

Excerpt of

The Groupness Factor

How to Achieve a **Corporate Success Culture**
through **First-Class Leadership**



Charlie Lang

Have you ever wondered:

- What makes some leaders more successful than others?
- How former friends can kill each other in a civil war?
- What makes people stay in an organization despite better opportunities elsewhere?

This groundbreaking book aims to help leaders understand how they can fully and consciously make use of the influential groupness factor to achieve first-class leadership for outstanding business results.

Charlie Lang, a former senior executive and now one of the leadership experts in Asia, discovered the groupness factor in early 2004. Through his expertise and wisdom as an executive coach and mentor, Charlie recognized the power of this entirely natural but almost unknown factor, and how first-class leaders intuitively use it.

"A great guide for building collaborative leadership in today's rapidly changing world."

- **Marshall Goldsmith**, considered by Forbes to be one of the five most-respected executive coaches, is co-editor or author of 19 books, including *The Leader of the Future and Coaching for Leadership*.

"I enjoyed the book and the anecdotal style. There are lots of suggestions and distinctions that leaders will find useful. *The Groupness Factor* may well create a stimulus for them to look at themselves, their behavior and quality of leadership."

- **Mick Bennett**, former Regional Manager of Hewitt's Asia-Pacific operation, is co-author of *Leadership and Talent in Asia: How the Best Employers Deliver Extraordinary Performance*.

"This book is filled with pearls of wisdom and is rich in strategies on how to become a first-class leader. It is a testimonial to how easy it is to lead when you choose the right book. *The Groupness Factor* is absolutely worthy of the investment."

- **Roz Usheroff**, an authority on leadership projection and communication, is the founder of The Usheroff Institute, Inc. and author of *Customize Your Career*.

"The groupness factor is a very useful concept for anyone leading groups of people. The book provides new insight into why groups do what they do, with practical tips for using groupness to create effective teams."

- **Angela Spaxman** is the Founding President of the Hong Kong Coaching Community, Director of Spaxman Limited and a practicing Career and Management Coach.



Charlie Lang

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through **First-Class Leadership**

Progress-U Limited

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How it happened

In Spring 2004 while visiting my friend Christine Klitsie, who owns an extensive book collection, I saw a particular book that caught my attention. It was "The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do" by Judith Rich Harris.

My daughter was 7 years old at the time so naturally, I was curious if the book had anything important to say about raising children. I started reading and after just a few pages, I realized that I *HAD to* read the whole book.

Without question, the book was fascinating for me as a father. However, something quite interesting happened while I was reading: it suddenly hit me that the concept of "groupness" described in the book was not only relevant for children and adolescents, but for adult groups as well. From that moment of realization, I started seeing group dynamics and leadership from a different perspective.

That moment came at the perfect time – as an executive coach focused on working with leaders, I had been previously searching for concepts that went beyond classic leadership teaching. Never would I have imagined that I would find what I was searching for in a child psychology book!

When I finally put the book down, I started to search for literature on the groupness concept related to leadership and organizational groups. To my surprise, I couldn't find published material that could provide me with deeper insights or directly confirm my findings on groupness. That was the first time I contemplated writing a book on this concept.

In Autumn 2004, I finally took the plunge. I came across relevant literature, which did not directly deal with the groupness factor, but

confirmed my conclusions. Particularly useful for me was the book "Leadership and Talent in Asia" by Mick Bennett and Andrew Bell. This book, based on the extensive Best Employers in Asia research carried out by Hewitt Associates, provided me with the necessary empirical evidence to validate my thoughts.

Finally, in December 2004, I started writing this book. I decided to write it in the shortest possible time, knowing that I usually function well when I push myself to meet tight deadlines. By the end of February 2005, I finished writing the first draft.

My wonderful editor Anna de Guzman took time from her busy schedule to edit my manuscript over and over again. She was certainly a key contributor in making this book a reality.

After completing the first draft, I enlisted a number of friends and colleagues who were willing to spend time, not only to read my manuscript, but also to give me valuable comments. Special thanks to:

- My alliance partner John Bower for his wisdom and for challenging my logic;
- My dear friends Christine Klitsie, Eberhard Froescher, Siti Hinchliffe and Doreen Low who went into great detail to highlight what could be improved; and
- My associates Susie Li and Loretta Parnell who kept encouraging me and pointed out areas for fine-tuning.

When I worked on the section on employee participation (Chapter 5), I remembered a recent speech of Mark Bergt, leader of cultural transformation at Jebsen & Co. Ltd. I gave him a call and asked whether his company would grant me permission to include a description of an exciting project he initiated some time ago. I'm grateful that the management of Jebsen allowed me to use that project as a wonderful illustration of what is possible.

Based on all the valuable input I received, I created a second draft, which was completed by the end of April 2005. I was lucky enough to get four leadership experts to invest their time in reviewing my manuscript. In spite of their tight schedules, they provided me with their feed-forward within just a few weeks. On the back cover of this book, you will find the comments of:

- Top US Leadership Coach Marshall Goldsmith, whose endorsement is very dear to me;
- One of the few authors in Hong Kong who specialize in leadership, Mick Bennett;
- Roz Usheroff, who has vast experience in working with leaders in North America; and
- Hong Kong's coaching pioneer Angela Spaxman, who motivated me to become an executive coach and, over the years, has become my colleague and friend.

The encouraging comments of these specialists gave me the confidence to publish my work. Shonee Mirchandani, the owner of Bookazine in Hong Kong, was my infinite source of knowledge on the publishing process and I'm grateful for her openness, support and friendly advice.

This is my first book project and it was indeed an exciting experience, much less frustrating than I thought – in fact, quite enjoyable. If you like what you read, I'd be happy if you recommended this book to anyone you feel could benefit from it. Consider it your personal contribution towards improving leadership in the world. This book is a gigantic step towards my mission of advancing first-class leadership to as many people as possible – a big dream that I hope will bring us closer to the ultimate goal: a better life for everybody.

**Leaders aren't born, they are made.
And they are made just like anything else,
through hard work. And that's the price
we'll have to pay to achieve that goal,
or any goal.**

- Vincent Lombardi

Prologue

Have you ever wondered?

The development of the human race is marked by a continuously increasing level of awareness. Certainly, we have already reached a remarkable degree of awareness. However, many questions still remain unanswered; many wonders still exist. Millions of curious people still seek answers for a better understanding of the world.

I, too, wondered about many things, particularly in my field of interest, leadership. I wrote this book to share how I was able to answer many pressing questions I encountered in my career – through the discovery of an important factor found in many aspects of life, one that most people are unaware of. I call it **the groupness factor**.

The groupness factor gave me answers to questions such as:

- What makes some leaders more successful than others?
- How can former friends kill each other in a civil war?
- What makes people stay in an organization despite better opportunities elsewhere?

Let me show you how the groupness factor is particularly relevant and powerful in leadership. You will learn how you can become a first-class leader by making appropriate use of this concept.

I will take you on a journey through the evolution of the human race, as it is necessary to understand where we came from to fully embrace the groupness factor. On this trip, you will learn how particularly persuasive leaders perhaps unconsciously used this factor.

Throughout my 13-year corporate career, I learned the power of true leadership the hard way, that is, with not much formal education and training. I eventually learned what works and what doesn't, but

often could not fully understand why. It was only after I started my executive coaching business that I discovered the concept of groupness in the excellent book “The Nurture Assumption” by Judith Rich Harris.¹ This revolutionary book about child psychology disproves the nurture assumption – the assumption that the outcome of a person as an adult is largely influenced by the rearing style of his caretakers. Harris proposes instead the so-called “group socialization theory” in which the concept of groupness is an important factor.

This opened my eyes to a whole new perspective. All of a sudden, answers to the above questions became obvious. I realized that the groupness factor is not only relevant to child development, but to leadership as well.

Although I will focus on how to apply this concept to corporate leadership, the principles described in this book are applicable to any kind of leadership and should be useful for countless situations you may encounter in your journey towards first-class leadership.

1. Harris JR. *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do*. New York: Free Press; 1998.

Introduction

The Importance of Leadership

Think of all the people who have been your leaders at some point. Try to remember their leadership style and the way they interacted with people. Do you think of them as great, average or downright lousy leaders?

I recently asked a number of people to do this exercise because I wanted to know whether my perception was unique or mainstream. Unfortunately, I found that many shared my perception: there are very few great leaders today – ineffective leaders truly abound.

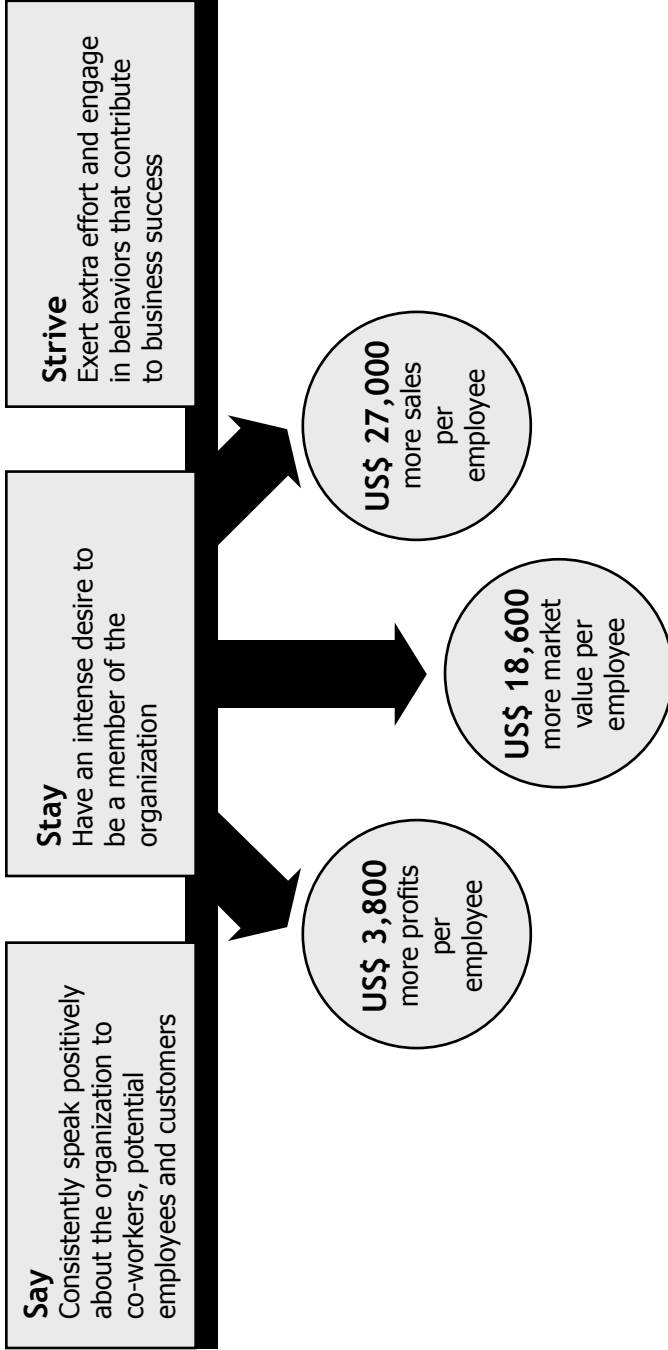
However, when asked about great doctors, teachers or other professionals, people can usually mention many names. What is the reason for this discrepancy? My explanation is simple: one can avail of formal training for most professions, but there is hardly any formal education for leaders.

Think about it – for the most important job in a company, we engage people with no formal education for the position. We just believe, or at least hope, that they will have a natural flair for leadership. There are very few companies that actually prepare a person for leadership positions, and the programs those companies have in place are often too general and not focused enough on the specific needs of their possible leaders.

If it is a known fact that the required number of leaders drastically outweighs the number of “born leaders”, why do so many top managers resist doing anything considerable about the situation? Here are three possible reasons:

- 1) They think that things are OK the way they are.

Figure 1. The Power of Engaged Employees¹



- 2) They think that it is sufficient for the CEO to be a great leader and the rest should just follow (this way of thinking is already an indicator of poor leadership).
- 3) They are aware of the problem but don't know how to fix it, or they are not able to measure the cost of poor leadership, and are thus unable to calculate the return on investment (ROI) for leadership development.

Hewitt Associates found that a clear indicator of good or poor leadership in an organization is the level of engagement of the employees.¹ Furthermore, they found clear correlations between engagement and key indicators of financial success (Figure 1).

This means, via employee engagement, it is possible to measure the leadership quality of an organization and calculate an ROI for leadership development initiatives.

Today, there is little doubt that individual executive coaching is one of the most effective interventions for leadership development. The Manchester survey of 140 companies showed 9 in 10 executives believe coaching to be worth their time and dollars. The average return was more than \$5 for each \$1 spent.²

Leadership quality may be the most important success factor for any organization. Embark on this journey to discover some of the secrets of first-class leadership and how the groupness factor can greatly assist leaders in creating an organizational success culture.

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1. Bennett M, Bell A (Hewitt Associates). *Leadership and Talent in Asia: How the Best Employers Deliver Extraordinary Performance*. John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd.; 2004.
 2. Pate K. Coaches help execs get comfortable in new roles. *The Denver Post*. September 2, 2001: M-01.

Chapter 8

The Benefits of Leading Using the Groupness Factor

We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee.

- *Marian Wright Edelman*

Can you imagine leading an organization with members who are not only ready, but *aching* to perform well?

Can you imagine not needing to motivate your staff with perks and benefits because they are already naturally motivated to want what you want?

Can you imagine being able to balance your life outside work and experience leadership as a true vocation because you don't waste time and energy to fix countless problems and ensure your people are performing in the best possible way?

Do these scenarios sound too good to be true? They may not be easily achieved, but they are entirely possible, as several examples among the Best Employers identified by Hewitt Associates show.¹

The previous chapters made you aware that becoming a first-class leader requires a number of skills and developing a number of traits. Being aware of and influencing the groupness factor are perhaps some of the most important keys towards organizational success.

In addition, if you are the CEO of a company, it is not sufficient that you become the only first-class leader. To achieve these outcomes, first-class leadership must be achieved across all management levels of your organization. Once you have developed a highly competent leadership team, you can expect:

- The emergence of a success culture with high levels of con-groupness across your organization
- A spirit of performance among the members of your teams
- A highly engaged workforce that wants to fulfill your company's mission and make your vision a reality

These will lead to:

A. Cost savings due to:

- Higher employee retention, especially of top talent
- Lower absenteeism
- Improved quality of processes, products and services

B. Increased revenue due to:

- Higher customer satisfaction
- Improved brand awareness
- A more effective sales team

C. Higher shareholder value because of:

- Increased confidence of existing and potential shareholders
- Improved profitability
- A clean corporate image

1. Cost savings

a. Talent retention

Just throwing money at people isn't going to be enough to keep them. If they don't like the company, the people they work with, or the way they're treated, they'll leave. Corporate culture has more to do with retaining people than it's given credit for.

- Flora Bacco, director of organizational policy and programs for UNUM America

What makes people want to leave their company? Studies, such as the exit interviews performed by the Saratoga Institute, reveal that less than 20% of all employees leave their jobs for better pay, benefits and perks.² More important reasons for employees voluntarily leaving jobs are:

- Misalignment of mutual expectations
- Person-job mismatch
- Insufficient coaching and feedback
- Perception of poor career-advancement prospects
- Work-life imbalance
- Distrust toward senior leadership
- Low confidence in senior leadership

Based on my own corporate experience, it seems that these US findings are very similar to what is happening in Europe and Asia. Apparently, the basic needs of people are the same worldwide, and these are:

- The need to be respected and acknowledged
- The need to belong to a worthwhile group
- The need to be recognized as a worthy human being

Obviously, the competence of the leadership in the organization can have a huge effect on these needs.

When calculating the cost of hiring an employee, you may need to consider:

- Advertising
- Agency and search firm fees
- Referral bonuses paid to employees
- Travel costs incurred by both recruiters and applicants
- Relocation costs
- Company recruiter costs (including salary and benefits prorated if the recruiter performs duties other than staffing)

Often, the costs of hiring add up to 50% and more of a yearly salary. Additionally, it must be considered that a new hire is not immediately 100% productive. Hence, a high retention rate has a considerable direct effect on the bottom line.

One note on retention measurement: there is nothing wrong with measuring retention rates. However, while a low retention rate clearly indicates room for improvement, a high retention rate does not necessarily mean that good leadership is in place. It is important to consider external factors like the availability of other opportunities, the economic situation, and so on, which might make people stay even though they would actually prefer to leave. When external factors change significantly, the retention rate might suddenly drop even without major internal changes.

b. Staff absenteeism

According to a US survey by CCH [Commerce Clearing House], which publishes human resources and employment law information, the direct cost of unscheduled absenteeism hit a record high last year [2002] - an average of US\$789 an employee, or more than US\$3.6 million a year [average cost per company], at large US companies.

While common in Asia, disciplinary action is not the most effective way to manage absenteeism, notes Charles [Alfred Charles, industrial relations specialist and managing consultant at Pro Act Management & Consultancy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia]. 'The best way is to increase the motivation levels of employees by job enlargement and job enrichment, and reward employees whose productivity levels are exceptional.'³

The unexpected absenteeism rate is clearly another cost factor highly influenced by the culture and leadership of an organization. First-class leadership produces high motivation and, subsequently, a low absenteeism rate. Also, if organizational groupness

the group members will feel a stronger solidarity with their peers and will try to minimize unscheduled absence from the workplace.

c. Quality

Total Quality Management (TQM), Six Sigma, Kaizen, and so on – myriads of quality improvement models have been developed to achieve the highest possible quality of processes, products and services. However, all of these methods highly depend on the willingness of the employees to adopt them. Again, first-class quality can only be achieved through first-class leadership.

2. Increased sales

When do customers buy? In my experience, customers buy when either one of the following two conditions is fulfilled:

- The comfort level of buying is sufficiently high
- The discomfort level of not buying is sufficiently high

Clearly, buyers prefer the first situation. Unfortunately, most organizations and many sales teams act in a way that does not help the buyer become more comfortable with their buying decision. In fact, the traditional way of selling, even the so-called consultative selling method, doesn't sufficiently help the customer feel more comfortable with his buying decision. Hence, a large number of sales is achieved because the buyer can't further bear the discomfort of not buying.

Rather than elaborating on sales methods, I shall focus on the effects of leadership on company revenues.

First-class leadership leads to an engaged workforce, which in turn, leads to higher customer satisfaction and improved brand image. Both factors lead to a higher customer retention rate, which leads to more “automatic sales” due to repeat purchases.

Finding new customers requires more time and effort than keeping loyal customers. Hence, revenues per salesperson – and total sales – will increase with the number of loyal customers.

Also, I often see salespeople spending a good portion of their time with special customer care due to quality problems and inefficiencies caused by a less engaged workforce in the production and back-office. Not only is this time taken away for actual sales activities, but it also reduces the confidence and motivation of the sales team, leading to a lower productivity.

3. Higher shareholder value

Professional institutional investors spend an increasing amount of time analyzing the leadership of an organization before making any investment decision. Today, more than ever, leadership integrity is a factor that should not be underestimated when considering the shareholder value of an organization. After the scandals with Enron, Arthur Andersen, WorldCom, etc., it does not come as a surprise that investors evaluate the integrity of the leadership before making an investment decision. They realize that good corporate governance and effective leadership is at least as important as the figures presented in the annual report. The annual reports are a reflection of the past; the current culture and leadership are indicators of the company's future. Investment decisions are future-oriented decisions, which explains why professional investors grill senior management before making a buying decision.

Of course, the profitability of an organization is still a major factor for investment decisions. Profitability is mainly a function of revenues and cost. As mentioned in the earlier sections of this chapter, first-class leadership leads to lower cost and higher revenues, which means it also naturally leads to higher profitability.

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1. Bennett M, Bell A (Hewitt Associates). *Leadership and Talent in Asia: How the Best Employers Deliver Extraordinary Performance*. Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd.; 2004.
 2. Branham L. *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave*. New York: American Management Association; 2005.
 3. Muldowney S. Nursing your absent workers back to good health. *BOSS magazine*. May 2003.

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