
Leaders and Followers

By Armando Cano Anzures

Metis, Goddess of Wisdom and Cunning

Metis is a character from Greek mythology who embodied wisdom, cunning, and prudence. Metis embodied the Greek concept of metis — an idea that went beyond simple intelligence: practical cunning, the ability to find the right solution at the right moment, anticipate consequences, and adapt with ingenuity to any situation. This kind of wisdom was considered superior even to brute force.

Does this character sound familiar? Have you ever thought of your area manager or your operations director as the reincarnation of Metis? They're capable of solving any problem, aren't they? Let's explore this time how leaders are able to resolve any situation through their magic touch.

Practical Cunning in Leadership

When we talk about leadership, it's easy to believe that the people we give the title of “leaders” always have to be at the front of every activity. Sometimes we expect them to solve a major quality problem with a customer, or to have the winning argument in some negotiation with the plant's labor union. We also expect that, when it's time to give the year-end party speech, they'll be able to offer memorable words that will forever be etched in the annals of history.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Even though leaders have reached a prominent position within one of the systems that businesses run on (finance, quality, human resources, and so on), or may have even reached local upper management, in the end leaders are human beings too. What do I mean by that? We all have strengths and weaknesses: some part of who we are may be highly developed, while other parts may have gaps. So how do leaders, aware of these gaps in their own makeup, manage not just to survive but to thrive?

Well, the answer is simple: the best leaders know when they need to be followers. They know there will be moments when the best thing to do is step aside and let another team member — someone whose skills are better suited to that particular moment — take charge of the task and help see it through. That doesn't mean becoming a mere bystander: being a good follower means understanding the importance of the task, in order to provide clear direction on where they want the outcome to go, while also supplying whatever resources are needed to achieve that outcome — resources that might be beyond the reach of the person the task was delegated to.

If it's a project, support can take the form of regular check-ins, where progress is reviewed and adjustments are made as needed, while also making sure the team member can use the experience to further strengthen the very skill being put to use. Let's be honest: if the skill required were actually a weakness, we wouldn't put that person in charge of the task in the first place — the outcome would be obvious, and disastrous. Remember this well: we thrive by using our strengths, not our weaknesses.

Leaders and Their Teams

How do leaders make sure they have people they can actually delegate these tasks or projects to? Here's a skill that truly sets real leaders apart: the ability to surround themselves, within their close team, with a range of different skills and capabilities — the kind that let them respond effectively to the ever-changing conditions of today's business environment. I'm sure you've read stories somewhere about the boss who

won't hire more capable people, afraid it will expose their own shortcomings. Maybe that happens somewhere (I personally haven't seen it), but truly intelligent leaders know that those team members can be brought in and developed to add real value to their department, and even to the entire organization.

If you have team members you can't fully rely on — not even for their assigned tasks — it's time to give them proper feedback, put the situation on the table, and work together to come up with an action plan to address the weaknesses you've identified. Sure, replacing them sounds like the easier route, but honestly, unless it's an attitude problem (which rarely changes), most people would rather know what's being thought about them and will be glad to receive guidance on how to improve their performance.

Personally, I remember that the best successes I've been part of came down to the team of people around me. And the best part of hitting the goals you set is getting to celebrate with all of them over some carne asada and a few beers.

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