



WHAT KIND OF LEADER ARE YOU?

BY DAVID JACKSON

What kind of a leader are you? When is it best for you to use your leadership genius? Let me tell you the story of the 33 miners who survived for 69 days last summer in the Chilean mining tunnel, as described in an exciting new book, *33 Men*, by Jonathan Franklin.

Luis Urzua was the shift foreman who, with all of the men in his shift, was trapped 2300 ft. down. He had 20 years experience in mines, but had only worked for a couple of months in this mine. Although military discipline is characteristic in Chilean mines, the men began questioning his authority after the disaster. Raging arguments ensued.

Mario Sepulveda Espinace, one of the team members, was a hard-working man of unbreakable sprit and a quick sense of humour. He had been poor all his life, but had learned above all to survive. He favoured action and encouraged the men to create schemes to get them out. Early in their siege in the tunnel, he tried to climb an air vent in bad repair. Rocks tumbled down, narrowly missing his head. He survived and recalls having a profound experience of realizing they would survive. He told the men, "No one will die here." He became the leader of the group.

By the beginning of day 2, they began a democratic process of meeting every day, debating issues and voting on them. Sepulveda was quick to figure out how to make soup with a can of tuna and water. Urzua was more mild mannered, accepting that "If they find us, good; if not, that's it." In contrast, Sepulveda demonstrated a hyper-productive leadership style. In the first days, Mario and Luis were given control over their most important asset, the dwindling food supply. The two men worked well together and the gang gave Urzua respect. But it was Sepulveda who gave everyone something to do – "You be in charge of technology."

The more the men worked, the more civility bloomed. Jose Henriquez Gonzalez was named 'the pastor' because he led the men in daily prayers. Víctor Segovia Rojas became the "chronicler" because he liked to write and kept a journal. Yonni Barrios Rojas adopted the most unusual role as the doctor. He had always wanted to become a doctor and had read a great deal about medicine.

By day 12, Mario Sepulveda collapsed and lay crying in his bed. The men rallied around him. "Mario, even with his madness, he saved us," one miner recalled. Sepulveda made jokes and continued to exhort, "We'll survive" amid his hallucinations.

When the drill came down but then missed their tunnel, Sepulveda prepared to die in a quiet dignified manner. Henriquez had them hold hands and pray for tuna fish. Sepulveda wrote to his son, "Remember Braveheart the warrior who protects his people."

LEADERSHIP



Finally on the 12th day, the drill broke through the roof of the tunnel. Food and water were soon lowered. When the camera came through the hole, Sepulveda articulated a shockingly positive summation of the miners' survival. They did not put Urzua on camera.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this leadership tale came on the last day when a larger hole had been drilled to allow each man to be drawn to the surface in a capsule. Sepulveda was not selected to go up first because he was not considered stable enough to manage that first crucial ride to the surface. Another steadier member of the crew was chosen.

I would encourage you to read this multifaceted story of disaster, creative persistence, inspiring human commitment and heroism below and above ground. I have only talked about one chapter of a well told tale that raises important questions about leaders and leadership.

It is clear teams need different types of leadership at different times. Indeed some types of leadership can compliment others. Become aware first of the areas of leadership genius you possess. Then figure out ways to identify the different types of leadership available in your teammates.

Different organizations need different types of leadership. It is exciting to see young leaders begin to realize what their particular strengths are and begin to use them in concert with others who have leadership strengths that compliment them.

I encourage you to become aware of the different types of leaders your organization needs and then celebrate the differences instead of letting those differences become a source of irritation and rivalry. This can be the way to build leadership teams who can find ingenious ways out of any hole they may fall into.

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