

ISSUE #5

Realizing

LEADERSHIP

Everyday Leaders Changing Our World

PATTY AZZARELLO IN CONVERSATION



DAVID DYE

BUT I THOUGHT WE WERE FRIENDS – HOW TO LEAD PEERS



DEBRA FINE

BUSINESS NETWORKING SKILLS



Along with the new challenges and opportunities we face when we're promoted, we also have to consider the impact of our new role on the relationships we have already established with our peers. When we're in a new position that makes us the supervisor of those who were our peers only the day before, the nature of our relationship changes and, as the new supervisor or team leader, it's up to us to help our new staff and former peers adapt to a new working relationship.

But I Thought We Were Friends – How to Lead Peers

David Dye



"How could you?"

He was angry.

His tight words and finger stabbing the air made it clear: he felt betrayed.

"How could you let this happen?"

He had just been fired...by the President of the Company.

"Me?? I'm not the one who skipped out on the team over and over again."

He may have been angry, but I was beyond frustrated and felt betrayed myself. I'd gone out on a limb to help, but in the end he'd gotten himself fired.

What made it worse was that for the prior year, we'd been friends.

That all changed when I was asked to lead the team.

LANDMINES

Our problem was not unique to us - it happens to nearly everybody when they are first asked to lead a team they once belonged to.

You are now in a position of providing accountability and inspiration to a group of your peers.

For many emerging leaders, this is the most difficult challenge they will ever face. I've watched many experienced leaders stumble when asked to address or lead a team of their peers. In fact, it's a Shakespearian dilemma: Prince Hal faces this challenge when he ascends to the throne and becomes Henry V. His old drinking buddies are left wondering where they fit in.

Several factors make leading peers difficult for new leaders:

1. We all want to be liked and accepted

Positional leadership, even when you are an outstanding servant leader, means taking responsibility for decisions that not every agrees with. It means holding people accountable and it means that the group who you naturally want to like and accept you won't always feel that way.

There's nothing wrong with wanting other people to think well of you and a desire to belong - it's very normal, human, and healthy so long as it's in balance and doesn't consume you.

But this isn't the only value in life and if you choose to lead, it will come into conflict with other values.

2. Your loyalty is to the mission AND the people

This is one of those "ANDs" that is so important - your friends may feel you've abandoned them, but you haven't. You've added an important loyalty - to the organization and its mission.

Learning to balance both takes some work, but to your friends who don't understand this tension, it can feel like betrayal.

3. Inconsistent behavior

In Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *V* sagas, Prince Hal partied with the best of them - he drank with the best known lush, Falstaff, but when he ascended the throne, he turned his back on his friends and acted like he'd never been part of them.

The problem was inconsistent behavior - the Prince did not lead before he had the position. Once he became King and tried to act kingly, his friends were understandably hurt.



4. Unclear expectations

This is the most common error. When you move from a peer role to a positional leadership role, some of your team may expect to get a “pass” on poor behavior, others may expect favors or special treatment (that would undermine your leadership credibility), and YOU may be expecting your friends to work especially hard because of your friendship.

All of this leads to massive disappointment when you do hold team members accountable, you won't do favors that would hurt the team, and your friends don't show any special effort.

5. Not everyone can handle it

Some people are able to manage the tension between friendship and supervisor. In my experience, however, it is the exception, not the rule. It takes a great deal of maturity for both people to be able to do this. At the extreme end of the spectrum, that's one reason so much human resource activity takes place around dating or marrying supervisors.

How many people would seriously pass over their spouse for a promotion or fire them? There is a natural conflict of interest. It's not impossible to overcome, but you would never bet on it.

LEADING PEERS - HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

My experience didn't have to end the way I described it. Early in my career, I fell victim to many of the same factors I've just described.

The good news is that a few healthy leadership practices can help you manage the transition from peer to positional leader:



1. Lead from where you are

In healthy organizations, leading from where you are, without a formal title, will naturally lead to you being asked to fill titled leadership positions.

It also helps ease the transition. If your peers all know you as someone who sets an example, practices healthy friendship (where you hold one another accountable), empowers others, and already balances the mission with your role on the team, you won't surprise them with radically different behavior when you change positions.

However, as a team member, if you are constantly bad-mouthing other people and critical of your supervisor, you will have to work hard to make the transition to a leadership role.

2. Be clear about expectations

This is the most essential step to managing the transition: have an honest conversation about the transition and your mutual expectations.

Be clear about your commitment to your team and to the organization, your management



expectations, your leadership values, and organizational mandates. At the same time, encourage your peers to be honest about their concerns or expectations and to talk with you if they perceive you are being unjust.

Be realistic about the times you will be called on to make a decision that is in the team's best interest even if it conflicts with what you personally would like.

The goal is to prevent surprises. Your team needs to know where you are coming from - don't let it be a 'gotcha!' moment later on.

3. Wear the right hat at the right time

This takes a level of maturity in your thinking and relationships, but is very helpful for avoiding misunderstandings.

The technique is simply to identify which "hat" you're wearing when you are having a conversation. I've had conversations that went something like this:

"As a friend, I am so sorry - that stinks! As the team leader, I can give you tomorrow to take care of your problem and then we will need you back."

4. Be clear, not perfect

The key with everything is to be very clear about expectations, goals, and desired behaviors. You will never be perfect, so quit trying.

And quit pretending - your peers all know the 'real' you isn't perfect, so don't suddenly try to act that way. It's inauthentic and your leadership credibility will suffer.

It's okay to be you. Just take responsibility, be as clear as you can, and...

5. Apologize as needed

Leaders often struggle to apologize, but it's even more pronounced when a former team member is leading the team. The insecurity and desire to

be accepted can keep you from owning your junk, apologizing, and moving on.

6. Weed as needed

There are times when it just won't work. For example: A former colleague continues to take advantage of your relationship and, despite your best efforts to clarify expectations and help them correct the behavior, nothing changes.

Once again, be clear about the situation: "I respect you and this is difficult, but if nothing changes you may be transferred or let go."

You can't control anyone else - your job is to be the best leader you can and give everyone on the team every opportunity to succeed. When someone isn't interested in going there, it is time to care enough for them to move them along.

7. Get a new peer group

I regularly encourage leaders to build relationships with other leaders, to find mentors, and get coaching. There is nothing like a group of people who understand the challenges you experience and can share meaningful wisdom.

You can't (or shouldn't try to) get this from your team. (So much of the humor on the American version of *The Office* was due to Michael Scott inappropriately looking to his staff for validation and to solve his own leadership issues.)

YOUR TURN

Leading a team of your peers can be hugely rewarding, but it's your responsibility as a leader to set clear expectations and act fairly. Even veterans can benefit from reviewing their relationships and making sure they are healthy. **RL**



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David works with leaders who want to build teams that care, increase employee engagement, and get more done. He is the founder and President of **Trailblaze Inc** and loves to partner with people who are working to change the world. David shares twenty years experience leading, managing, coaching, and teaching in the public and nonprofit sectors where influence is critical. He has served as an elected city councilman, has coached leaders in more than 2000 sessions, and prior to starting Trailblaze, served as Chief Operating Officer for Colorado UpLift where he led efforts to replicate organizations in Phoenix, Orlando, Portland, and New York. He regularly speaks and writes about effective leadership. Connect with David today via his [blog](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or [Google+](#).