



# ASCENDING THE LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP

by Greg Wiens

***Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization***

by Dave Logan, John King and Halee Fischer-Wright  
HarperBusiness, 320 pp. \$26.99

One thing I have discovered about leadership is that the more you learn to practice it, more is expected from you. *Tribal Leadership* by Dave Logan, John King and Halee Fischer-Wright, is built on this very premise. Elaborating on the popular leadership concept of tribes, this book explains that each stage of leadership builds on the previous, ultimately resulting in the most cohesive and powerful version: tribal leadership.

*Tribal Leadership* discusses the evolution of groups and their leaders, asserting that cultures within tribes can go through five levels of cultural development. For clergy, the tribe is the church. The five levels of cultural development are:

## **LEVEL ONE: LIFE SUCKS**

This level is best understood by looking at gang or inmate behavior. They abandon any attempt at redemptive behavior because to them, life is terrible. This often results in violent behavior, because there is little left in life to pursue. Within this culture, if a leader is able to help the group buy into the idea that at least someone else's life might be great, they would evolve into the second level of cultural development.

## **LEVEL TWO: MY LIFE SUCKS**

This level is built on the premise that although my own life sucks, the lives of others may not. Level two typifies many businesses, churches and other organizations where members hate their job and wish they were someone else. They eschew productivity because it holds little benefit and exhibit passive aggressiveness instead. Scott Adams' comic strip, *Dilbert*, is a classic example: Dilbert and his fellow peons' futile efforts to please their blissfully ignorant boss are done with faith that somewhere out there, businesses run efficiently.

## **LEVEL THREE: MY LIFE IS GREAT**

The studies in *Tribal Leadership* reveal that nearly 50 percent of leaders spend most of their lives in this stage. Stage-three leaders push themselves to be their best so that they can impact others. However, these leaders can often become overwhelmed by having too much to do in too little time because they refuse to delegate. This comes from an unspoken belief that others are not great, and cannot be trusted to as good of a job as the leader. They often surround themselves with a team that is supportive, but never great like them. These leaders feel that being the best on the team is inherent to their role. They are often stars and may be pastors of very large churches. They relate to staff in dyads, meaning that all team communication goes through them first.

## **LEVEL FOUR: WE ARE GREAT**

When level-three leaders realize that the talents of their team may far outshine their own in certain areas, and that being a partner rather than a solo leader is more effective, they ascend to the fourth level of cultural development. These leaders have moved beyond the dyad to the triad, continually connecting gifted leaders within and outside of the team. They motivate highly gifted people by placing them in teams and stepping back. This allows these leaders to solve the problem of never having enough time. By relinquishing control, they gain it.

## **LEVEL FIVE: LIFE IS GREAT**

This is when true cohesiveness is achieved. The team is “in the zone”, and is so consumed with vision and values that they are no longer competing against an enemy, but are in passionate pursuit of a cause. The authors assert that nonprofits have an advantage toward this level of performance because the business *is* the cause and monetary reward is often an afterthought. Level-five cultures are much more effective than the previous four, yet most tribes, even nonprofits, are only able to operate in this type of culture for short bursts and then fall back to less effective levels.

## ***TRIBAL LEADERSHIP AND THE CHURCH***

*Tribal Leadership* is a challenging message for pastors and church leadership, because to be an effective level-four leader, you must have been an effective level-three leader. In other words, to function as a values-based and cause-focused team, a leader must have succeeded first as an “I am great” leader and then as a “we are great” leader after that. This is because each level causes leaders to improve different areas of their leadership skills and abilities, spurring the transition to more effective levels of leadership.

Though it should be natural for churches to function at level five, most function at a level three at best. Even large and effective churches often have great leaders, but their culture is not team-centered or cause-driven. Often mega-churches suffer from a cult of celebrity around the pastor, which crushes the collaborative environment required to attain higher levels of leadership.

I was unsettled as I read *Tribal Leadership*. It was disturbing because it felt like the authors had studied my own leadership path and had watched me progress through the various levels of leadership. Not only were they aware of how I led at various stages, but they also completely exposed my corresponding and humbling weaknesses at each stage. This book is a useful tool for pastors to assess their current state of leadership. Though it is never easy to scrutinize one’s own performance, it is the best way to identify how to transcend the status quo and attain true impact.

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