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LEVEL 2: PERMISSION

My friend and mentor Fred Smith says, “Leadership is getting people to work for you when they are not obligated.” That is the essence of the second level of leadership, Permission.

Leaders who remain on the Position level and never develop their influence often lead by intimidation. They are like the chickens that Norwegian psychologist Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe studied in developing the “pecking order” principle that is commonly used to describe all kinds of groups.

Schjelderup-Ebbe found that in any flock, one hen usually dominates all the others. This dominant hen can peck any other without being pecked in return. The second in the order can peck all the others except the top hen. The rest are arranged in a descending hierarchy, finally ending with one hapless hen who can be pecked by all, but who can peck no one else.

In contrast, Permission is characterized by good *relationships*. The motto on this level could be written as “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” True influence begins with the heart, not the head. It flourishes through personal connections, not rules and regulations. The agenda on this level is not pecking order; it’s people connection. Leaders who succeed on this

level focus their time and energy on the needs and desires of the individuals on their team. And they connect with them.

The classic illustration of someone who didn't do this is Henry Ford in the early days of the Ford Motor Company. He wanted his laborers to work like machines, and he attempted to control their interactions outside of work with rules and regulations. And his focus was totally on his product, the Model T, which he believed was the perfect car, and which he never wanted to change.

When people started asking for it in colors other than black, he famously responded, "You can have any color you want as long as it's black."

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Needless to say, you can care about people without leading them, but you cannot lead people well without caring about them. People won't go along with you if they cannot get along with you. That's just the way it is.

On Level 2, as you connect with people, build relationships with them, and earn their trust, you begin to develop real influence with them. That makes you want to work together more. It makes you more cooperative with one another. It makes the environment more positive. It boosts everyone's energy. And in work settings, people stay longer and work harder.

If you've been given a leadership position, then you've been given your boss's permission to lead. If you've earned influence on Level 2, then you have acquired your people's permission to lead. That's powerful. However, I do have to caution you. Staying too long on this level without adding Level 3 will cause highly motivated people to become restless. So let's talk about Production.

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