

The Social Leader: Leading in the Age of Social Media

By Frank Guglielmo, Ph.D.

There are three key questions that are at the forefront of the leadership development agenda in today's digital social media enabled world:

- Is leadership still relevant?
- Are individual leaders in organizations still relevant?
- Are you still relevant in the way you are leading?

The answer to the first two questions is a resounding yes; in fact many CEO's would say that the need for talented individuals to lead has never been greater. A 2012 survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit found 43% of CEOs concerned about having sufficient leadership talent. ⁱ

The question of leadership relevance in the digital age is a critical one; leaders have to learn to become relevant in a fast changing, social media enabled world. But the solution is not a quick fix about becoming technically savvy; rather it is about transforming your mindset at a deeper level and evolving a powerful personal leadership narrative.

The world is changing, driven by the constant connection and ubiquitous creation of information resulting from the explosion of social media.

The world we play in, work in and try to lead has not changed in the last 10 years – it has been replaced. The overriding context that faces a leader today is the socially connected world in which we all now work. This is a world in which information is not just ubiquitous (the information age of yesterday) but where everyone has the ability to influence both the creation and meaning of information constantly and in real-time.

This new socially connected digital world, our *post-information age*, is forcing companies to rethink how they are structured, how they operate and most importantly, what it takes to lead within this new world.

Almost 25 years ago John Kotter wrote the famous and deeply influential HBR article *What Leaders Really Do?*ⁱⁱ He told us that a leader's primary role is to help people cope with change and that leaders actually do three things: they set direction, align people, and motivate and inspire others. This article set in motion a school of thought that placed leaders at the pinnacle of sense making within organizations. They became accountable for creating meaning, harnessing passions and bringing employees together in common cause.

Of course other than Kotter's writing, something else of consequence happened in 1990 - the Internet came into being and forever changed the worldⁱⁱⁱ. The Internet

gave birth to the information age, and the so-called knowledge era. For the first time everyone had access to huge amounts of information through the internet and knowledge was fast turning into a commodity. Possessing information no longer had a premium, dealing the first blow to hierarchies that were sustained by the notion that those who led knew more.

The information age quickly gave way to the age of Social Media, a post-information age where *information* – facts and data plus a point of view – is now created continually, communally and simultaneous by many people who are joined by passion around a topic rather than geographical or organizational allegiance. From merely being consumers of information, we turned into producers as well, which dealt the second blow to the neat and tidy world of hierarchy. This new reality is moving the underlying model of our organizations away from “hierarchies” toward flatter, highly networked “communities”.

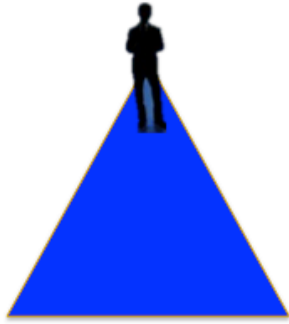
In this world of “community-based” organizations, where the meaning of facts is the province of a digitally connected community rather than a single leader, are you leading in a relevant way? The role of leadership as the linchpin of helping an organization cope with change and uncertainty has perhaps never been truer. *How* a leader delivers on this role in a massively connected world where employees have access not only to facts and data but to everyone’s viewpoint has changed significantly.

Leadership in this new “post-information age” world requires a shift in focus from being a “General” to being a “Mayor”,

In traditional organizations the successful leader was a *general*. In post-information age organizations the successful leader will be a *mayor*. Mayors have constituents whom they know and influence rather than troops who they command based on authority. These are the new realities of leading in a business that operates in a world driven by digital social connections – what we call ***Social Leadership***.

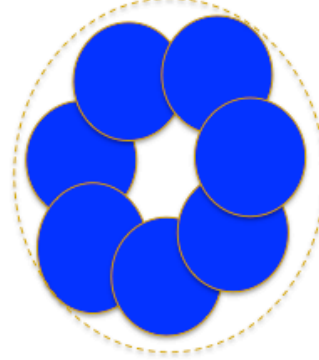
The differences between a general and a mayor are immediately obvious. Generals have troops; mayors have constituents. Generals are known by their troops; mayors know their constituents. Generals command based on their position in the hierarchy, which they achieved independent of the wishes of their troops. Mayors govern from their position in the community, which they achieve with the consent of their constituents.

Traditional Organization



- The leader was:
 - A **General** directing the troops
 - Setting strategy & building organizational alignment
 - Directing execution and continuous improvement

“Community-Based” Organization



- The leader is:
 - A **Mayor** addressing the needs of constituencies
 - Inspiring common purpose
 - Harnessing passion and innovation

Constituents versus troops, knowing versus being known, governing versus commanding, consent based influence versus positional authority, these are the new realities of leading within a community based business. But how do leaders succeed within these new realities?

Increasingly, the answer is not a set pattern of behavior, or a “fit the mold” approach. Rather success as a leader is based on authenticity - an individual focusing on the productive capabilities that are naturally a part of who they are.

Fit the Mold



- Focus on “what the leader does”
 - Identify the “right” behaviors
 - Teach leaders these behaviors
 - Reinforce these behaviors through rewards and feedback

Be Authentic



- Focus on “what the leader is capable of”
 - Understand “who” the leader is
 - Grow the productive aspects of the leader
 - Reinforce continuous adaptive changes in behavior through rewards and feedback

The conversations a leader has, the actions she takes and the behaviors he exhibits cannot be artificial – an attempt to mimic a standard that is set by an organization independent of the individual. These conversations, actions and behaviors all need to be authentically part of the individual's leadership style. This still leaves the critical question, "what should a successful leader focus their attention to be successful in this new world?"

We each need to identify and grow our own unique approach to addressing the leadership imperatives of shifting from leading as a general to leading as a mayor.

At the Social Leader Network, we have found that there are five imperatives for success as a leader when making the shift from general to mayor:

- Conveying your values
- Proactively influencing the world around you
- Relating to others
- Taking in new information and adjusting your perspective
- Adjusting your approach for different audiences

In our forthcoming book, *The Social Leader*, Sudhanshu Palsule and I discuss what we call the five Tenets of Social Leadership. These tenets are a lens through which to understand the productive, and non-productive, aspects of a leader. They address the five imperatives of leading as a mayor. These Tenets are outlined below.

Tenets of Social Leadership

The five tenets to focus on to become a successful Social Leader are:

- **Personal drivers:** Those aspects of ourselves that motivate us and are the origin of our behavior: our needs for affiliation, achievement and power
 - Achievement – the personal desire to win, to succeed
 - Affiliation – the preference for working with others and growing attachments
 - Power – willingness to accomplish objectives though others, comfort with responsibility
- **Mindfulness & Personal Agency:** being present and experiencing events as they are; being aware of one's own behavior and its' impact on others; believing that one is in control of one's own actions

- **Openness to learning, growth and ambiguity:** Thriving and learning from situations that are complex, novel and ambiguous. Remaining willing to take in new information and to handle changing situations
- **Credibility and Equity:** Engender in others a belief in our credibility; building personal trust in a relationship. The consistency, reliability and authenticity with which we are perceived by others which in turn determines their acceptance and understanding of our behavior
- **Social Scalability:** Adjusting the scale on which we lead; our ability to successfully influence and set agendas when working with individuals, teams and entire organizations.

The five Tenets of Social Leadership interact in a dynamic way to create an individual's Personal Narrative. A Personal Narrative is the thematic story describing an individual that 1) the individual believes about himself or herself; and 2) that others believe about that person. The Tenets of Social Leadership provide a framework for looking at these themes within a leader's unique Personal Narrative.

We all uniquely hold conversations, take actions and exhibit behaviors that contribute to being productive within these five Tenets and, at times, non-productive. Growing as a Social Leader really involves looking at our unique approach to leading – our Personal Narrative – through the lens of the Tenets of Social Leadership and focusing on increasing and expanding the conversations, actions and behaviors that are productive.

The Tenets of Social Leadership provide a lens to help guide your growth as a Social Leader.

The world in which we seek to be leaders has not changed; it has been replaced. We are living and working in new world where every employee has access to data and opportunity to contribute to creating meaning and a point of view. What was once the sole purview of the leader is now widespread – driving a shift to flatter, networked, “community-based” organizations. This in turn is creating imperatives for leaders and requires leaders to consider themselves more as mayors than generals – focusing on harnessing the passions, creative and momentum of their constituents.

Finding our unique, authentic path to being successful as Social Leader involves three critical things:

- Honestly understanding when we are productive and not productive as a leader;

- Creating a thought-full plan for expanding your authentically productive conversations, actions and behaviors;
- Purposefully putting your self in situations that provide an opportunity to grow.

The tenets of Social Leadership provide a lens to help understand yourself as a social leader and to guide putting yourself in situations purposefully to grow your own unique capabilities to lead as a mayor within this new social media enabled world.

ⁱ Economist Intelligence Unit (2012). CEO Perspectives: How HR can take on a bigger role in driving growth.

ⁱⁱ Kotter, J.P. (1990) What Leaders Really Do. Harvard Business Review.

ⁱⁱⁱIn 1990 ARPNET was decommissioned opening the door to commercial internet service which was fully realized in 1995 with the decommissioning of NSFNET.