

# Independence Day

By Karel Murray

Dawn is arriving. The chilly air causes the breath of the waiting mass of humanity to materialize as briefly hanging ghostly shapes. Twilight recedes as the sun slowly ascends over the horizon, spearing the darkness with the brilliant light of hope and promise of a new day where anything can happen. Crisp aroma of meadow flowers fills the air and the crowd inhales deeply to capture the scent, if only for a moment.

They wait.

Suddenly, the quiet is shattered by the hammering of a majestic horse's hooves as it gallops over the crest of the hill. Backlit by the rising sun, the anointed leader surges into view and a mighty cheer erupts from the crowd, deafening in the celebration of their chosen leader. Raising a hand, asking for quiet attention, the leader guides the prancing steed, resplendent in silver and highly polished leather, up and down the front lines looking deeply into the eyes of those who have chosen to follow.

After the intense moment of connection, the leader positions the horse at a location where every eye can see him and the sound of the leader's voice carries easily to every woman, man and child gathered in the meadow.

Eyes flashing, head held high, he speaks.

The voice of authority, possibility, love, and urgency fills the air and those who listen feel their eyes fill with tears, too enraptured to hold back any emotion. This is the day when we fight for our freedom.

Independence Day.

At least that is how the movies and books say leadership looks and feels. This rousing, intense interaction between leader and follower is natural and logical. But, let's re-run the scenario again for today's environment:

Twilight is arriving. All company employees move quickly into the corporate lobby. Through the rain streaked windows, employees witness the sun as it descends behind the skyline, obscured by smog. A day is ending, where each employee knows anything can happen. The smell of panicked sweat permeates the air.

They wait.

Suddenly, the murmur of the assembly is shattered by the elevator door opening one story above at the atrium level. Backlit by the florescent light, the President of the company calmly walks up to the railing and looks down over the crowd. Raising a

hand, asking for quiet attention, the leader, looking tired and pale, gazes sadly into the eyes of those who have been hired to work for his company.

Choosing a location at the railing where every eye can see him, the sound of the leader's voice carries easily to every woman and man. The voice of authority and urgency fills the air and those who listen feel their eyes fill with tears, too shocked to hold back emotion. This is the day when they are given their freedom – released from their jobs due to the recession.

Independence Day.

Both scenarios highlight a leader who can stand and deliver the best and worst of news with compassion and strength. Harsh, necessary decisions are the responsibility of a leader and delivering the results of those decisions to members who are following you with trust and commitment is one of the hardest things a leader will ever do.

I believe that is why fewer people are willing to assume the mantle of leadership, even if it only involves personal responsibility.

Leadership is placed on our shoulders in all sorts of ways; group acclimation, recognition of a job well done or as a logical progression in the scheme of things. Often we receive the benefit of ascension to a position of power through financial rewards, perks, public recognition and the ability to create necessary change. That has to sustain us at night when we have trouble sleeping.

Often, many leaders feel isolated because they choose to keep power and information firmly within their grasp, afraid that any leak of bad data would cause anxiety in the workforce and negatively impact productivity. Isn't the leader supposed to be strong enough to stand alone?

Let's go back to the movie scenario...this leader exudes confidence in his followers, an undying faith that they will understand the issues at hand, work with him to solve the problem through group interaction... even if that means charging down a path to a destination that could result in destruction. At least they did it together.

The role of the leader isn't about isolation. It's about creating such a powerful presence within a group that people choose to follow you - knowing their voices will be heard, considered and implemented when it makes sense. The members believe in the direction the leader is taking, have faith in the outcome and willingly give up their independence for a greater good.

The power of leadership is in collaboration. When that happens, anything is possible, even in the harshest of times.