

# A New Kind of Leader

## Leading Effectively as Our Culture Evolves

Dr. Tim Elmore

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*“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.”  
(Colossians 4:6)*

### **There’s More Than One Way to Do It**

It used to be that leadership and management researchers all seemed to believe that if you were going to grow an organization—you had to possess a certain temperament, perform a set number of essential functions, and even embrace a particular style of leadership. In short, all good leaders look basically alike.

Very few experts believe that anymore. Peter Drucker recently said he doesn’t believe there is “one right style” of leadership that will do the trick. There are, in fact, many leadership styles that work, both in the marketplace and in the ministry. Dr. John Maxwell once remarked, “We must size up every situation we face, then decide on what leadership approach is best. In other words, read the situation before you lead the situation.” I concur. It is ridiculous to think we must “clone” ourselves to look like someone else, because they happened to succeed in their context. I believe leadership success is about 50% nature and 50% nurture. By this I mean, it’s half about the wiring God gave you and finding a match for who you are; and, it’s half about adapting yourself to your environment so that you can be fruitful.

### **Leadership Style Statements:**

1. There is not just one right way to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Great leaders will change styles, but not \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Lasting leaders determine their style by observing their \_\_\_\_\_.

### **The Evolution of Leadership**

Leadership is a buzzword today. Many people are writing on the subject. It is important to note that the subject of leadership has experienced an evolution over the years. While we have always needed leaders, the style of leader we want is different now.

In fact, over the last fifty years our world transitioned in the way it views leadership. The acceptable style has changed for most people. The way we led in 1950 looks a little different than the way we lead today. Our culture has demanded it. Let’s look at this evolution.

1950s	1960s-1970s	1980s	1990s	Today
<b>Military Commander</b>	<b>CEO</b>	<b>Entrepreneur</b>	<b>Coach</b>	<b>Poet / Gardener</b>

**1.** \_\_\_\_\_

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the acceptable style—the popular style for most leaders—was the military commander style. Regardless of whether it was a business, church or government position, leaders led in a very top-down fashion. Flow charts told everyone where they fit, and if you weren't at the top of the chart—you didn't lead. Leaders led and followers followed. Folks didn't question authority like we do today. It was a black and white issue. This was our grandparents' generation. Even U.S. presidents during this period came from military backgrounds where this style was common: Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. There was one leader in the organization.

**KEY VALUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Employers would expect employees to be loyal and stay in the factory forty years, get their gold watch and then retire. If someone left a staff position, they were considered disloyal. Parishioners didn't leave churches because they were loyal to a denomination. Pastors enjoyed the respect of most people, even outside of the church. They were considered an authority. Part of the reason for the acceptance of this style was the level of education of most people. Relatively few went to college. During the 1920s and 30s, an eighth grade education was considered an achievement. By the 1950s, a high school degree was the norm. Leaders controlled information. This is no longer true in our "information age." Consequently, during this period of time, most leaders enjoyed leading from their positional authority.

**2.** \_\_\_\_\_

By the late 1960s, society was changing. In the U.S. there were riots on university campuses, civil rights marches on the streets and baby boomer rebels who began to question the idea of blind submission to leaders. "Question Authority" was a common bumper sticker. To make things worse, by the late 1960s, it became clear that President Johnson had not been honest with Americans about the Vietnam War. He kept saying all was well, but it wasn't. Add to that the Watergate scandal of President Nixon, and you understand why the common leadership style could no longer be "military commander." Few were interested in blind submission. Followers were asking questions and leaders had to begin explaining what they were doing and why. The new image for leadership was the CEO (Chief Executive Officer). They led by casting vision to their people, in hope that their followers would buy in to the vision and work toward its fulfillment. The CEO style became popular not only in business, where you would expect it, but also in non-profits and government circles too.

**KEY VALUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

If the organization's goal was to make widgets in a factory—the CEO style leader would motivate his people to make more and better widgets. Advertising and marketing began to play a major role, as large numbers of corporations went nationwide. Productivity was the watchword. Business leaders even became popular during this time. Why? They led from vision, not just from positional authority. While this was an improvement, it was still very top-down in nature.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_

By the 1980s, a new style of leader became popular. It fit the era in which we lived. As Americans we felt our nation was becoming great again—in industry versus the Japanese, in the military versus the USSR, and even in the religious world, as mega-churches became more numerous and popular during this period. The style we celebrated was the leader as an entrepreneur. He or she was a pioneer; had few boundaries; didn't do things the conventional way; and managed "by walking around," as Tom Peters reported. This leader, in fact, actually looked for non-traditional ways to lead. It was the Reagan era. It was the Lee Iacocca era. It was the Chuck Swindoll era.

#### KEY VALUE: \_\_\_\_\_

Good leaders felt the most critical element of their leadership was being the first to do it. Think about it: fax machines, computers, walkmans, and videos all became popular during this decade. Certainly, innovation is still a revered quality among leaders today, but it was during this period we came to grips with how important it was. Because society began changing at such a fast rate, leaders had to be out in front, and questioning the way they did things every year. They led from creativity during this season. The effective leader made sure nothing was sacred if it didn't work. The emerging work force was looking for this new kind of leader—someone who would lead from creativity. This innovative style enabled followers to share ideas that might be implemented by the organization. This helped them tolerate the fact that this leadership style was still a top-down model.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_

By 1990, a new style became popular. It was the leader as a coach, and it remains a common style today. This style was appealing to Generation X, who was now entering the work force in large numbers—and who longed for relationships and authenticity. They didn't care for an effective, productive leader who was untouchable. Unlike their baby boomer parents who lived to work, they simply worked to live. The new kind of leader had to know how to assemble and work with teams of people. By this time, business leaders even began creating work environments to be conducive for teamwork and relationships. Many put coffee houses in their offices, sofas, VCRs, and sometimes-even video games for employee break times.

#### KEY VALUE: \_\_\_\_\_

They saw themselves as coaches who had players. Those players each had strengths, and it was the job of the leader to be a broker of those strengths and talents. The leader had to find the proper roles for all the players, so they could make their significant contribution to the team. Although this style was more participatory, it was still top-down in nature. Leaders led through placement of their people in roles that would both fulfill the organization's goals and fulfill the player.

## 5. \_\_\_\_\_

As we proceed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I see a new kind of leader on the horizon. It is a leader who's in touch with the postmodern world in which we live. This leader combines many of the strengths of the last four styles. In addition, he or she is secure enough to build relationships with their team, and drive the process toward getting the desired result. We'll call this type of leader a poet and a gardener.

This new generation of leaders doesn't enter their position assuming they have all the answers. In fact, they surround themselves with a team of other leaders (not just a team of players, but a leadership team). This inner circle is optimally diverse in their strengths and perspectives—but not in their values. As this team meets to discuss ideas, the poet / gardener listens and adds, then ultimately puts words to what the Holy Spirit seems to be saying to them as a group. I call these leaders poets because they are discerning of the culture and the ideas that emerge from others, not just themselves. In the same way we enjoy a poem because that poet put words to what we were feeling and thinking, these leaders summarize big picture ideas with excellence. They synthesize and extrapolate thoughts; then they come up with the best one, even if it is not their own. At this point, they become a wordsmith who articulates the idea until the entire team owns it. They give language to the ideas and feelings the people possess. While the leader-poet has many good ideas, they don't pretend to think up all the answers, and the pressure is off of them to do so. They are communicators of the best ideas, regardless of the source. They recognize that people no longer rely on a leader to gain information—it's accessible to all. Needless to say, these leaders are attractive to a new workforce who longs to be part of creating the ideas and determining the direction. People support what they help create.

The leader-gardeners are people-developers. The work of a gardener is to cultivate the soil, pull the weeds and create an environment where plants can grow. In fact, this is the primary function of a gardener. In this same way—the leader-gardener sees the primary function of their leadership to be developing their people, not simply doing the program. They are equippers. They empower. These kind of leaders see themselves as mentors to their team. Relationship is inherent in this style of leadership. It causes employees to want to stick around, because they see the value in staying. They will not only help the organization get to the goal, they will grow in the process. The employee doesn't merely feel like a number or a cog in the wheel. They are not “used” by their boss—they are developed, and God uses them in the process.

### KEY VALUES: \_\_\_\_\_

These leaders connect with their people and their culture. This connection actually creates the culture within their organization. They are in touch. They also value growth—not just organizationally but for each individual in it. They resource everyone. Personal growth is what the leader values for each team member. They lead out of shared ownership. Everyone owns the vision and they flourish as they move toward it.

I believe this is the attractive leader of today. This isn't to say all the others will die out. Based on temperament and generation, other styles will remain, and some will do well, because of the strength of the leader's personality and vision. But the style that the new generation of employees will want is the poet / gardener.

## Characteristic of a Poet-Gardener

As our perspective on leadership has evolved from military commander to poet/gardener, the style of leader we value has changed. The qualities we value have remained constant (integrity, purpose, wisdom, etc.) but the style is different. The healthy poet / gardener possesses these characteristics:

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| a. _____ | f. _____ |
| b. _____ | g. _____ |
| c. _____ | h. _____ |
| d. _____ | i. _____ |
| e. _____ | j. _____ |

## Emphasis Through the Years

### LEADERSHIP STYLE:

1. Military Commander
2. CEO
3. Entrepreneur
4. Coach
5. Poet/Gardener

### EMPHASIS:

- Determining Plans
- Doing Programs
- Designing Products
- Deploying Players
- Discerning Purpose, Developing People

## Insights About Leadership Style

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

Question: Which style have you seen as a follower?

Question: Which do you practice most naturally as a leader?

## Further Reading

1. John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993
2. John Eldridge, *Wild At Heart*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000.
3. Garry Wills, *Certain Trumpets*, Simon and Schuster, 1994
4. Harland Cleveland, *Nobody in Charge*, Josey-Bass Publishers, 2002
5. Christine and Tom Sine, *Living On Purpose*, Baker Book House, 2002
6. Tim Elmore, *Leveraging Your Influence*, Lifeway Publishers, 2003