

# What Followers Want from Leaders: Capitalizing on Diversity

To meet people's needs, you must first embrace their uniqueness.

By Chantel C. Upshur-Myles

**T**oday's diverse workforce provides both challenges and opportunities. It can offer creativity, energy, and new approaches to solving problems. However, differences in backgrounds and norms can also result in conflict, disruption, and loss of productivity. The outcome depends largely on how a workforce is managed.

## How Much Do You Understand Diversity?

To lead effectively, you must gain a deep understanding of each person's unique identity, which first requires self-knowledge. Begin by asking yourself this: How attuned are you to your own social identity? To assess your identity-based awareness, ask yourself<sup>1</sup> these questions:

**What social identities – identities you take on when you're with other people – do you recognize** in yourself? Which of these identities is most central to your "true" self?

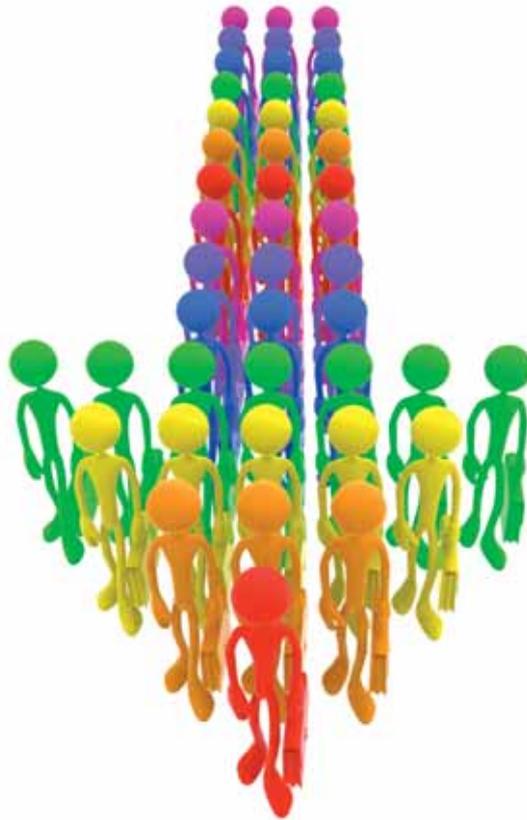
**How does your central identity** differ from the identities others use to make judgments about you?

**Which of your social identities is a hot button**, triggering strong emotional responses in yourself and from others?

**Are there aspects of your social identity** you must keep hidden at work? If so, why, and what are the consequences?

**Which aspects of your central identity make you unique**, and which are similar to the identities of others in the organization?

Your responses to these questions will provide a



*"The ultimate leader is one who is willing to develop people to the point that they eventually surpass him or her in knowledge and ability."*

— Fred A. Manske, Jr.  
Former Senior V.P.  
for Federal Express

glimpse of the potential social conflict followers face daily and help you solve the riddle of what followers want from leaders.

## What Do Followers Want?

Before we address the wants of followers (including paid and volunteer staff), we must understand why they become unmotivated. Ivan Scheier has identified four key reasons<sup>2</sup> volunteers lose motivation:

- **They sense** leaders aren't concerned with their overall well-being.
- **They lose interest** because they're in positions too menial for their abilities.
- **Leaders minimize** the importance of their efforts.
- **They're placed** in positions they don't want.

When employees (both paid and volunteer) aren't seen as creative beings, with individual strengths, passions, and talents, they're liable to become discontented. What would it take for followers to be fulfilled in their work and committed to their leaders? Here are six things followers want leaders to provide:

**1. Followers want leaders who appreciate them.** Leaders can show appreciation by

acknowledging a job well done. This expression can take many forms, such as a card, note, e-mail, gift, special recognition, or verbal thank you.

**2. Followers want leaders to need them** for more than just getting the work done. They want leaders to value their advice, wisdom, and ideas.

*continued on page 16*

Spearheading the needed changes may require a shift in your organization's culture.

**3. Followers want leaders who keep their word.** If that word is broken, leaders need to apologize and seek forgiveness to restore the working relationship.

**4. Followers want leaders who see them as people of worth,** not simply as means to an end. Leaders must make time to help meet followers' emotional and relational needs.

**5. Followers want leaders who are vulnerable, teachable, and approachable.** Leaders need to be open with followers.

**6. Followers want leaders to improve communication** by becoming active listeners. Active listening, a lifeline for the entire leadership process, requires five actions<sup>3</sup> on the part of leaders:

**Clarify** questions.

**Reflect** content.

**Mirror** feelings.

**Make** positive assertions.

**Be** present.

Active listening, a lifeline for the entire leadership process, requires five actions on the part of leaders.

### How Can You Make It Happen?

In 2004, researchers conducted a study<sup>4</sup> to see how the quality of

Nonprofit World • Volume 25, Number 5 September/October 2007  
Published by the Society for Nonprofit Organizations  
5820 Canton Center Road, Suite 165, Canton, Michigan 48187  
734-451-3582 • www.snpo.org

the match between volunteer and job affects the likelihood that volunteers will stay with the organization. The researchers found the greatest motivating factor was "values." When you match people with jobs aligned to their values, you're more likely to retain satisfied workers.

Researchers found the greatest motivating factor was "values."

Such a match requires respect for people's diversity. Dimensions of diversity include race, ethnicity, work experience, values, education, parental and marital status, location, military experience, religion, socio-economics, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, and age. Followers want to be recognized, celebrated, and empowered based on their uniqueness, which encompasses their culture, strengths, temperament, experiences, personality preferences, spirituality, and other values.

Spearheading the needed changes may require a shift in your organization's culture.<sup>5</sup> Make sure your culture accommodates followers' deepest needs. Such a culture will embrace the core values of innovation, appreciation of diversity, and recognition of each person's individuality. ■

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Hoppe, Michael, "Understanding Diversity: Begin By Listening," Center for Creative Leadership, <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/ewsletter/2005/JULdiversity.aspx>

<sup>2</sup>"The Imitation of Volunteers: Towards an Appropriate Technology of Voluntary Action, *Journal*

*of Volunteer Administration*, Vol. XIV (1).

<sup>3</sup>Hoppe, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup>Clary, Gil, Mark Snyder, and Keilah Worth, "Volunteer Sustainability: How Nonprofits Can Sustain Volunteers' Commitment," Nonprofit Sector Research Fund, No. 36, [http://www.nonprofitresearch.org/publications1526/publications\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=250353](http://www.nonprofitresearch.org/publications1526/publications_show.htm?doc_id=250353).

<sup>5</sup>Mitchell, Mark & Donald Yates, "How to Use Your Organizational Culture as a Competitive Tool," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 2, [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org).

How attuned are you to your own social identity?

#### Resources

Conejo, Carlos, "Managers Must Become Multicultural," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 6.

McKay, Shona, "Building Morale: The Key to Successful Change," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 13, No. 3.

Zhu, Judy & Brian Kleiner, "The Failure of Diversity Training," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 18, No. 3.

These publications are available from the Society's Resource Center, [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org).

*Chantel C. Upshur-Myles, MSW (chantelu@verizon.net), is the owner of Myles Youth Facility, LLC, and co-owner of U & H Management and Consulting Services, LLC, in Laurel, Maryland, a doctoral student at Regent University, an active volunteer in her church, a board member of the Laurel Boys and Girls Club, Inc., and an advisory board member to AutumnLeaf Group, LLC, and the DHS Faith Based Partnership Committee.*

## Advertisers' Index

Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance.....	11	Monitor Liability Managers, Inc. ....	Inside Front Cover
American Bar Association.....	Inside Back Cover	Print Art Etc. ....	27
Ausco .....	5	Shore Bank .....	23
e Tapestry .....	3	Verizon Foundation.....	Back Cover