

# Be Impossible to Ignore

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON

Pick a problem . . . any problem. There are plenty to go around.

The economy, the environment, competition in your business, educating our youth, shady business dealings, shady political dealings, finding the cure for any number of diseases, growing your IRWA chapter, ensuring your family's financial security. The list is endless.

There is not one single problem that can be solved without leadership. That's because there is no problem that can be solved without the cooperation and collaboration of people.

## Which Brings Us to You... and Leadership

Your family, the organization in which you work, your community, and IRWA share something in common—they all need you to lead.

Leadership isn't reserved for people with titles. In fact, the old, tired leadership theories based on the power of position and authoritarian models of persuasion are no longer even compatible with today's need for collaboration, cooperation and commitment.

It is time to embrace a different definition: Leadership is about influence. Nothing more and nothing less. Leaders influence others through what they say, what they do, and how they say and do it. Leadership has little to do with position and everything to do with your ability to convince others to act—sometimes even against their own immediate interests—to accomplish a greater goal or task.

Leadership distinguishes you in every aspect of your life. Everyone has the ability to influence, and that means anyone can choose to lead.

## Three Ideas for Today

The best leaders command respect, earn trust and influence for good. Here are three ideas you can implement immediately as you continue on your leadership journey:

**Embrace the opportunity and responsibility of leadership.** History is filled with examples of individuals who chose to lead rather than accept the status quo. From William Wallace, the commoner who united the Scots to overthrow British rule in the thirteenth century, to the founding fathers of the United States. From Rosa Parks to the Nobel Prize nominee, writer, and labor organizer Ernesto Galarza. Every country, culture, and generation has its leaders. Some are known to everyone. Most are known to only a few. The common factor is their willingness to step into the void that exists when leadership is absent.

**Be too good to ignore.** Legendary entertainer Steve Martin was asked what it takes to make it big. His response was both stunningly simple and amazingly complex: "The secret to success is to be so good that you are impossible to ignore."

In most cases, we have little, if any, formal authority over the situations where we have the opportunity to influence others. That is what makes Martin's comment so important. We earn immense credibility when we are so good that we are impossible to ignore.

### Leverage the power of relationships.

Think of a teacher, mentor, or coach who meant a great deal to you. Did that person expect more of you, or less of you? Were you more likely - or less likely - to do everything in your power to meet and exceed those expectations?

Were you motivated by the power of their position or the strength of the relationship?

In essence, compliance can be mandated based on the leader's position. However, commitment is volunteered based on the strength of the relationship between the follower and the leader.

## Where We Go from Here

This is the first in a series of leadership articles that I have been asked to write for the members of IRWA. It is truly an honor to be associated with such an outstanding group of professionals.

In upcoming issues of Right of Way magazine, I will share ideas on what it takes to be an effective leader. This is a journey that we will take together, and I encourage you to share your questions and ideas for future topics.

## One Last Thought

The absence of leadership creates a vacuum that allows chaos to flourish. Do something today to fill that void. There are plenty of problems, and each one is waiting for someone to take action. That someone can be you. If you choose to lead.



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