

## **Abstract of lecture on transformational leadership (SFU, July 2009)**

Most of the psychological literature on leadership today deals with the question as to why and how leaders impact followers. To use a cliché, how do they succeed in harnessing the hearts and minds of followers?

My point of departure is the other way round, not how leaders impact followers, but rather, why *followers* are affected by certain leaders. In other words, what is there in the hearts and minds of followers that is susceptible to leaders' influence?

Followers are attracted to leaders for various reasons; the primary ones, which will be discussed in this talk are the need for *security* and the need for *meaning*.

The need for security is explained by projection - a process whereby certain aspects of the self, such as desires and urges, are found in and projected onto another person outside the self (Dictionary of psychoanalysis, 1984). The leader as 'projection screen' gives the followers a feeling of security (such processes, as will be illustrated, appear more prominently in times of crisis).

Leaders also provide their followers with a sense of meaning and direction. They may serve as the 'right story' or the 'right symbol' that the followers want to be associated with as part of their self identity or self esteem.

These needs are fulfilled in different ways in the case of distant leaders (i.e., political leaders) and close leaders - 'leaders in every day life' (i.e., managers, teachers, commanders). Whereas in the case of distant leaders the followers are influenced mostly by projections and perceptions attributed to the leaders'

*images and rhetoric*, in the case of close leaders the followers are influenced first and foremost by the leaders' *daily behaviors* (personal example, attention, care, etc.).

In a review of studies (that will be presented in the talk) dealing with transformational leadership and good parenting (Popper & Mayseless, 2003), we will see that the typical behaviors of good parents are identical to those of transformational leaders. For example, both set goals and standards, build feelings of self worth, provide opportunities for learning, and develop motivation. Hence, by observing and understanding how good parents behave we can clearly see the behavioral inputs expressed in transformational leadership.

As for the outputs, there are hundreds of comparative studies that report on better results achieved by transformational leadership – academic and organizational performance, self confidence, self esteem, higher levels of moral values, and so forth. In sum, followers of transformational leaders are more committed in their hearts and minds. As Bernard Bass phrased it in his famous book on transformational leadership (1985), they are willing to perform "beyond expectations". Examples, explanations, and possible implications for teachers as transformational leaders will be discussed in the lecture.