



The Community of Leaders

VINCE MOLINARO

Leaders today are yearning for something more meaningful.

The reason is that, for many of us, the experience of leadership has been mediocre at best.

Think of your own experience. There's a good chance you and your fellow leaders haven't been on the same page and strategic clarity has been low. You spend too much time working at cross-purposes. Or maybe the primary focus is on protecting turf and competing internally, silo against silo. Conflict seems to run rampant. Frustration is high, and getting anything done feels next to impossible.

Or your experience may be one of sheer apathy, where there is little energy or vitality. You and your fellow leaders seem to only be going through the motions, bystanders cloaked with fancy leadership titles. It's exhausting and often demoralizing.

Whatever the experience, you may end up questioning why you ever became a leader in the first place. You also know deep down that there has to be a better way.

I'm here to tell you that there is.

What if you worked every day with a group of leaders in which everyone was truly aligned to the vision and strategy of your organization? What if there was a real sense of collaboration that enabled innovation to flourish? What if all the leaders in your organization showed up fully committed to being the best leaders they could possibly be? And what if leaders supported one another to achieve higher levels of personal and collective performance?

This is what a genuine community of leaders feels like. In fact, I believe this is the real missed opportunity in organizations today. If there's one thing I've learned over the past 25 years in the leadership business it's simply this: If you can create a strong community of leaders in your organization, it will become your ultimate differentiator. As one chief executive officer (CEO) client of mine put it recently, "If I can figure out how to get our top three layers of leadership truly aligned and engaged to our strategy—fully committed to be the best leaders possible—it will be our secret sauce, our edge in the market." He is not alone in this thinking. More and more senior leaders I work with are starting to understand the power of building a strong community of leaders.

It's the new model of leadership that we need in our organizations today. And the good news is that we're hardwired for it.

You see, over the years I've asked the same question in all of my leadership seminars and keynote presentations: What kind of culture would you need for you to be at your best and able to make your fullest contribution as a leader?

No one has ever said, "I thrive in a climate of low trust". "I am at my best in a climate of apathy" "I excel in a climate of constant conflict." "I love working at cross purposes with my colleagues."

Instead what I hear over and over again—regardless of company, industry, country or level of leadership—is the same thing: "I'm at my best in a climate of high trust." "I perform at my best when I have a sense of mutual respect and support." "I excel when there are strong relationships and everyone is pulling in the same direction"

These answers all describe the characteristics of a strong community of leaders. We're hardwired for it. Yet we struggle to create a real sense of community, instead remaining trapped in really bad and ineffective cultures.

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It's time we bring about what we already intuitively know we need. It's time we build a strong community of leaders in our organizations.

Every strong community of leaders that I've experienced or witnessed shares two critical characteristics: they have a high degree of clarity and commitment.

First, everyone understands that leadership will be the ultimate differentiator, and that the community of leaders is built upon a shared aspiration for great leadership. The community is not created merely to establish a better way for leaders to work together (although that does happen). Instead, it's all about making your company more successful and driving sustainable business success. It's about showing up each day with a "one-company mindset"

Second, there is a high degree of clarity about the kind of leadership needed for success. As a leader you have a clear understanding of the leadership expectations. As a leader you know what you must do to make the organization successful and the way in which you need to lead. You don't settle for lame or bad leadership. In fact, a strong community of leaders exits those individuals who consistently fail to live up to their leadership expectations and obligations. These organizations know that a few bad leaders can undermine everything. So they don't tolerate it—and neither should you.

You will also find that there is also a high degree of commitment demonstrated by leaders. First, it's a commitment to the idea of a community of leaders. Second, it's a commitment to do the work to build it. You demonstrate your commitment by setting the pace and being the best possible leader you can be. Strive to be the leader everyone else wants to emulate!

You and your fellow leaders also demonstrate your commitment by doing the hard work of leadership. No one is a bystander or spectator. Everyone participates fully. This means you have the courage to call out bad leadership behavior. You challenge the community if leaders are not living up to the aspiration of great leadership. At first this will be difficult, but once you create your community of leaders, everyone will come to accept it and expect it. They will look to you for feedback, and you will look to them for feedback. You will have a deep sense of personal commitment to your fellow leaders to support their growth and development.

In fact, if you aren't living up to the level of leadership that has been set, you can count on someone in the community of leaders reaching out to you and saying, "Hey, you aren't doing your job. We need you to be better. So step up!" No one is afraid to challenge another person. You will also know that everyone will have your back. You know they will be there for you to support you even when you are vulnerable.

For this community to work, you will need to show your commitment over the long term. A strong community of leaders isn't a destination to arrive at. Rather, it requires constant work. You need to continually create ways to connect with your fellow leaders, to build and strengthen relationships, to drive even more clarity and commitment.

You will know when you've got it right because it will be a visceral feeling. You will feel the high level of clarity and commitment. You will be blown away by the level of trust and mutual support. You will feel part of something great, something special, and something rare.

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I experienced this visceral feeling back in August 2011. It was days after Hurricane Irene hit the Caribbean, the U.S. East Coast, and parts of Eastern Canada, and I was flying home to Toronto after a business trip. My seat on the plane placed me in the middle of a group of eight young men. They were talking loudly, joking around, and full of excitement and energy.

I chatted with them as we took off. The most talkative member of the group, Daryl, reminded me a bit of the lead singer in a band, brimming with charisma and effortlessly able to connect with people. He introduced the rest of the group and explained they were a line crew for a contract utility company. They were headed to Toronto to pick up some trucks and then drive to Connecticut to repair electrical lines damaged by the hurricane.

This big mission explained why they were so excited, but as the flight continued I noticed something else about this group. They were constantly teasing one another. They shifted easily from talking about their personal lives to talking about the job they were going to do in Connecticut. It was obvious that they shared a deep connection. They weren't just friendly coworkers; they had a true bond.

I said to the group, "You guys seem really tight. Why is that?" As soon as I asked the question, I could see Daryl's demeanor change. He became still and thoughtful. He said, "Doing the kind of work we do, we're taking our lives into our hands every single day. We're like a band of brothers. We have to have each others' backs—one mistake and you can lose somebody forever."

That's what it feels when you share a deep connection with your colleagues. That's what is possible when you are part of a strong community of leaders. But I don't think it should take a dangerous job or a hurricane to build that powerful sense of connection and trust.

Your life doesn't have to be on the line. Rather, it simply requires a common aspiration, clarity, and commitment on the part of all leaders in your organization.

Imagine the difference to your employees, your customers, and your shareholders. Imagine the level of collaboration, innovation, and productivity. It will be staggering.

So are you ready to change how you lead in a transformative way? Then it's time to start building a community of leaders in your organization. What's the first step? Put the Community of Leadership Manifesto into action. It spells out the commitment that you and your colleagues must make to create a strong community of leaders in your organization. Good luck!

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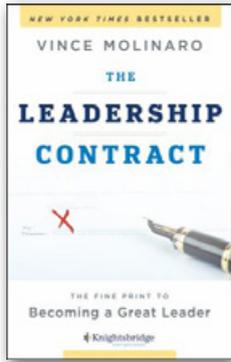
The Community of Leadership Manifesto

We are done with the old model of leadership that has glorified heroes. We are done settling for mediocrity. We will not be lame leaders. We will stop going through the motions. We will put an end to the isolation that we feel every day. We will not be disconnected from one another. We will not put up with a climate of apathy and low trust. We will put an end to all the infighting and competition. We will stop working at cross-purposes. Instead, we resolve to create a strong community of leaders—one in which there is high clarity on what we are trying to accomplish as leaders to make our organization great. We will share a collective aspiration and passion for great leadership. We will set an example to other organizations. We will build the best leaders in our industry. We will operate as one company, not as silos within it. We won't build up silos, but break them down. We will be aligned to our strategy. We will drive collaboration and innovation across our organization. We will build strong relationships with one another. We won't break each other down, but build each other up. We will make each other stronger, not weaker.

Once we build a strong community of leaders, it will become our ultimate differentiator. It will be our true and everlasting source of competitive advantage.

It all starts with each one of us. It all starts with a decision to lead in a more deliberate way—with greater personal clarity and commitment. 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Vince Molinaro, PhD, is a global leadership adviser, speaker, and researcher on leadership accountability. As the founder and CEO of Leadership Contract Inc., Dr. Molinaro travels the world helping organizations build vibrant leadership cultures with truly accountable leaders. Vince lives leadership accountability every day as an entrepreneur and global executive. His research and writing on leadership accountability are featured in some of the world's leading business publications. He also shares his insights in his Gut Check for Leaders blog and through the Accountable Leaders App.

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