

# THE LAW OF BUY-IN

People Buy into the Leader, Then the Vision

When I teach leadership seminars, I field a lot of questions about vision. Invariably, someone will come up to me during a break, give me a brief description of an evolving vision, and ask me, “Do you think my people will buy into my vision?” My response is always the same: “First tell me this. Do your people buy into you?”

You see, many people who approach the area of vision in leadership have it all backward. They believe that if the cause is good enough, people will automatically buy into it and follow. But that’s not how leadership really works. People don’t at first follow worthy causes. They follow worthy leaders who promote causes they can believe in. People buy into the leader first, then the leader’s vision. Having an understanding of that changes your whole approach to leading people.

For the person who attends one of my conferences and asks whether his people will follow, the question really becomes, “Have I given my people reasons to buy into me?” If the answer is yes, they will gladly buy that leader’s vision. But if the leader has not built credibility with his people, it really doesn’t matter how great the vision is.

You cannot separate leaders from the causes they promote. It cannot be done, no matter how hard you try. It’s not an either/or proposition. The following shows how people react to leaders and their vision under different circumstances:

## **WHEN FOLLOWERS DON’T LIKE THE LEADER OR THE VISION...THEY LOOK FOR ANOTHER LEADER**

The only time people will follow a leader they don’t like with a vision they don’t believe in is when the leader has some kind of leverage. If the followers have a choice in the matter, they don’t follow. And even if they don’t have much of a choice, they start looking for another leader to follow. This is a no-win situation for everyone involved.

## **WHEN FOLLOWERS DON’T LIKE THE LEADER BUT THEY DO LIKE THE VISION...THEY LOOK FOR ANOTHER LEADER**

Even though people may think a cause is good, if they don’t like the leader, they will go out and find another one. That’s one reason that coaches change teams so often in professional sports. The vision for any team always stays the same: everyone wants to win a championship. But the players don’t always believe in their leader. And when they don’t, what happens? The owner doesn’t fire all the players. They fire the leader and bring in someone they hope the players will buy into.

## **WHEN FOLLOWERS LIKE THE LEADER BUT NOT THE VISION...THEY CHANGE THE VISION**

When followers don’t agree with their leader’s vision, they react in many ways. Sometimes they work to convince their leaders to change the vision. Sometimes they abandon their point of view and adopt their leader’s. Other times they find a compromise. But as long as they still buy into the leader, they rarely out-and-out reject him. They will keep following.

**WHEN FOLLOWERS LIKE THE LEADER AND THE VISION...THEY GET BEHIND BOTH**

When people believe in their leader and the vision, they will follow their leader no matter how bad conditions get or how much the odds are stacked against them. That's what continues to inspire followers to keep running the race, even when they feel they've hit the wall and given everything they've got.

As a leader, having a great vision and a worthy cause is not enough to get people to follow you. You have to become a better leader; you must get your people to buy into you. You cannot ignore the **Law of Buy-In** and remain a successful leader!

*As a leader, your success is measured by your ability to actually take the people where they need to go.  
But you can do that only if the people first buy into you.*

*"Others have seen what is and asked why. I have seen what could be and asked why not."*

Pablo Picasso

*"Well, I said to her, 'You know, kids don't learn from people they don't like.'"*

Rita Pierson

*Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.*

Rumi