mark Taylor, Scott Jackson, Eric Hale, Mark Dale, Charlie Toland, Bill Wake, Frank Westphal

Thanks to David Vydra and Phil Goodwin for spotting the real title and focus lurking under all the posturing.

Here are patterns suggested or substantially improved by reviewers. I accept full responsibility for what is published, but I want to acknowledge that the ideas here had many parents:

Ken Auer	Motto, Clean Talk
Chet Hendrickson	Public Reward
Cindee Andres	Spiff
Dave Cleal	Substitute, DIY
Ron Jeffries	Help Request, Say That Again, Silence
Phil Goodwin	Borrowed Idea
Bill Wake	Balanced Karma, Behaving Moment
Thomas Osterlie	Humble Pie
Russ Rufer	Alternatives
Erik Meade	Volunteer Army
Ward Cunningham	Personal Moment

# Theory

The first half of this book is a theory of leadership. If you are the kind of person who likes to know a bit about what you are doing before you dive in, read it first. If you learn action-first, skip to the Practice section. In either case, you can come back to this section when you want to reflect on what you've done.

# Change

Imagine you were on a team that was working well. Everything is groovy. The job gets done. Everybody's happy.

Do you need leadership? No. Everything is fine. You need administration to make sure that everything continues to run smoothly, but leadership? No.

Now something changes. You get a new boss. A new technology. A new team member. The old way of working doesn't work any more. The job isn't getting done. Everybody's grumpy.

## Leadership

Now you need leadership. Something has to change. And it has to start somewhere. Some one person will begin it. That person is leading. The people they influence are following. If it's a little change, you might not even notice Amir working a little different and asking questions that get other people working a little different. That doesn't matter. It's still leadership.

Leadership is creating change.

Leadership is not about changing yourself. Self-help is a worthy topic, filling a whole bunch of shelves on my bookstore walls that otherwise could be holding useful science fiction. We won't be talking about self-help here. Instead, we will be talking about the kind of change that happens between two people.

Leadership is creating change in other people.

## Followership

There isn't a good word in English for this. "Followership" is clumsy. "Studenthood" is accurate, but conjures up too many visions of sore knuckles and broken rulers. "Scholarship" doesn't sound terribly practical.

The concept is critically important, though, so I'll stay with "followership" because it is symmetrical with "leadership". Followership is important because without someone to follow, no one can lead. The follower in the dance of change actually leads, and the "leader" follows. Change can only happen at a pace absorbable by the follower.

No one talks about followership, and I don't think it's because of the clumsy name. Just as there are good ways to lead and bad ways to lead, there are good ways to follow and bad ways to follow. Followership isn't sexy. You can't imagine earning a million bucks a year for being a great follower.

We already established in the preface that we were going to ignore the high-margin end of the leadership market, so we have time and space to explore following in just as much detail as we explore leading. I'll use "partner" in most of the advice, because most of it applies whether at this moment you are a leader or a follower.

## Myth of Constant Change

I'm glad I'm writing to reluctant leaders and followers. I hardly have to warn you against over-leading or over-following. Silly folks take talk of "constant change" as an excuse to never leave anything alone. As soon as one change is made it's time to start the next one.

Nevertheless, I'm going to warn you against constant change. Once you get good at leading or following, it can become addictive. You might even be tempted to become (oh horrors) a consultant. Don't go there.

The world needs people to do the work. The reluctant leader or follower always pauses before initiating a change and asks, "Should I just work, instead?" This is a difficult question to answer. Sometimes when you say "yes, I should just work" you really mean "I'm afraid of change, and so I'll work instead." When you are afraid of change, the first thing you have to do is address the fear. Then decide again.

Just because you consciously and continuously decide between change and work doesn't mean you can't change quickly. When you get good at it, it can look to an outsider like you are constantly changing, because you transition so smoothly between doing and learning. Part of the purpose of the Practice section is to give you tools to learn to learn like a river—adapting to the rocks but always flowing down hill.

You can change often and quickly and still get work done. Pablo Casals, probably the greatest cellist ever, played a piece that required a long string of machine gun sixteenth notes. When asked if he got tired while playing the passage, he replied, "No. I rest between the notes."



# Reluctance

“The angels of knowledge and illumination are placed before the angels of office and domination.” Sir Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, First Book, VI, 3.

I’m going to let Bill Caputo introduce this one for me. Bill?

I can speak from experience—negative experience of course. When I was going through basic training in the US Army I was 24, and a college graduate. Most of the guys in my platoon were 18 or 19, and just out of high school. Furthermore, I had been in ROTC before enlisting, so I had actually already been to two training camps similar to basic training. In short, I had a lot of friends, and was seen as someone who could help (I guess you could say I was looked up to somewhat)

And it must of showed, because I was given the recruit platoon leadership position by the drill sergeant. Now this means two things. The drill sergeant yells at you when platoon screws up, and it means that if any of the platoon's responsibilities are to be accomplished (like getting the barracks clean) you are the one who has to make that happen.

I failed miserably. At first things went well, but I had problems getting certain people to do the things they were responsible for. I spoke to my squad leaders, and we tried positive pep talks, cajoling, arguing and all the rest that seemed the right thing to do. Instead of getting more support I got less. I was doing pushups constantly for people messing up (and getting mad about it). Instead of seeing this as my failure, I saw the three or four guys who were really goofing off as “the problem.”

Naturally, I focused my attention on them. And something interesting happened. I became the bad guy! Instead of everyone saying that they were slackers, and it was they not doing their cleanup, or talking in formation that had the drill sergeant going ballistic, I was the object of criticism. Soon, I only had a few people who still seemed “loyal” everyone else was mad at me.

That is when I decided it was the time to stop messing around and get to the bottom of things. I called a meeting. I spoke eloquently on teamwork, and why I knew what was best for the team. I had everyone’s attention. I covered the problem areas. I stated what we needed to do to get on track. I talked and talked. Finally, in a rousing finale, I told them that they were jeopardizing *my* career, and I wouldn’t stand for it any longer. They were going to toe the line, because I didn’t come there to fail.

Needless to say the outcome was predictable (but not to me then). Ultimately I was replaced as the platoon leader. The guy that replaced me was worse than I was. Soon, they replaced him. The woman who replaced him wasn’t nearly as dynamic as I was. She didn’t have nearly the ability I did. I didn’t like her much. But she kept things together—sort of. We languished. We sucked. We were considered the worst platoon (not surprisingly, our *true* leader, the drill sergeant, was inept, and for a time we didn’t even have one (when he got removed), so this

says something as well). The woman approached me, and asked for my support. I didn't know she didn't have it, but she didn't. Looking back on it, years later something interesting occurred to me:

I *was* the leader of that platoon. Once I left the *position* of leadership, I went back to being just one of the guys. Then my actual experience, maturity (a relative term I assure you) and personality re-emerged. I almost immediately made amends with everyone, including my former "problem" people. For a long time I felt that the answer was I should never be in charge, I should be the guy standing next to the guy in charge helping out, giving advice. Being in charge was for people who were bad at it, or for the very few who seemed blessed somehow (I have a good story from the army, too, to date the best leader I have personally worked for was a sergeant in the Army.)

Now I am seeing that I never needed to make the distinction. Leadership is never about being in charge, leadership is about working for change. When I am not "in charge" my natural instincts for change seem pretty good. When I am "in charge" I start worrying about it and mess it up. It's not the position, it's the actions that count.

## **Not Stupid**

Bill is what I would call a reluctant leader. He wants to lead, but he doesn't want to be at the top of any hierarchy. He wants to be part of a good team. He is willing to do good work to help the team. He is even willing to help other people do better work to help the team. But please please don't call him a leader.

Just because Bill would rather be doing "real work," doesn't mean he just wants to get his leading or following over with as quickly as possible. If you're going to do it, you may as well do it right. The patterns in the Practice section assume that you are willing to work at leading and following, you just don't want to make it the focus of your existence.

## Comfort Zone/Safety Zone

Turkeys are incredibly stupid. If you want to catch a turkey, you put a leg in front of them. They turn around to go the other way. Put your other leg in front of their new direction. The turkey will just give up and sit down. “That’s it. Game over. I’m surrounded.”

Programmers aren’t stupid (not as a rule, anyway). I can’t count the times I’ve said something like, “If you write automated tests, you’ll get more done every day.” “But we have too much to do. We don’t have time to write tests.” “No, no. You didn’t understand. You’ll get *more* done, not less.” “Yes, but we don’t have time for testing.”

Now I don’t want to go on record as comparing programmers to turkeys, but the two stories do seem to have a suspiciously common thread. In both cases progress was possible, but in both cases the individual involved decided progress was impossible.

I don’t particularly want to try to teach turkeys to have more initiative, but I sure wish I could get programmers moving. Coaxing, demonstrating, yelling, belittling—none of these strategies work in the situation I described (this is the voice of experience talking).

### What Up?

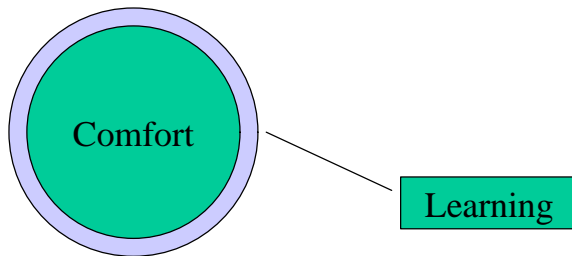
One of the denizens of my freshman dorm was named Mike. Mike wasn’t terribly sharp, and he loved drinking beer. He was obviously intellectually out of his depth in college. Let’s just say he wasn’t prepared for the life of the mind.

I watched Mike (with a bit of trepidation, since he was a big guy and I wasn’t) lurch around for most of a year. Then one day we went out to play basketball. A complete transformation overcame Mike. With a basketball in his hand, he was a dancer, a poet, a storyteller. His considerable bulk floated through the air. Shots rained in from all over the court.

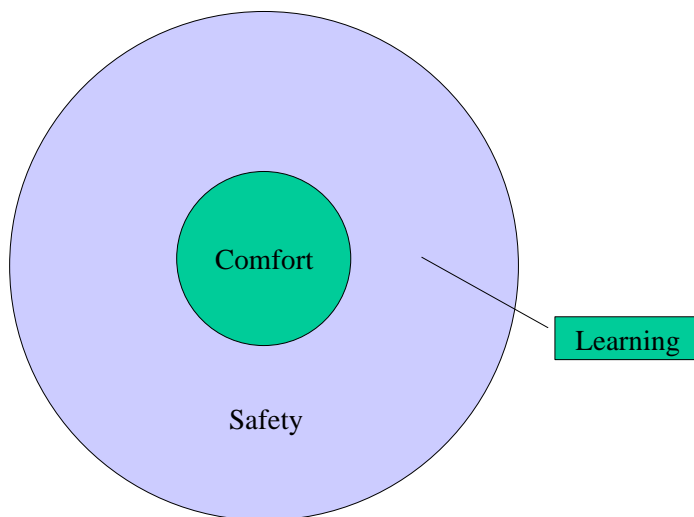
Mike was comfortable with basketball. He wasn’t comfortable with book learning. In his world of comfort, he was a completely different person than when he wasn’t.

### Comfort and Safety

When you’re in your comfort zone, you’re not learning anything. You may be very productive doing your work, but you’re not learning. To learn, you have to move, even if only briefly, out of your comfort zone.



When you're feeling overwhelmed, you aren't prepared to move out of your comfort zone. You can't even start learning. There is a safety zone that constrains just how far afield you can go and still function. If you are out of your safety zone, no matter how much you want to learn, you have to get back to feeling safe before you can learn.



Back to our stupid turkey. As soon as my second leg went down, the turkey was out of its safety zone. "Surrounded! I'm going to die!" The situation was more than its little turkey brain could handle. It shut down. Likewise the programmer who won't try testing (all except the part about the little turkey brain). When the safety zone is too close to the comfort zone, no learning is possible, no change is possible, no leadership is possible.

There's a great example of comfort/safety in the actions of Martin Luther King in 1964. Early in the year he appeared conservative, conciliatory, prompting charges of selling out from the radical civil righters. As the year progressed he appeared to change his mind, to push harder and harder, prompting charges of betrayal from his former allies on the right.

In retrospect what he seemed to be doing was playing with the US public comfort/safety zone. The gap wasn't wide, ever. He nudged the public out of their comfort zone, but not out of their safety zone. When they had assimilated that change, their comfort and safety zones expanded, so he nudged again. By the march on Selma, he had the American public ready to condemn the forces of law and order, which never would have happened at the beginning of the year.

## The Moment

The follower controls leadership. You can't lead any faster than the follower can follow. When a follower's safety zone constricts, there is nothing the leader can do about the topic. Together, leader and follower must create safe space before learning is possible.

You can help create safety. You can offer to accept the consequences of trying to change. You can allude to other areas of safety (I wonder how much Mike could have learned if his teachers had known to relate their lessons to basketball?) You can simply wait until the follower finds their own safe space.

Perhaps this is why stories work so well for teaching, because they connect from an uncomfortable, maybe unsafe place to a comfortable place.

# Authority and Responsibility

“Let’s start with defining our terms.” What a horrid beginning to real understanding. “Before we learn together, let’s be sure our language congeals so we can’t easily change our positions.”

However, here are two words that I will be using throughout the remainder of the book: authority and responsibility. These two words are so loaded, and mean such different things to different people, and are so critical to understanding leadership that I simply feel I must say something about them now. If you’re comfortable leaving definitions until last, feel free to skip this chapter and come back to it later, or never.

Most of the organizational problems I see manifest themselves as mismatches between authority and responsibility. A QA department is blamed for the lousy quality of a product, but when they tried to keep the product from shipping they were told, “We need to book the revenue this quarter.” QA has responsibility without authority. The mismatch isn’t the cause of the problem, but if you are looking for authority and responsibility, it’s easy to start at the mismatches and then move upstream.

*Sphere of concern/sphere of influence*

## Blatant Clue

What do authority and responsibility have to do with leadership? Often, when you feel you need to demonstrate leadership, it’s because you have spotted a mismatch.

*Example of mismatch and how reluctant leadership kicks in.*

## Loaning Authority/Responsibility

Another relationship between authority/responsibility and leadership is the shift of authority and responsibility that go along with the act of leadership. Every act of leadership requires that the follower temporarily give up authority for their own behavior to the leader. Along with this shift goes responsibility for the consequences of the change. Once the change has taken place, the follower takes back authority and responsibility for their own behavior.

This model made me extremely uncomfortable the first time I spoke it. Some of the most effective leaders I know are nudgers like Ward Cunningham and Martin Fowler. Where is the shift of authority and responsibility in what they do?

A defining moment in my understanding of leadership was a three-day conference of gurus attended by Martin. The first day everyone was interrupting everyone else. When Martin had something to say he would hold up his index finger. After a while, either he would be recognized and speak his piece, or he would put his finger down.

By the third day, everyone was holding up their finger when they wanted to speak. Interrupting had gone from standard practice to an occasional, and remarked on, breach of etiquette.

First, was Martin demonstrating leadership? Absolutely. He wasn't just trying to act how he wanted to act, he was trying to get us to act differently. The rest of us, in trying his style, voluntarily gave Martin authority over our behavior. We voluntarily acted like he wanted us to act, not how we usually acted. Along with that went responsibility—if the non-interruptive style hadn't worked, he would have taken a certain amount of ribbing for being such a Midlands prig.

## Manipulation

Does this imply that leadership is manipulation?

Yes. All leadership, however subtle, is about changing someone else's behavior. If it was about changing our own behavior, we wouldn't call it leadership, we would call it growth. So there is a sense in which any time you choose to lead, you are accepting authority over someone else's behavior, and any time you follow, you are lending authority over your own behavior.

I stared at this reasoning for a long time. Won't this put off many of the people I want to read this book, people who don't see themselves as leaders, but who will be more effective and less frustrated if they take a more active role in leading and following? Perhaps, but if we don't call leadership what it is—asking for a change in someone else's behavior—we won't have a solid basis for the rest of the discussion.

And no. Tom DeMarco commented on an early draft, "The difference between leadership and manipulation is the difference between a breeze and a draft. If we want to cool off, the movement of air is pleasant. If we are chilled, the exact same air movement is unwanted. Manipulation is just failed leadership."

As a leader, you have limited control over whether your actions are perceived as leadership or manipulation. You have a responsibility to do your best, but then your follower decides. As a follower, you make the final call on whether you were led or manipulated, but you share the responsibility. If you didn't do your best to help your partner, or if you did something you regret at leisure, you might feel manipulated, but you are responsible for that part of the manipulation that was under your control.

There are no victims in the dance of leadership. Two dancing, one leading, one following, until the step is learned. Then back to shaking our individual groove things.

# ***Leadership is Life***

So far we have leadership as a temporary transfer of authority and responsibility from one person to another, a transfer fraught with dangers but absolutely necessary nonetheless. How? How does this transfer happen? What can we do to make success as likely as possible, and to make the many forms of failure as unlikely and as recoverable as possible?

The patterns in Practice give the detailed answers to these questions. However, there is a general shape to leadership, whatever the details, and understanding that general shape is will help set up the next things I want to talk about, so I'll tell a few stories here and let the rest emerge later.

## **Sales as Life**

My Uncle Henry is the best salesman I've ever met. I had the fortune of sitting in a corner of his office for hours as a child watching him do deals. When I got old enough to buy and sell things myself, I began to realize just how good he was. Then one day I caught him in an philosophical mood, and he began to talk about his romance with sales.

“Sales is a metaphor for life. Finding a prospect is birth. Adolescence is the when you find out about their needs, fears, and desires. Drawing and signing the contract is maturity. When they drive the car off the lot, it is like a little piece of you dying. You mourn because the process is over. But you turn at the sound of the door opening and begin all over again.”

Aside from the implications of me growing up in a car-selling family, and how deeply someone can care about a process as superficially banal as sales, what is interesting to me is the metaphor itself.

## **Leadership as Life**

Applying the metaphor of life to leadership, we have:

- Birth—When the leader or follower notices the need for change.
- Adolescence—That (often awkward) period while the leader and follower negotiate the terms of the transfer of authority and responsibility.
- Maturity—Authority and responsibility for the follower's behavior shifts to the leader. The follower tries the change with the leader's help.
- Death—The follower, having absorbed change as much as they can in whatever form they can, reclaims authority and responsibility for their behavior.

Leadership is a transitory relationship. Leadership is not a way two people live now and forever. I can tell you a pattern and you can try it. I have led, you have followed. Minutes later you can tell me a story you think bears on a problem of mine. The “death” part of the Life Metaphor reminds us that leadership always ends.



# Action Reflected

Learning is action reflected. For leadership/followership this means that behavior will always precede learning. That's why a leader is important—they can intelligently suggest actions that might lead to learning, and they can initiate reflection when there is a lesson to be learned.

This book is backwards, then. The patterns should be first and the theory second. Unfortunately, I don't have the guts to switch it. "Theory first," that's the way I was taught.

The Practice section embodies an implicit model of learning—learning is action reflected. In this model, to learn you must:

- Do something
- Stop doing it
- Reflect on what you did

The patterns in Practice assist all three of these activities. *Should this be the structure of Practice? What patterns are missing if this is really the model? How would the existing patterns divide into these three categories?*

# ***Satir Change Model***

Change. Before, then after, right?

If only it were that easy. Every change is accompanied by turmoil. The turmoil is part of the change. You can't eliminate it, but you can anticipate it. If you know things are going to go wonky, you won't be tempted to think, "I'm such a bad follower. Trying to change is screwing everything up."

The Satir Change Model has helped me when I'm feeling like everything is coming apart. Virginia Satir developed it to explain the way change happens in families. I won't do it justice here—there is an enormous literature out there about the model and how to use it positively. For our purposes I want to present just enough of it so you can explain the kind of upset you feel or see when leading or following.

## **Before**

You are humming along and everything is alright. Not perfect, perhaps, but you are doing fine. For example, you might be writing a book about leadership suitable for kings and potentates. Every day you add a couple of patterns. You can plot almost exactly how long it will be before you can send the draft to the publisher.

## **Oops!**

Along comes something that rocks your world. You start getting reviews from your friends that suggest your book is completely off base. Yes, they like some details, but the tone of the whole thing seems too elitist.

## **Nah...**

That can't be a problem. You keep writing patterns, but with a little less conviction. Suppose your friends are right? Suppose you are adding to the power of hierarchy in the world?

## **Gack!**

You stop dead. You can't get anything written. Every time you try to write, you either just stare at your laptop in disgust until finally you go look at the Extreme Programming mailing list, or you throw away every page as you finish. Occasionally you write something that seems promising, but you're not the least bit consistent.

## **Aha!**

You get an idea. You're having an email conversation with Dan Palanza, one of your weirdest and most provocative friends. It strikes you that if you restricted yourself to leading and following one-on-one, and you spent as much time on following as on leading, you might still have a book's worth of stuff to say, and it would focus on the kind of leadership you want to see.

## Restart

You start working again. You write a few theory chapters and send them out. Some of them seem to spark good ideas, others of them miss, but at least you're not just staring at the stupid Thinkpad any more.

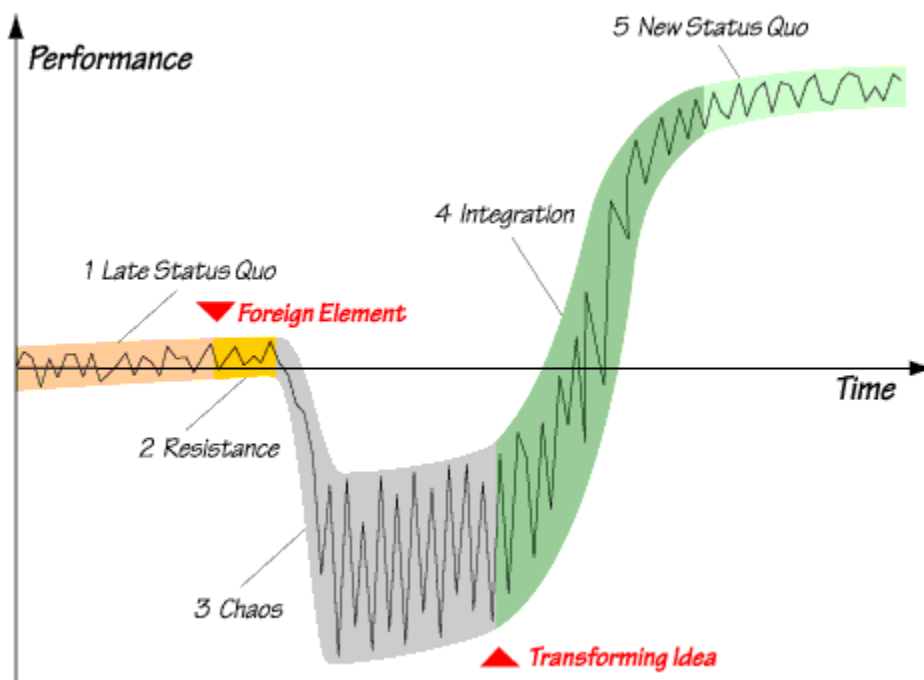
## And away we go...

You pick up speed. You finish the rest of the book in a rush, going on to fortune and fame (my wife insists we work on them in that order).

## Really?

No. I made up the names of the stages above (and the cleverly self-referential example). The phases are really called:

- Late status quo
- Foreign element
- Resistance
- Chaos
- Transforming idea
- Integration
- New status quo



For leadership, the important points are:

- The gap between the foreign element (the negative reviews) and the onset of chaos. You may sort of know you need to change but not really know how, for months or years. Resistance doesn't make change any less necessary, but just because someone isn't changing doesn't mean they shouldn't change. They might be in resistance.
- The drop in performance once resistance crumbles. "Stupid reviewers. If only they understood how brilliant I really am..." If you pointed out the need for change, you could easily be blamed for the ensuing chaos, even though you were just the messenger. Price you pay. Part of the territory.
- The variation in performance even after you have the transforming idea. Just because you realize what the book should *really* be about, doesn't mean you will be able to instantly start writing it.
- The model is not a one way street. The story above shows the best case (yes, turmoil and all, it's still the best case). However, at any point along the way you can revert to the old status quo, woefully inadequate as it is. The more stress, the more likely you are to revert.

As I said earlier, there is lots more juice left to be squeezed from the Satir model. You can use it to anticipate or recognize problems. If you are aware of which stage you are in, you can encourage certain activities to make the stage shorter and more effective. However, enough for now to say that change brings pain.

# Practice

The Practice section takes that airy-fairy theory and turns it into actual things you can do to lead and follow. Skim through the patterns here, paying attention to the questions and answers (they are in *italics*). When you get in a situation where you need more technique, flip to a pattern that seems to fit, read it, and apply it.

*The structure of the patterns—sections, are they going to be a real language, etc—will have to emerge once we have more patterns.*

## Bitch Session

*How do you get started when something is bothering you?*

Horsemanship has a pattern. Some days the horse just isn't ready for a lesson. If it's one of those days, don't turn it into a contest of wills. Get off. Unsaddle the horse. Put it away. Come back tomorrow.

In between those days when you are ready to tackle the world and those days when you would prefer wrapping your arms around yourself and rocking in the corner of a dark room are the vast majority of days. On those days, you are kind of ready to learn. It might make sense, though, to spend a little time getting readier to learn. Personal Moment addresses one flavor of getting ready—switching from general life mode to business mode.

Another reason not to be ready to learn is because you are angry about something, even something unrelated to the topic at hand. When you are angry, there are a host of mental and physical changes at work that, in sum, make learning less likely—closed body posture, darting attention, defensiveness.

*Get it off your chest. Set a time limit (like one cup of coffee).*

## Personal Moment

*How do you get started when you're not ready for work?*

Some people like to dive right into their work. It's called work, let's get to it. Others just can't imagine working with someone else without first spending a minute or two talking about the kids or last night's TV show or how about those Mets.

If you're one of those "get right to work" kind of people, you can either leave your partner very uncomfortable, or you can just spend a minute or two talking about trivia.

*Take a minute to talk about non-work before getting to work.*

The duration of the "minute" is culturally dependent. It also varies with how long you have known your partner. I have work friends with whom I chat for ten or fifteen minutes before working. I have new acquaintances with whom I spend half an hour or even a whole meal before turning to work. The point of the Personal Moment is to recognize that you and your partner can't move forward until you are both ready.

## Say That Again

*How do you respond when your partner gives you too much information?*

If I knew what question to ask, I would just ask the question. Often, however, I'm in the position where I know very little of what is going on. I've been with a client for two days. The company is losing money. We're talking about gene sequencing. Somebody has just given me a long explanation they obviously felt was important. I'm just not getting it.

I might privately feel like the explanation, while important to them, really isn't important to me or what I'm doing. A little humility is called for, though, because I know I don't know how to tell what is important and what isn't.

Another tempting possibility is to interrupt. "Wait, wait. You just said these two things. Which of them is more important?" While this can work, your partner clearly has a lot on their mind. They would like to have their say, after which they are ready to have a discussion.

Restating is one option. If I can restate what my partner just said, I'll do it. If the explanation is long and involved, this would take a long time, and might be impossible for me if we are talking about gory details. The problem isn't so much that I don't understand, it is that I don't understand what part of what I've been told is important.

*"Say that again."*

The leader won't usually repeat the explanation verbatim. Instead, I'll be treated to just the important parts. Now I have a piece of information I didn't have before—what my leader thinks is the most important point. Now we can focus on that point as the first target for change.

## Restating

*How do you respond when you're not sure you understood?*

Unlike Say That Again, in this case it's not that there's too much information, this time we're just not sure we understand. Both of us would rather not pause. We have other things to be doing, naturally. But building misunderstanding on misunderstanding isn't effective.

On the other hand, you are also feeling a bit lost, and that's not good for communication. Since you and your partner are there to communicate, you need to accommodate each other. Asking for a pause for clarification interrupts the flow, but helps you feel better and gives your partner feedback on how much you are hearing.

*"May I say what I just think I heard?"*

Keep the cycles between restatements short—seconds or minutes not hours.

Sometimes people talk because they need to talk to think. Interrupting someone who is thinking aloud will not help them think. If your partner gets annoyed when you restate, consider just taking notes, or waiting.

Sometimes, verbal restatement can just be an exercise in recall, not understanding.

“I’m really angry.”

“I hear you saying you are really angry.”

Not a lot of change to gain insight there. If this gets to be a problem, restate in a different medium than the original statement—draw a diagram, act out the situation with the pencil representing the pointy-haired boss and a coin representing the oppressed programmer, make an analogy.

I often draw diagrams when I restate. *Insert typical handdrawn diagram here.*

## For Example

*How do you help clarify a vague statement from your partner?*

Partners don’t always have a crystal clear idea of what needs to change. They feel there is a problem. They are willing to help in making the change. But they can’t state exactly what the problem is, much less how they would like to see it addressed.

It is easy to get frustrated in such a situation. “You say we have unhappy customers. Prove it! I think we have the happiest customers in the world.” We’ve just fallen into the resistance tar pit. Either your partner will just start pushing harder, which doesn’t solve the problem, or go away, which doesn’t solve the problem.

*“For example?”*

“Just this morning, Terry called to say the install failed again.” Now we have something we can work on together. Why did the install fail? Had it really failed before? Is this a big problem or a little problem?

Examples don’t tell us everything we need to do, but they do tell us one thing we may need to do, and that’s more information than we before.

## Question Circle

*How do you ensure a question is answered?*

So you’re answering a question. You can see that your partner has lots more questions, and after all you have work to do, so you’d like to get on with the next thing. However, moving forward without being sure of answering a question doesn’t really help. If you build on a still-fluid foundation, the results are predictable.

*Always end an answer by asking, “Does that answer your question?”*

Once I started doing this I was startled how often the answer was no. I still get maybe 10% “no”s, but it has gotten a lot better from when I first started. Part of it is because I have more feedback about how I’m answering questions. Also, since I know I am going to be publicly graded on the quality of my question, I’m more careful in planning my answering, and in paying attention to subtle cues while I’m answering.

## Show Me

*How can you better understand a technique?*

One demonstration can replace hours of frustrating dialog.

There are lots of techniques out there that require you to understand fundamental theory before you can get them. However, much of the time you will be unable to even listen to a description of theory because you don't have enough context.

This happens all the time in music school. A teacher would launch into a long-winded theoretical description of modes or a chord progression. I wanted to stop them (but never did, musical schools generally being "not the place" for such behavior and I being a young chicken) and say, "Could you play one please, then begin your lecture over?"

If you have a piano handy, here's an example. Modes are cool. They are the basis of all church music up until ????. They are commonly used today (The Police's "Don't Stand So Close To Me" is in Lydian mode). But I'm not going to explain. First, go play the modes. Play 8 notes, up then down, on the white keys starting with C. Now play 8 notes, up then down, starting with D.

If you had done this (which I don't expect you did, because I never do activities demanded by book authors), you would now be ready to hear an explanation of how you get from the Ionian mode (C-C) to the Dorian mode (D-D) by flattening the third and seventh notes. If we got rolling, I could even explain "I don't particularly like modes anyway" (Ionian-Dorian-Phrygian-Lydian-Mixolydian-Aeolian).

*"Can you show me?"*

## Not Now

*How do you tell your leader you are out of your safety zone?*

"Back off, Jack!" comes to mind. Unfortunately, it is likely to invoke some fairly defensive reactions. The leader definitely feels you need to change. You're not given them her way face-saving way out if you just refuse.

On the other hand, you really don't want feel like you can change. You are up to your eyebrows in craziness and one more could just put you over the top. In your heart of hearts, though, you know you need to change.

*"Can this wait?"*

This is a legitimate question. If the answer is "yes", you both have your graceful exit. If the answer is "no", your partner needs to first help you find a way to get back to your safety zone.

## Nudge

*How should you make your entrance in a working team?*

It's easy to see situations as disasters. "The patient is nearly dead, but I'll see what I can do." The doctor who gets the patient's family to buy this is set up for a fat fee. However, as bad as things look, most situations will keep stumbling along because, incredibly, the competition isn't any better.

Seeing situations as disasters is addictive. After all, I must be pretty important to be called in on such a difficult situation.



You can travel along the crisis/intervention spiral until you freeze completely. At some point, you perceive the problem as so bad that it overwhelms your confidence in your ability to intervene. Then you're stuck.

At times like these, and for all the situations that really aren't about to fly apart, you need to keep from perceiving the situation as a disaster.

My wife is an absolute master of this. She can pick out one improvement in a room in total chaos. When that one's done, she does the next one. In a remarkably short time, the room is clean. I look at the same room, panic, and go outside to chop down some more trees.

*Begin with small changes. Do one thing now and everything else later.*

If nudging doesn't come naturally to me, I have been privileged to work with a couple of world-class nudgers—Ward Cunningham and Martin Fowler. They don't do anything dramatic, but things change around them.

## Clean Talk

*How can you show that you're different?*

I started to write this pattern to explain when to use profanity as a leadership technique. While I found lots of examples of leaders who cussed, I was unable to come up with a single case where it seemed the leader would have failed had they not cussed.

My wife, Cindee, says I cuss when I'm afraid. Every time I'm afraid, I would do better to face it, whether privately or publicly, instead of hiding behind dirty words.

The downside of cussing is enormous. As just mentioned, it can become an excuse not to face your fears. It can easily offend people you'd rather not offend. It can make you sound stupid.

*Violate the social norms. Never use profanity.*

Some cultures expect profanity. You can stand out on a trading floor by never using expletives. Clean Talk can be a simple first step towards leadership.

I'm not trying to be a prude here. If cussing is just the thing for you, go for it. But think about whether there is an even better way to accomplish your purpose, and think about your purpose and mental state in the first place.

## Mission Impossible

*How do you stand out positively?*

It's easy to find problems. Pointing out problems doesn't make you a leader, it makes you a whiner. If you want things to change, awareness is not enough (contrast this with Nudge, where awareness often is enough all by itself).

At the beginning of a turnaround, the team is often paralyzed, either emotionally or intellectually. They see all of their problems as big problems, and they just don't feel like doing anything about them. Fortunately, though, impossible problems are often

impossible only because everyone agrees they're impossible. You can find something that seems hard and make visible progress.

*Solve a problem that everyone thinks is impossible. You don't have to solve the whole problem, just enough so people's fear is unblocked.*

"If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself." Ah, the plaint of inept leaders everywhere. If you tackle a tough problem today because no one else thinks they can, that's one thing. If you're still tackling all the same kinds of problems in a month, you've failed as a leader. You might be a fine implementor, and if that's what you're aiming to be, well enough. Leadership is getting the team to change. So move past Mission Impossible as quickly as you can.

## Borrowed Idea

*How do you figure out what problem to solve?*

Coming into a new situation can be overwhelming. There are technical problems, social problems, management problems. How do you know what to work on first?

Sometimes when you see the need for change, you really are the first one to see the problem. Part of the value that you bring is your perspective. When you alone see a problem, you will probably have to begin fixing it yourself (Mission Impossible).

When I began as a consultant, I thought this was always the value that I brought. I would come in, listen hard, invent a great idea, then help my clients implement it. Turns out the world isn't nearly as stupid as all that.

I was on one of my first consulting assignments, desperately searching for ideas when one of the programmers said, "The problem is obvious. Project A needs to merge with Project B. I've told my boss this a hundred times, but he just won't listen." It couldn't be this easy, could it? I was valuable because I could come up with great ideas, wasn't I?

I didn't have any better ideas, so I went to the boss and said, "Perhaps you could merge Project A and Project B." Oh joy, oh rapture. What a bright guy you are. How did you ever come to such an insight into our complicated problems in such a short time? We're so glad you came.

So much for being a great guy because I came up with cool ideas. It took me a while to get over the shock.

*Hear the ideas. Tell them to the people with power.*

My biggest breakthrough, the Chrysler C3 project, started exactly this way. During coffee on the first day someone said, "If only we could walk through the machine room with a big magnet, we could get this project done." Nervous laughter ran around the room. Everyone went back to patching up the shaky old code. Two days later I was telling the CIO that we should throw out the old code and start over.

## Sit Together

*How do you make a safe place for leading or following?*

The Big Lie of technology is that place doesn't matter any more. The virtual world is all we need—with enough bandwidth, Mogadishu is Bali. It's just simply not true.

This is not to say that you can't create the feeling of safety without sitting on each other's laps. Advances in communication have made it possible for teams to form remotely. But the most interaction happens when you share a place. When you are together, every experience is a shared experience, and shared experience is the bedrock of teamwork.

*Sit together.*

Even if you are stuck in the wilds of the Cubicle Desert, you can make a place to sit together. Beg, buy, borrow, or steal a second comfortable chair (if you don't have a comfortable chair, get one—you can't lead, follow, work, or play if your back hurts). Put the computer somewhere where it is easily visible to both of you. If interruptions are a problem when you are with your leader or your follower, put a strip of masking tape across the cubicle door.

Non-technical leading and following can happen away from the usual work space. Drinking coffee together or sharing a cookie can expand both partners safety zone, and you can tackle subjects you couldn't tackle under the assault of jangling phones and “You've Got Mail!!!!”.

## Nickname

*Something about calling each other familiar names discharging tension.*

“Yes, master,” delivered in just the right Young Obi-Wan voice can do wonders to loosen up a tense situation.

## Rite of Passage

*How do you mark the end of a leadership episode?*

Since we're talking about reluctant leading and following, we are trying to get the “leadership moment” over with as quickly as possible. However, since we want the leading or following to be effective, we can't just quit as soon as we feel uncomfortable.

As a leader, you have a clearer idea of the purpose of the transaction than the follower. It is up to you to set the criteria for being done. “When they've written their first unit test, I can go back to my work.”

*Work towards a clear milestone.*

Mark the achievement of the milestone in some way—high five, buying the follower a soda, telling someone else about the achievement in the follower's presence.

## Translated Concern

*How do you phrase a problem?*

The easiest solution is just call it like you see it. “You’re breaking the build and it’s got to stop.” Bang. Zoom. Straight out of the safety zone. No learning possible. Game over.

Back up. What you need to do is find a way to communicate your concern, while at the same time honoring your partner.

*Translate your concern into concerns your partner already has.*

Leaders need to translate concerns into follower language—“Have you seen how we check in code?” Well, no. Or, yes but I was in a hurry.

Followers need to translate, too. “I only know one way to check in code. If there is another ways I’m all ears.”

## Humble Pie

*How do you balance criticism?*

When you take authority over someone else’s behavior, you risk unbalancing your relationship. Once, twice, it’s fine. If all you ever do is try to get other people to change, though, resentment is bound to pile up.

Fortunately, the raw material for fixing this problem is lying around everywhere just waiting to be used.

*Publicly admit your own mistakes.*

Because I tend to be pretty high profile (that is, not nearly reluctant enough leadership), I get to use this pattern *a lot*. The only times I don’t use it and I should is exactly when I know, at least sub-consciously, that I’m making a mistake.

A good example happened at the XP 2001 conference in Sardinia (at least programmers are finally picking cool spots for conferences.) I was pair programming with Alan Francis, a bright, young programmer. We were converting integers to roman numerals (a cool little programming task). We’d implemented a few tests already. I chose for the next test a problem that would require a couple of changes. Alan challenged me, “Perhaps you’re smart enough to go that fast, but is it really what you want to do?” (cf Brutal Sarcasm, which I had apparently used on him a time or two).

In front of a class of 40 student new to XP, I took a deep breath and apologized. It gave everyone an example of just how the programming process should proceed, it validated Alan as an expert in his eyes and theirs, and he was right, I was going too fast.

## Awareness

*How do you begin addressing a problem?*

Just because someone says, “Please tell me what to do,” doesn’t mean that you should actually tell them what to do. When I say that, I generally mean, “I’m afraid because I’m confident in what I should do.” Answering that question with a laundry list of behaviors isn’t helpful, because the problem is the confidence, the lack of a gap between comfort zone and safety zone.

Rah rah doesn't generally help a confidence problem. If all I needed was positive words, I would say them to myself. What I need is a sense that the situation is under control, or at least understandable. Once the world isn't total chaos, I can take it from there.

*First, help the follower be aware.*

I learned about the power of awareness from Tim “The Inner Game of Golf” Galwey. Unfortunately I didn't have time to get him to fix my golf slice. However, we did have time for a demonstration. He drew two dots on a piece of paper. The game was to close my eyes and draw a line from one dot and stop on the second dot. I tried it a few times just to get the feel of it. Then he said, “Do it again, and notice which muscle you feel most as you draw.” I felt a muscle on the back side of my shoulder. “Okay, do it again, and concentrate on that muscle to the exclusion of all else.” When I stopped drawing I forgot to open my eyes, I was concentrating so hard. When I did open them, there was the pencil, right in the middle of the second dot.

I fought against the power of awareness for a long time. “It can't be that simple.” “That's for physical stuff, not for mental activities.” I think what I was saying in all this was, “I don't get to fix people.” I valued myself because I was able to fix problems.

Being a parent five times over has gone a long way towards helping me get over the need to fix people. They can't be fixed. They can sometimes be helped to fix themselves. That's what awareness is all about—giving your partner a sensible enough world that they can go ahead and change themselves.

One last example—a team in London discovered that every time they broke one of their overnight tests, it was a change they had made after 4:30 the previous afternoon. They bought an alarm clock and stopped programming at 4:30. It made all the difference on the train in the morning knowing that the tests all ran perfectly so they could look forward to adding new functionality instead of running around fighting fires. But without the original awareness, they would probably been tempted to work longer and longer hours in their search for productivity, rather than doing the right thing, which was to stop working when they stopped being productive.

Even if awareness doesn't “magically” make a problem go away, measuring together can be the basis for the beginning of communication. We're not sure why you keep making this kind of mistake. Hmm... Let me watch you program another one of those. Do you realize you didn't write tests for this code over here? That's not the problem? Well, we have a lot more to go on moving forward than we did before.

## Curative Story

*How do you make large changes slowly?*

The “mechanic” metaphor is endemic to leadership. I have a problem. Will you please fix it (by which I generally mean “make it go away”).

We could debate the merits of the mechanic metaphor up, down, and sideways, but there is a fundamental problem that cuts through all the theoretical concerns—the mechanic metaphor misaligns authority and responsibility. In the final analysis, I have

responsibility for my behavior and I have authority over my own behavior. The mechanic model tries to transfer authority to someone else, but there can be no transfer of responsibility. My behavior is my behavior.

Reluctant leaders temporarily accept authority and responsibility, but since this creates imbalance, the transfer should be as short and as gentle as possible.

*Tell a story, the imagery of which contains the seeds of the problem and solution. Don't explain. Let the story stand.*

Here is a story I told to my six-year-old Forrest when he kept dashing off in random directions and crashing into walls:

Once there was a hummingbird named Harry. Harry loved yellow flowers. He loved yellow flowers so much that as soon as he saw one he would zoom off to take a drink. Pretty soon he would zoom off as soon as he saw *anything* yellow. <picking items from the room> He saw a yellow hat. Zoom! Bang! He saw a yellow street sign. Zoom! Bang! He saw a yellow book. Zoom! Bang!

His beak was getting bent. He was getting headaches all the time. He went to see the wise old owl. The owl said, "Loving yellow flowers is fine. When you see something yellow, you need to stop and make sure it's a flower before you zoom over to it."

I told this story to him probably a dozen time over the course of a month. I never mentioned the connection to his face-plant habit. However, at the end of the month, without ever saying, "Slow down and watch where you are going. How many times have I told you...<blah blah blah>" he was far more careful.

What I really love about curative stories is that they honor the listener. They say, "You are smart to figure this out, but here is a picture that might help." The listener can take from the story any lesson they are ready to learn.

Adults often resist learning through stories. "Just tell me what to do. Don't give me that guru garbage." That's why there are lots of techniques in this book. However, I believe that the deepest, most lasting lessons come from stories, so that's where I start and end whenever I can.

There are volumes to be written on curative storytelling for adults. The basic idea comes out of Waldorf (also called Steiner) education. I'm only beginning to understand just how powerful they can be, so I'll stop here and let you try them yourself.

## Simple Contradiction

*How can you help someone who contradicts you?*

I found this situation frustrating for many years. "Don't you think..." Any sentence starting "Don't you think," can immediately be answered, "No."

I have no idea why this wasn't enough for me. I suppose I'm pursuing universal acceptance (and cocking up the job royally). I just couldn't leave statements like that

alone. “Don’t you think you might design yourself into a corner if you grow the design one step at a time?” “Well, no, because...” and I’d be off on another fruitless diatribe.

Imagine my relief when I discovered that I can answer the real question simply, without elaboration.

*Just say “No”.*

I find it difficult to take all the emotion out of my voice when I do this. “But you can’t possibly design a system as complicated as this one step at a time.” “Yes, you can.” <louder> “But the architecture is so complicated. You can’t do that a little at a time.” “Yes, you can.” <turning red> “Without an overall design before you start, the whole project is doomed.” “No, it isn’t.”

You want to get the questioner first to imagine that a different way is possible, then start imagining the benefits of working a new way.

## Brutal Sarcasm

*How do you get someone to change when they can’t yet see the need for change?*

People know what to do but they don’t do it. What is up with that?

You have a partner who consistently checks in ugly code. You know it’s ugly. They know it’s ugly. Somehow, though, they just keep doing it.

There’s lots of techniques in this book to try in this situation. You can explain, make them aware, tell stories. What if they keep doing it?

First, is it so bad? Is it you who are the problem? I didn’t think so, but it is worth asking before proceeding. What you need now is a way to talk to them that will jolt them out of what they are doing. They don’t need more facts. They need a new way of looking at the world.

*Reflect what they are doing with sarcasm.*

The key with brutal sarcasm is to always sow the seeds of redemption with the comment. “Wow! That’s pretty amazing that you can get two tests running at the same time. I have trouble working one at a time.” This can be devastating to your partner. However, the way out is obvious—delete one of the tests and get the remaining one working. Then the follower can feel good about rescuing himself, and they have a story to help them remember the lesson.

Sarcasm is more commonly used to reinforce power relationships. I was advised many times to leave Brutal Sarcasm out. I use it so much, and to such effect, that I’d really like to leave it in. You have to promise to only use it when you’re feeling confident, and never use it out of fear. After you once smack someone because you are afraid, their trust for you is broken. It will take a long time to rebuild that trust.

## Socratic Method

*How do stop people from relying on you for answers?*

We established early that this was a book only for reluctant leaders and followers. You would think, with an audience like that, that we would have no problems creating dependency. You would be wrong (which is to say, “I have been wrong.”)

It *is* easier to rely on someone else for answers. It *is* easier to give up authority and responsibility to someone else. It doesn't work, but it's easier.

We need some way to wean followers from the need to follow and leaders from the need to lead. We have work to do, remember?

*Only answer with questions.*

Socratic method is not the same as cat-and-mouse. Bob Trotter, my Music 201 professor, gave us permission to interrupt him if we ever caught him playing cat-and-mouse. Here's how cat-and-mouse works—I the teacher want to reinforce my power over you the student. I will ask you a question to which I have the answer, and I will keep asking you the question until you answer correctly. “What is the capital of North Dakota? No, good guess. Anyone else? That's not quite right. Johnny? No? Fargo.”

You can tell cat-and-mouse is not a teaching technique because it assumes the student already knows. If the student already knows, it's not teaching. I'm very comfortable now answering, “You haven't taught us about the capital of North Dakota yet. What is it?” However, I still get urges, reinforced by decades of mass education, to jump in with “the right answer”. Then I get angry that the teacher is playing power games instead of teaching.

There are no wrong answers in Socratic method. Whatever answer you give is the seed of the next question. The “final” point you reach as a follower is the final point you are ready to reach, enhanced because of the awareness, perspective, and courage of the leader.

As with Curative Stories, adults often balk at Socratic Method. “Quit fooling around and tell me the damn answer.” If you've gotten to this point, some other technique may be more appropriate. However, sometimes frustration fuels insight.

## Silence

*How do you respond when no reasonable response is possible?*

When leading and following, you are dealing with an unstable emotional substance. It can blow up, seemingly inexplicably, at just about any moment. What do you do when someone goes non-linear?

Are you sure you know exactly the right thing to say? Something that is going to help and not just make the situation worse? Weren't you sure you knew five minutes ago exactly the right thing to say? Perhaps you should take a moment and think.

*Silence is better than saying the wrong thing.*

This is surely a tough pattern for me. I am Mechanic Leaderman <trumpet flourish>. I can fix this.

I didn't learn a lot in my family about handling confrontation positively. When I started consulting I found myself completely unprepared when I accidentally touched



an emotional nerve. The turnaround for me was when I was giving a pattern class in Boulder, Colorado. A student sitting in the front row got more and more agitated. After a couple of hours she walked out. Whew! Now I can get back to the rest of the class. Wait a minute, Mr. Beck (I'm quite formal with myself when I think I'm screwing up). You started this, you'd better finish it. I excused the class.

When I went out in the hall, the student was sobbing quietly. She vented at me immediately, but instead of running away I just stood there and took it. After a couple of minutes she slowed down. I told her what I was trying to achieve and asked her how I could better achieve it for her and the rest of the class. She made a reasonable suggestion. I invited her to return to the class.

Come to learn later that she was in a job that basically involved her tidying up everyone else's loose ends. She hated her job, and she was looked down on by the rest of the organization. There was no way to "fix" the situation. I could, however, listen. And if I could listen in that situation, there are lots of other situations where I can listen, too, regardless of the flapping of my magic Mechanic Leaderman cape in the closet.

## Help Request

*How do you help someone get back to their safety zone?*

Sometimes a "you'll do fine—just take this step, now this one..." is all that's needed. Sometimes, though, someone is so far out of their safety zone that getting away from the activity is a prerequisite to progress.

"Stop, stop, stop!" isn't going to work, though. Vigorous handwaving is only going to take them further out of their safety zone, and getting back is just that much harder.

You can't help them by helping them. You can't help them by stopping them. What do you do?

*Ask them to help you on some other task.*

I'm nervous about including this pattern. If your partner realizes what you are doing, they are likely to view it as manipulation. "Leave me alone. I'm almost done here. And if you try to start a Socratic Dialog I'll poke you in the snoot!" However, I've seen Ron Jeffries use it to great effect. The key seems to be delivering your request with absolute sincerity. "I know you're busy there, but could you help me arrange the donut plate," just isn't going to work. The alternate task needs to be important, and your partner needs to have some obvious contribution to make.

## Motto

*How do you reinforce a lesson?*

Once you and your partner have learned a lesson, you'd like to spread it to the rest of the team. Also, as with all change, it is all too easy to slide back into old habits. Once you and your partner have learned a lesson you'd like to remember it yourselves.

*Boil the lesson down to a pithy saying.*

There is a talent to picking just the right few words, or even just a gesture, to remind everyone of the essence of a lesson. Ken Auer is an absolute master of it. His Auerisms are worth studying.

This is one of those patterns that are definitely culturally relative. When I had my first job in Ireland, I kept trying to come up with clever mottoes. Every time, my brilliant efforts were twisted to make me look stupid, arrogant, or just plain American (yes, yes, redundant, I know...). I quickly learned to choose techniques in Ireland that didn't require a superior grasp of the English language.