

MAXWELL MOMENT**Creating a Winning Environment - Part One**

by Dr. John C. Maxwell

The environment has taken center stage recently in the American media. Going "green" has become trendy among everyone from Hollywood elites to suburbanites. Corporate America is experiencing pressure from environmentally savvy consumers who are flocking en masse to socially responsible companies. At a time when the USA is at war, an American, Al Gore, was awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize for his persistent advocacy of the environment. Whether the discussion involves global warming, renewable energy, or organic agriculture, seemingly everywhere environmental issues are at the forefront of debate.

Perhaps "environment" should be the word at the center of leadership conversations as well. Consciously or unconsciously, leaders cultivate the environment in their workplaces. Some are lush climates where leaders flourish and thrive, while others are toxic environments where leaders either leave or wither from the pollution. In each of the next two editions of Leadership Wired, we'll pose five questions about the environment you're creating as a leader. My goal is to help you nurture a winning environment in your organization.

The Growth Environment

Growth is the yardstick by which you can measure the well-being of your organization's environment. A healthy climate is conducive to growth, and functions as an incubator where leaders are birthed and developed. The following qualities characterize a growth environment:

1. Others are ahead of you.
2. Your focus is forward.
3. The atmosphere is affirming.
4. You are often outside of your comfort zone.
5. Failure is not your enemy.
6. Others are growing.
7. People desire change.
8. Growth is modeled and expected.

To gauge your success in setting the climate of your organization, monitor your people to see whether or not they're growing.

Questions That Create a Winning Environment

1. *"Do I understand what it takes to be a team?"*

Without effective teamwork, an environment is doomed to fail. A collection of individual contributions will never compare to the synergy of a cohesive team. A successful team displays:

Tolerance of one another's weaknesses.

Encouragement of each other's efforts.

Acknowledgement that every person has something to offer.

Mindfulness of how each person depends on the others for success.

As Mother Teresa was fond of saying, "You can do what I cannot do, I can do what you cannot do, and together we can do great things."

2. *"Are my expectations crystal clear?"*

We all deal with the impact of expectations in 3 dimensions:

1. Expectations we have for ourselves.
2. Expectations we have of others.
3. Expectations others have of us.

Leaders clarify expectations in every dimension, and they frequently revisit them to make adjustments or to realign team members to the expectations.

3. *"Do my people understand why what we do is important?"*

In any environment, workers can lose focus of how their task relates to the big picture. Leaders connect activities to the purposes behind them by bridging "what" and "why". They do so by exposing team members to the end results of their labor, by expressing gratitude for their work, and by explaining how each job is relevant to the company as a whole.

4. *"Does my team define success with their customer?"*

In an optimal environment, every person is pulling in the same direction toward a common goal of serving the customer. From the sales team to the accounting office, no one should be in the dark when it comes to understanding customer needs and figuring out how to exceed them.

Before I speak to an organization, I ask questions to uncover their motivation for bringing me in as a featured guest. The organization's response helps me tailor my presentation so that they receive maximum value from me. Afterward, I follow up by asking if I met their expectations. Doing so gives me feedback while also demonstrating my commitment to serving them.

5. *"Am I holding people accountable for performance?"*

In the work environment, what doesn't get inspected, won't be respected. If there's no accountability in an area, then there's no incentive to perform with excellence in it. It's incumbent upon a leader to design scorecards and benchmarks to evaluate performance.

Accountability starts with a look in the mirror. Workers are unsuccessful for three main reasons, and in each case, leadership may have set the stage for failure.

Root Causes of Poor Performance

Leadership Responsibility

Inadequate Training
Lack of Capacity
Bad Attitude

Proper Equipping
Picking the right people for the job
Modeling confidence and optimism

Before blaming or disciplining their people, leaders should first scrutinize their performance of personal responsibilities.

Review

Questions That Create a Winning Environment

1. "Do I understand what it takes to be a team?"
2. "Are my expectations crystal clear?"
3. "Do my people understand why what we do is important?"
4. "Does my team define success with their customer?"
5. "Am I holding people accountable for their performance?"

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LEADERSHIP@LARGE

Seeing the Future

"I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."
~ John F. Kennedy, May 25, 1961

With those words, President Kennedy cast the vision for perhaps the most spectacular feat ever undertaken by the United States of America. His ambitious vision captivated the imagination of the Americans, and it motivated the nation's brightest scientists and astronauts to pursue a seemingly impossible mission.

No one, even a generation earlier, could have fathomed a man walking around on the moon. Consider that only 50 years before Kennedy's speech, most Americans were traveling by horse and buggy! In those days, sending a man to the moon would have seemed just as ridiculous as traveling backwards in time.

Amazingly, NASA accomplished Kennedy's daring vision when the crew of Apollo 11 landed on the moon in July of 1969. Within a dozen years of JFK's speech, 24 Americans had walked on the surface of the moon. America had done the impossible, and the entire country took pride in the accomplishment.

THE MYTH ABOUT LANDING ON THE MOON

In their article, "The Higher Plane of Leadership," Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller give seeing the future the top spot on their list of qualities held by servant leaders. When so many people float through life without a strong sense of direction, a leader serves by linking others to a purpose greater than their own self-interest.

In the case of President Kennedy, the vision to land on the moon rallied millions of Americans with a sense of meaning, and it turned a fanciful dream into a concrete reality. However, Blanchard and Miller caution against assuming that vision comes only from world leaders or history's heroes. In their words, such assumptions, "fuel the myth that creating and communicating a compelling vision is someone else's responsibility." Regardless of position, every leader has the duty to picture a brighter future, and to inspire others to create a better tomorrow.

If visions only started with Presidents and CEO's, then we'd have a small number of elite leaders surrounded by a sea of mindless followers. Blanchard and Miller argue that leaders must have visions aside from those of their leaders, "Although vision from the top is critically important, it is no substitute for personal vision, vision for your team, your department, or your division." One could argue that President Kennedy's vision to land on the moon was made possible by countless supporting visions of NASA scientists, engineers, and astronauts. By himself, JFK would never have been able to put the pieces in play to see the future come to pass. He relied on the visions of leaders at every level of government to develop the vehicles, systems, and programs to make landing on the moon possible.

To gain more insights from Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller, access their article, "The Higher Plane of Leadership," in the Fall 2007 issue of the [Leader to Leader](#) journal.

United We Stand... Divided We Fall

In the late 1960s, disillusionment with the Vietnam War was running high across the country. President Nixon won the 1968 election, largely on his pledge to end the conflict and bring American troops home. After de-escalating the Vietnam War during his first year in office, the Nixon Administration invaded Cambodia on April 30, 1970, expanding the war and sparking anti-war demonstrations across the nation. One of war protests ended in disaster and remains a symbol of an America at odds with itself.

THE KENT STATE TRAGEDY

On May 4th, 1970 students planned to hold an anti-war demonstration on the Kent State campus at noon. Fearing the protest would turn violent, the college's administration prohibited the rally and called in Ohio National Guardsmen to maintain order at the university. However, outraged students showed up anyway—some 1500 taking part in the demonstration.

Shortly before noon, the National Guardsmen ordered the students to scatter, but they refused to leave. The Guardsmen then fired tear gas canisters into the crowd, but the wind dispersed the gas, rendering it ineffective. The Guardsmen, their military rifles loaded, decided to advance on the students in an effort to break up the anti-war rally. Undeterred, the students responded by hurling rocks at the Guardsmen and yelling insults at them.

Stymied in their attempts to disband the protest, the Guardsmen had begun to retreat from the students when several of the troops wheeled around and began to shoot. While some fired only into the air, others fired directly into the crowd of students. When the dust settled, four students were dead and nine wounded.

The first reactions from the students were of shock and disbelief, but as the reality of what had happened settled in, the students' anger boiled into an uproar. The ugliness of the shootings could have escalated into even more bloodshed, as the hostile and agitated crowd prepared to mob the small group of soldiers. Fortunately, Kent State faculty, led by Professor Glenn Frank, made their way to the students and passionately persuaded them not to attack the Guardsmen. Such was the furor that it took twenty minutes for the faculty to convince the students to leave.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM KENT STATE

Leadership lessons from Kent State are particularly relevant today as America finds itself bogged down in another unpopular war, with strong opinions both for and against involvement in Iraq. As we move forward in a tense political climate, let's not forget the principles taught to us by the tragedy in Kent.

The Power of Relationships

In the absence of relationships, misunderstandings may fuel hatred and even violence. The students at Kent State didn't know the Ohio National Guardsmen. All they saw were soldier with guns—a representation of what they were protesting in Vietnam. Likewise, the Guardsmen didn't know the students. All they saw was an uncontrollable and hate-filled mob, threatening to attack them.

The Kent State tragedy was moments away from being the Kent State Massacre when Professor Glenn Frank and the faculty intervened to calm the students. The relationships they had with the students earned them the right to be heard. Through their appeals, crisis was averted.

The Necessity of Civility

In the heat of a bitter clash of opinions, no excuse can be given for physically lashing out at the other side. Perhaps the four students who died would still be alive had not the protestors provoked the Guardsmen by showering them with rocks. By the same token, the students would certainly be alive had not the Guardsmen lost their cool and begun shooting their rifles.

The Freedom to Express Disagreement

In America, freedom of expression is a First Amendment right. When those in authority try to silence the voices of their opposition, we end up with brutalities like the Kent State tragedy. The freedom to criticize national policies is a mechanism by which leaders are held accountable for their actions by an active public. This freedom is a beautiful feature of democracy, and it separates the United States of America from the oppressive regimes of the world, which muzzle any voices of dissent.

To learn more from the tragic events on May 4th, 1970 at Kent State, visit the full account of the incident online at the university's website:

<http://dept.kent.edu/sociology/lewis/LEWIHEN.htm>

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The Three Signs of a Miserable Job by Patrick Lencioni (Wiley, 2007)

Three signs of a miserable job...

1. You circle the Starbucks drive thru twice on Monday mornings to delay starting your workday (and to feed the caffeine addiction that helps you survive).
2. Your mobile phone's ringtone is Loverboy's "Everybody's Working for the Weekend."
3. At 5:00 pm each Friday, you shoot off fireworks to celebrate your weekend independence.

While the symptoms of workplace discontent express themselves in a variety of ways, Patrick Lencioni spells out three universal origins of job dissatisfaction in his newest title, *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*.

Sticking to his modus operandi, Lencioni tells a fable to illustrate his ideas. The central character of his story is recently retired CEO, Brian Bailey. After piloting JMJ Fitness Machines into a lucrative buyout from an industry leader, Brian has earned himself a leisurely retirement alongside his wife, Leslie. However, Brian's relaxation is cut short when he hears about shifts in JMJ's workplace wrought by its buyers. The culture he spent nearly two decades carefully creating is being demolished.

While brooding about the unfortunate changes in his former company, Brian gets the itch to be back in management. In need of a challenge, he becomes co-owner of a run-down Italian restaurant, Gene and Joe's, near his home. Having dined at the restaurant, Brian has seen firsthand the disinterest of its workers, and he resolves to make Gene and Joe's a place where employees look forward to their work.

At first, Brian's pet management project is a bit bumpy, but soon he begins to turn around morale at Gene and Joe's. To spark changes inside the restaurant, he puts in place measurements whereby the employees can gauge their performance. He also takes special care to remind each employee of the difference they are making in the day of a customer or co-worker. Finally, he goes out of his way to learn about his employees at a personal level. As a result, the employees, formerly accustomed to surviving their work shifts, actually begin to enjoy their jobs.

Framed as a conversation between Brian and his wife, pages 128-144 set out Lencioni's philosophy of management. During the course of the dialogue, the three signs of a miserable job surface.

1. Immeasurement: "Employees need to be able to gauge their progress and level of contribution for themselves."
2. Irrelevance: "Everyone needs to know their work matters to someone."
3. Anonymity: "People cannot be fulfilled in their work if they are not known."

The three signs are summarized again by Lencioni on pages 221 and 222, and he advises managers on how to avoid them in the book's closing chapters.

Lencioni's story is well written, but it has only marginal entertainment value. However, by putting his philosophies into a fable, Lencioni makes *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job* far more memorable than the usual business text. Weeks after reading a book by Lencioni, it's easy to recall the central ideas by conjuring up his characters and storylines.

The Three Signs of a Miserable Job is a simple, yet profound book addressing the root causes of workplace malcontent. It is highly recommended reading for any LW subscriber in a management position. Readers will find that the book can be digested quickly and easily, and they will be able to draw from Lencioni's uncomplicated approach to purposeful management.

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QUOTES

Laughter

"Mirth is God's medicine. Everybody ought to bathe in it." ~ Henry Ward Beecher

"Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face." ~ Victor Hugo

"The most wasted of all days is one without laughter." ~ E.E. Cummings

For more information on Dr. John C. Maxwell, please [visit our website](#). In our effort to become your new content provider, portions of *Leadership Wired* are often written by editors other than John C. Maxwell and do not necessarily reflect his opinions.

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