

## Living the 21 Laws of Leadership

### *The Law of Buy-In* People Buy Into the Leader, Then the Vision

*“A man is not as big as his belief in himself;  
he is as big as the number of persons who believe in him.”*

— Woodrow Wilson

## Application Guide

The people of India bought into Mohandas (called Mahatma) K. Gandhi, as a person, before they shared his passion for freedom in India, and in particular, Gandhi's non-violent approach.

In 1997 India was celebrating 50 years of liberty, largely credited to one Man, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was educated in London in the field of law. When he completed his studies he returned to India, and then to South Africa. There he worked for 20 years as a barrister and political activist. During that time he developed as a leader, fighting for the rights of Indians and other minorities who were oppressed and discriminated against by South Africa's apartheid government.

By the time he returned to India in 1914, Gandhi was well known and highly respected among his countrymen. Over the next several years, as he led protests and strikes around the country, people rallied to him and looked to him more and more for leadership. In 1920 — a mere six years after returning to India — he was elected president of the All India Home Rule League.

The most remarkable thing about Gandhi is not that he became their leader, but that he was able to change the people's vision for the way they would obtain freedom. Before he began leading them, the people used violence in an effort to achieve their goals. For years, riots against the British establishment had been common. Gandhi's vision for change was based on non-violent civil disobedience.

Gandhi challenged the people to meet oppression with peaceful disobedience and non-cooperation. Even when the British military massacred over 1,000 people at Amritsar in 1919, Gandhi called the people to stand, but without fighting back. Rallying everyone to his way of thinking was not easy. Because the people had come to buy into him as their leader, they embraced his vision. Then they followed him faithfully. He asked them not to fight, and eventually they stopped fighting. When he called for everyone to burn their foreign-made clothes and start wearing nothing but home-spun material, millions of people started doing it. When he decided that a March to the Sea to protest the Salt Act would be their rallying point for civil disobedience against the British, the nation's leaders followed him the 200 miles to the city of Dandi, where they were arrested by government representatives.

Their struggle for independence was slow and painful, but Gandhi's leadership was strong enough to deliver on the promise of his vision. In 1947, India gained home rule. The people accomplished his vision because they had bought into Gandhi. Once they had embraced the vision, they were able to carry it out. That is how the *Law of Buy-In* works.

### I. Assessment

The following questions will give you insight as to how well you are living the *Law of Buy-In*.

- A. Do people follow your leadership easily or do they seem to hesitate?
- B. Are you open and honest in your relationships with your key people?
- C. Are you consistent in your leadership behavior?
- D. On a scale of 1-10 how well do the people trust you?
- E. Is your lifestyle worthy of being followed.
- F. Is your vision clear?
- G. Do your key people support you 100%?

## II. Application

Your vision may be grand and worthwhile, but the people must buy into you first. It is also important to remember that you can not separate the leader from the vision. They are integrated in the minds of the people. The following guidelines will help you with both the people buying into you, and your vision.

### A. Practical principles of the *Law of Buy-In*.

1. People see the messenger \_\_\_\_\_ they hear the message.

Most people hate dealing with used car salesmen. They would rather get a root canal done than wheel and deal on a used car lot. Within minutes of walking on the lot, people make up their mind about buying a car, even though they have not seen it yet, and may have no idea which car they want! It is because they buy into the used car salesman before they buy the car. If the salesman flies at the customer in an orange plaid coat — talking a mile a minute like he is their best friend, the deal is dead and very difficult to resurrect.

In contrast, I have met insurance salesmen who were warm, personable and took time to answer my questions. They stayed focused on my agenda, not trying to sell me what I did not need or want. The insurance premiums were probably a few dollars higher than the competitors, but I bought into him before I bought into the product.

This is so important, I want to tell you one more story. I was scheduled for an annual physical check-up, and understood the reputation of this particular Doctor was outstanding. When I met him, I knew right away, brilliant or not, I would never see him again. This is the *Law of Buy-In*, in reverse!!

These examples are not about leadership, but they are common everyday life experiences that help you get a clear picture of this leadership law. Let us move to the leadership arena.

A business executive moved from a highly successful and long-term career in one corporation to be the CEO of another company. He/she had the goods, he/she was proven and he/she had a plan. Things went sour . . . why? The employees, board of directors, and stock-holders did not buy into the leader. It happens everyday.

★ ***Leaders are the link between the people and the vision.***

2. People want to know if the messenger \_\_\_\_\_ his/her message.

Passion and integrity about the leader's lifestyle, must match the message. If the leader speaks of "a company that values its employees" but does things to contradict that, the employees will no longer buy into the leader. In one organization, this was the message from the leadership — "We value our team." Then benefits were cut, and no raises were given in the same year when solid profits were realized for the company. Remember, the people will no longer "buy-in" if the leader "sells-out."

★ ***When words and actions match you have credibility. When words and actions do not match, you have confusion.***

3. People will not participate if they do not see the \_\_\_\_\_.

This begins to move from buy-in of the leaders, to the vision itself. The people want to know if the value is worth the price tag. It does not matter if the people are employees, customers, or members of a church, they all want to see value before they participate.

When I began to process my INJOY team (then nearly 100 employees) through the 2,000 mile move from San Diego to Atlanta — the question of why came up quickly. What they really wanted to understand is the value of such a big change before they were willing to participate. This came relatively easy, certainly not because people would rather live in Atlanta, but because they had bought into me as a leader. This is the *Law of Buy-In* in action.

- B. Insights on the people buying into your vision.

Two of the previous laws will be of great help in applying the *Law of Buy-In*, such as the *Law of Connection* and the *Law of Solid Ground*. I encourage you to briefly review both of them as part of your application of this law.

1. Let the people see your \_\_\_\_\_.

The *Law of Buy-In* starts with the heart. It is about genuine relationships with other people. It is not about salesmanship or politics, but caring about people.

People need to see what you care about through your actions, not just your words.

**★ *The people need to know what is important to you, what brings you joy and what makes you angry. If they can identify, not always agree, but identify, you are on your way to buy-in of the people.***

How to know the hearts of the people:

1. What do they cry about?
2. What do they sing about?
3. What do they dream about?

2. Treat the people with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

I was told the story of a church staff member who was fired over the phone, on an answering machine! Can you imagine?! The staff member came back from vacation to hear on his/her message machine that he/she no longer had a job. He/she had been a faithful and productive employee for years. Needless to say, he/she was devastated and when he/she asked why he/she was released, the reply was, "Well, we just needed to make some major budget cuts." let us say that was true, but that certainly is not how to do it in the right way. This in no way communicates dignity and respect of the person.

Another amazing story is about Jerry and his family of five who had saved for nearly two years for a special family vacation in Europe. Permission was granted from Jerry's supervisor to take vacation on those certain dates six months in advance. Airline tickets were purchased and all arrangements were confirmed. The supervisor called Jerry at the last minute and said that a "big account" demanded immediate attention and the vacation must be canceled. There was no discussion, no consideration of options, just told to do it. Before Jerry could even verbalize his protest, his boss said: "if you can not change your plans, I can find someone else to take your job."

These two stories refer to employees, and certainly do not communicate dignity or respect. Just as easily dozens of stories could be told of customers, another important group of people who need to buy into you (the organization's personnel) and products or services you provide. Some of the customers would tell stories of being treated well and others would tell "horror stories."

How you treat the people determines a large part of buy-in.

3. Show them how you have \_\_\_\_\_ best interest at heart.

Jim Garlow, who is the new Senior Pastor of Skyline Church near San Diego, California, has kept the congregation's best interest at heart, during the church's multi-million dollar relocation campaign. For over a decade, during my leadership there, the church had battled a wide variety of issues from environmental concerns to re-routing freeway systems. Dr. Garlow has wisely involved many people in the process, asking their advice, and inviting their participation.

Recently, a difficult decision was made to relocate the church, not into the new sanctuary, but into a multi-purpose family center until the finances could support the construction of the new sanctuary. The financial resources are not coming in fast enough to build the whole project at once. There were several options, but this one was in the best interest of the people. Pastor Garlow knew the congregation desperately needed to relocate. Too many years have already gone by. Another major delay could kill the project. He/she did what was necessary to move the congregation into a position where the building project could ultimately be completed successfully.

4. Invest generous amounts of \_\_\_\_\_ with people.

Election years illustrate this point well. Politicians hit the campaign trail to get buy-in from the people. They do it largely by hundreds of gatherings where the priority is clearly being with the people, not the political platform. They talk about current issues, and occasionally will actually say what they believe, but the "tour" is about relationships with the people not debating the issues. Politicians understand well and are masters at the *Law of Buy-In*.

5. Find out what the people care about and address those needs \_\_\_\_\_.

**★ *The difference between felt needs and real needs is sometimes little and at other times great, but both kinds must be met. The inexperienced leader wants to get to the bottom line and deal with the real needs. The wise leader will deal with the people's felt needs first to get buy-in. This becomes the entry way to meet the real needs of the people.***

C. The leader and his / her vision.

Assuming the people have bought into you as a person and as *their* leader, it is also important how you communicate your vision.

1. Be sure you are crystal \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in your vision.

Start with yourself. Do you know exactly, with passion and confidence your vision or mission? Forgive the obvious nature of this question, but I want to make sure you do not attempt to communicate your vision if you are not yet clear in your own mind and heart. Knowing it is only half the deal, you must also be willing to pay whatever price tag is necessary to get there. Settle this privately before you "go public." This does not mean the details of the vision are set in concrete, or that it can not be shaped by your key people. The core of the vision is set in your heart and mind.

Avoid long, philosophical statements and promotional ideas. Get to the point quickly and keep it simple. The shorter the better. Clarity is vital. Everyone you consider a constituent should be able to repeat the vision almost verbatim, and know what it *means*. Not everyone will know the precise strategy, which will continually change anyway, but they will know what *direction* they are headed.

2. Make sure you communicate exactly what you want the people to \_\_\_\_\_.

First the people buy-in, then they accept the vision, but you can still fail if you do not let the people know how they can participate. Tell them what you need and want them to do. Let them see the opportunity in it for them, but leave no doubt in their mind what you want.

3. Give the people \_\_\_\_\_ to think and process your vision.

After you have made it clear what you want and need, and the people see the opportunities of participation, (or purchase etc.,) whatever the case may be, give them time to think. Do not use pressure tactics. Invite questions, lots of them. The people want to know how the changes will affect them. Be honest and direct with your answers.

4. Process your key personnel \_\_\_\_\_.

Any major changes in your organization, particularly if it involves the vision and direction, need to be discussed with your key people first.

5. Do not run too far \_\_\_\_\_ of the people.

Make sure you remain in touch with the people. They may be your congregation, employees, customers, or board of directors, but whatever your context, stay close to the people. Losing touch is how you lose buy-in after you have it. Buy-in is not a one time event, it is a continual process.

### III. Action Assignment

Conduct an informal survey this month amongst your key people, and random constituents. Make the survey anonymous, and conducted by someone other than yourself. You review and approve the survey, possibly even write it, but let others conduct it. The goal is to ask no more than 7 simple, well thought through questions that give you "on the streets" information about the *Law of Buy-In* in your organization.

The following are 3 sample questions to get you started, they are obviously generic in nature, you can personalize and add to them for your setting.

- ✓ Are you supportive of the leadership?
- ✓ What one thing would you change if given the opportunity?
- ✓ Are you in agreement of the vision and direction of your organization?