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Dear Reader,

One of the key aspects of learning is becoming aware of our mental models, beliefs, opinions, assumptions – all those 'things' that shape the way we think. There are several ways of becoming aware of this. We can travel to a different culture; we can start a project with a diverse team; we can visit a different neighborhood; or we can read challenging points of view.

This month, we invite you on a learning journey that uses the latter. We interviewed Joe Raelin, author of several books on learning and leadership. He will challenge our thinking with his perspectives on developing leaders.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

**Quote of the Month**

*"Treat people as if they were what they should be, and you will help them become what they could be."*

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

*German author and scientist (1749 - 1832)*

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# LIM NEWS



*We develop your leaders while they develop your business*

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## STOP TEACHING LEADERSHIP

## Interview with Joe Raelin

**LIM News:** *You have recently made a very bold statement, suggesting that leadership training can be a misuse of resources. Can you explain where you are coming from?*

**JR:** As you may know, around \$50 billion are invested annually in the US for training. A hefty percentage of this annual budget is dedicated to leadership development. The intent is to put leadership into people, such that they can transform themselves and then their organizations upon their return. Well, my contention is that these training initiatives are ill-advised because they are unlikely to succeed. Most of these programs subscribe to what I call "the list approach" namely, there is an explicit or tacit list of what attributes the participants need to acquire to become good leaders. The designs aim to help trainees learn and then practice these attributes, with the expectation that once they become experts of the list, they will graduate into leadership. Instrumentation, such as 360-degree feedback, is also used to measure the level of success. The problem with the list approach is that it is not so easy to apply -- or it doesn't work -- back home. The main reason is that no one else in their environment has learned these attributes, and what was well presented by the instructor may not necessarily fit with organizational realities.

**LIM News:** *Are you suggesting that leadership cannot be learned unless the whole organization or unit attends the training?*

**JR:** What I am suggesting goes a bit beyond that. The presupposition I am making is that people need to be prepared for leadership at all levels of the organization. What seems to be taken for granted is that certain people are eligible for leadership, and the others are just reliable followers. In other words, much of current leadership development prepares people to become leaders over others who are followers. I consider this leader/follower relationship to be outdated. Just take a look at how organizations are structured in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: bureaucracies are breaking down and new forms, built on webs of information, are emerging that distribute power and control.

**LIM News:** *In this new scenario, are there no more followers?*

**JR:** Not in the classic sense. Let me share with you how Robert Kelley<sup>[1]</sup> described the effective follower. He suggested that a follower should have the vision to see both the forest and the trees, the social ability to work well with others, the character to flourish without being a hero, the balance to pursue personal and corporate goals at no cost to either, and the desire to participate in a team effort. Who wouldn't like to see these characteristics in their leaders? The implication of the more traditional concept of a follower connotes "doing what you are told" because "you are less valuable than the leader." But if we no longer need our leaders to be "out in front," we no longer need our followers to be "back in line."

**LIM News:** *If the "followers" can become leaders, what about the distinction between managers and leaders?*

**JR:** You are asking about a traditional dualism that most likely originated back in 1977 with Abraham Zaleznik's classic article.<sup>[2]</sup> He described the manager as a rational, practical, and unimaginative person, and the leader as a visionary, restless, and dynamic character. Who would ever choose to become a mere manager under these conditions? The point is, managers are not excluded from leadership; they need to work with peers, bosses, subordinates, and others, and in this interaction

there is room for leadership to emerge.

**LIM News:** *I can see that before we can clarify what leadership development should be, we need to make more explicit what leadership means to you...*

**JR:** Let's consider a conventional leadership item. A leader needs to know how to motivate others to do things. As Bill Drath and Chuck Palus<sup>[3]</sup> have suggested, however, "people are already in motion." One purpose of leadership is to help individuals find ways to channel existing motivation towards meaning and contribution to the organization.

**LIM News:** *What other characteristics define leadership from your perspective?*

**JR:** I like to talk about "leaderful practice" as opposed to leadership to challenge the traditional leadership archetype that refers to the "person out in front." Leaderful practice involves everyone in leadership, seeing it as a collective property, perhaps akin to empowerment models. A leaderful practice has four critical tenets: it is collective, concurrent, collaborative, and compassionate.

**LIM News:** *Four c's! Can you elaborate a bit on each of them?*

**JR:** Sure. **Collective** leadership means that everyone in the group can serve as a leader, the team is not dependent on one person to take over. **Concurrent** leadership means that the individuals can be leading simultaneously, not necessarily in sequence. **Collaborative** leadership suggests that anyone in the group can speak for the entire team; each member advocates a point of view but willingly solicits the inquiry of others. And **compassionate** leadership means that individuals maintain an unadulterated commitment to preserving the dignity of every single member.

**LIM News:** *So now that we are more clear about what leadership -- I mean, leaderful practice -- is, what are the ways you recommend developing the inherent behaviors?*

**JR:** I've found that the best way to connect learning to a practice is what I call "work-based learning," or what in LIM is commonly referred to as "action reflection learning." It is learning that is acquired in the midst of action, related to the task at hand, and practiced collectively with others.

**LIM News:** *Does work-based learning happen in a specially designed program or at work itself?*

**JR:** It is clear that the workplace offers as many opportunities for learning as the classroom. Such learning, however, needs to include space and time for reflection on work practices. In today's fast-paced work settings, people are not used to being able to stop to reflect. Therefore a specially designed environment needs to be established. Learners, using learning teams and coaches, confront emerging problems by reflecting together on their assumptions. Rather than focus on job-specific skills, they learn situation-specific principles that can attend to the variability in their work environments. ARAMARK's Executive Leadership Institute has used this action learning-based approach for 11 years now, with 358 managers, transforming the company into a collaborative culture that values teamwork and business-line integration.

**LIM News:** *What are the visible outcomes from these development activities?*

**JR:** Individuals become learning leaders. They commit to their own and others' learning-in-action, freely exchanging knowledge; they develop reflexive self-awareness, insight, and a commitment to examine their own defensive reactions that may inhibit learning; they develop a peripheral awareness

of others; they suspend their own beliefs while increasing their empathy; and, finally, they develop a systemic perspective that looks at organizations as an integrated system of relationships.

**LIM News:** *This certainly must have an impact on the bottom line...?*

**JR:** It does. By releasing the leadership potential in everyone, people don't need to wait for their marching orders to act. They become thoughtful contributors, not to mention the value of working in an environment that emulates such steadfast values as authenticity, humility, trust and compassion.



**Joe Raelin** holds the Asa S. Knowles Chair of Practice Oriented Education at Northeastern University, where he is also the director at the Center for Work and Learning. He is author of the recent *Creating Leaderful Organizations: How to Bring Out Leadership in Everyone* (Berrett-Koehler, 2003). [J.Raelin@neu.edu](mailto:J.Raelin@neu.edu)

[1] Kelley, R.E. 1988. In praise of followers. *Harvard Business Review*, 66 (6): 142-148

[2] Zaleznik, A. 1977. Managers and leaders: Are they different? *Harvard Business Review*, 55 (3) 67-78.

[3] Drath, W.H.& Palus, C.J. 1994. *Making common sense*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership. Also see Drath, W.H., 2001. *The deep blue sea: Rethinking the source of leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



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 – Editor: Isabel Rimanoczy - Editing Support: Tony Pearson - 1580 Sawgrass  
 Corporate Pkwy, Sunrise, FL 33323- USA - Ph.: (954) 315-4583 - Fax: (305)  
 692-4586

E-mail: [Newsletter@LIMglobal.net](mailto:Newsletter@LIMglobal.net) - [www.LIMglobal.net](http://www.LIMglobal.net)