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Ami Rokach

The Center for Academic Studies, Israel

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Abstract

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Keywords

leadership; loneliness; alienation; coping; work

Leadership and Loneliness

Ami Rokach Associate Professor of Psychology, The Center for Academic Studies, Or Yehuda, Israel and York University, Toronto, ON, Canada

Abstract

This article addresses leadership and loneliness and examines the interaction of these two constructs. The literature suggests that leaders (educational, state, business, and organizational) endure stress, alienation, loneliness, and emotional turmoil. These may lead to health problems and negatively affect social and familial relationships as well. The interaction of leadership and loneliness will be highlighted. Relevant literature will be reviewed on leadership and its characteristics and effects on those who succeed and get to the “top.” Loneliness will be examined and how it may affect people in general, and leaders in particular; the article will close with suggested strategies as to how leaders may cope with their loneliness.

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Leadership

There is a distinction that was made “between *rulership*, which basically consists of obtaining the followers’ obedience by coercion (e.g., control of resources or legal authority), and *leadership*, which includes causing people to respond to the leader of their own free will, based on trust and enthusiasm. Leaders, unlike rulers, have the ability to harness the hearts and minds of the followers. (Popper, 2011, p. 29)

Each leader is unique, which is the difference that others follow. However, leaders as a group possess some common characteristics (Goffee & Jones, 2004). Leadership is defined as: (a) influencing people in the direction of contributing to group goals; and (b) coordinating the pursuit and achievement of those goals. “We think pragmatically of leadership as building a team and guiding it to a victory....Leadership is both a resource for groups and an attribute of individuals, but we believe that its primary significance concerns group performance” (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008, p. 183; Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). Banai and Reisel (2007) saw leadership as the process of providing direction and influencing others. Leaders’ behaviors shape their subordinates—referring to leaders of state, business, and the educational system down to the level of principals (see also Bandura, 1986; Shamir, 1990).

Similarly, although the argument can be made that leadership in an organizational function is broader than that of a school principal, the principal similarly is a

central figure in the school’s direction, functionality, and goals (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011). The school principal is viewed as a ‘gatekeeper’ responsible for coordinating the outside [out of school], the inside [in school], and assumes the gatekeeper’s position on the threshold between the two (Crawford, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2007). Those responsibilities are demanding and put the educational leaders in conflict with their staff, organization, and/or the community. Kelchtermans et al. (2011) observed, “These principals try to sit on the fence, run with the hare and hunt with the hounds” (p. 100). Isolation, loneliness, and exasperation are not uncommon.

This article will briefly examine the history and development of leadership throughout human existence and take a closer look at the loneliness that may be experienced by those leaders.

A Brief History of Leadership

According to evolutionary and anthropological frameworks, humans evolved in a manner not unlike a pack of animals, which allowed our ancestors to survive despite the predators lurking in a hostile environment that infrequently supplied them with shelter, food, and water (Foley, 1997; Van Vugt et al., 2008). Collective foraging and hunting, division of labor, group defense, and (often) communal parenting helped to buffer external threats (Kenrick, Li, & Bunter, 2003). Consequently, group members had to decide what, when, and how to do things. Such decisions could be made when one individual would

take the initiative and provide direction for the group. Additionally, a cooperative effort and group cohesion were necessary in order for the community to function well (Bloom, 2000). Conflict and even homicide were present in those ancient communities, and a need for peacekeeping existed before conflicts got out of hand (Boehm, 1999). Leaders served those functions; thus, leadership has a long evolutionary history.

Van Vugt et al. (2008) suggested a four-stage process of progressive evolution of leadership over the course of non-human to human primate history. It included the following:

Stage 1: Pre-human Leadership

Simple leader-follower structures for coordinating group activities are found in the first stage (Bloom, 2000). The foraging pattern of a variety of insects, the swimming patterns of schools of fish, or the flying patterns of birds are examples of leader-follower relationships. Members then follow the one who moves first. Non-human primates exhibit behaviors that resemble leadership. For example, chimpanzees were observed to display peacekeeping behavior (de Waal, 1996). Boehm (1999) observed a conflict between two neighboring chimpanzee groups in Tanzania who became involved in a conflict. The alpha male from one group charged the other group, and the others in his group followed him and overpowered the other group.

Stage 2: Band and Tribal Leadership

Humans, not unlike chimpanzees, developed and shaped leadership by their unique evolutionary history. This stage, Environment of Evolutionary Adaptiveness (Foley, 1997), extended from 2.5 million years ago until the end of the last ice age, which occurred 13,000 years ago. Humans lived in semi-nomadic conditions focusing on hunting and gathering food in clans of 50-150 individuals (Dunbar, 2004). The best hunters and warriors, referred to as "Big Men," exercised great influence on group decision-making (Chagnon, 1997; Diamond, 1997). For approximately 2.5 million years, leadership was democratic, in that group members resisted attempts of direct control by Big Men. If Big Men attempted to dominate the group, they may have met fierce resistance by collaborative subordinates (Boehm, 1999). This scenario has influenced the manner in which leaders are evaluated in modern society. Individuals seek in them (though not always find) fairness, integrity, competence, good judgment, generosity, humility, and

concern for others (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Van Vugt, Hart, Jepson, & De Cremer, 2004). *Homo sapiens* emerged nearly 200,000 years ago, united into larger tribal structures, and maintained authority structures that were inherently democratic (Dunbar, 2004; Van Vugt et al., 2008).

Stage 3: Chiefs, Kings, and Warlords

Some 13,000 years ago, at the end of the Ice Age and the beginning of agriculture and dependable food supplies, leaders began to play a key role in food distribution within the community (Diamond, 1997; Johnson & Earle, 2000). Leaders in those communities possessed powers to deal with conflicts, paving the way for formal authority powers and the stage for chiefdoms and kingdoms (Betzig, 1993). Leaders, by their allocation of resources to specific groups, could create cultural elites or hereditary leadership (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). As it was a lucrative payoff, leadership began to attract shrewd, albeit resourceful, people who succeeded — but for selfish reasons (Betzig, 1993). A large proportion of modern humanity still exists under these oppressive conditions: parts of Asia, much of Africa, the Middle East, and South America (Transparency International, 2005).

Stage 4: State Leadership

The fourth stage, some 250 years ago, is termed The Industrial Revolution (Van Vugt et al., 2008). Communities merged into states and nations, and large businesses developed, all of which had implications for leadership. As citizens were free to leave, at least in democratic countries, they may not have had the power to reverse leadership dominance, not unlike subordinates in Stage 2, Environment of Evolutionary Adaptiveness period (Boehm, 1999). Citizens, who may have felt powerless, actually had the ability to influence how leaders behaved. In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, workers were practically slaves of their employer, though the situation has since improved significantly (Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005).

Scholars have discussed the compatibility between followers' values and characteristics of the leader (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). Followers with a secure-attachment style (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) are drawn and tend to follow people-oriented leaders, who usually have a secure-attachment style (Popper, 2002). Followers who exhibit an avoidant-attachment style are attracted to task-oriented leaders (Shalit, Popper, &

Zakai, 2010), who usually tend to have the same style (Popper, 2002). Another attempt to understand which followers are attracted to what kinds of leaders was the compensation argument, which significantly differs from the attachment style similarity theory, according to which followers are attracted to leaders who provide a response to their sense of deficiency. Consequently, people-oriented leaders attract individuals with insecure attachment styles who may follow that leader as a way of strengthening themselves (Shalit et al., 2010).

Loneliness

Research suggests that loneliness is a universal human experience. Luo, Hawkley, Waite, and Cacioppo (2012) noted that between 20-40% of the people in Western countries are lonely at any given time. Loneliness is such a painful and profound experience that it is unimaginable that it does not affect all facets of individuals' lives. For example, Luo et al. (2012) found that it affects individuals psychologically, emotionally, health wise, and in their relationships in general, and in more intimate ones in particular. Similarly, Theeke (2009) noted the physical correlates of loneliness included poor perceived health, physical symptomatology, hypertension, sleep disturbance, and dementia in the elderly. Negative psychological correlates included depression, negative self-assessment, diminished intimacy in marriage, and general and social psychological distress.

Beyond Luo et al. (2012) and Theeke (2009), others have reported the physical effects of loneliness. It has been shown to alter immunity (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1984) and to predict mortality as well (Patterson & Veenstra, 2010). Loneliness and lack of social support have been reported to be associated with impaired sleep, impaired mental health, cognitive sluggishness, increased vascular resistance, increased systolic blood pressure, and altered immunity (Hawkley, Thisted, Masi, & Cacioppo, 2010).

Loneliness is also clearly related to impaired mental health (Wilson et al., 2007) and precipitates depression (Cacioppo, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2010). Loneliness feels bad; is a subjective experience that causes one to wonder whether others also experience its depths; is painful; and affects self-esteem, confidence, and social self-image (Rokach & Brock, 1997).

Loneliness carries a significant social stigma as well, as lack of friendship and social ties is socially undesirable, and the social perceptions of lonely people

are generally unfavorable. Lonely people often have very negative self-perceptions, and the inability to establish social ties suggests the person may possess personal inadequacies or socially undesirable attributes (Lau & Gruen, 1992). "The extent of the stigma tends to range from personal deficiency to dislikableness....Lonely people are perceived as less psychologically adjusted, less achieving, and less intellectually competent in relating to others" (p. 187).

In general, the psychological views of Peplau and Perlman (1982), Rokach and Brock (1997), and Weiss (1973), though they differ as to whether loneliness is a unidimensional or a multidimensional experience, share several common tenets:

- Loneliness is an experience of separation.
- Loneliness is associated with invalidation of meaning.
- Loneliness is painful and, thus, difficult to tolerate.
- Loneliness motivates humans to seek meaning and connection.
- Loneliness most probably has an evolutionary basis.
- Loneliness signals the potential for growth and new possibilities.

Thus, loneliness is a universal experience that does not respect the boundaries of age, gender, race, and marital or socioeconomic status; it is sometimes persistent and continuous and other times short-lived (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; McWhirter, 1990). Rolheiser (1979) eloquently captured this universal quality by declaring, "No person has ever walked our earth and been free from the pain of loneliness. Rich or poor, wise or ignorant, faith-filled or agnostic, healthy or unhealthy, have all alike had to face and struggle with its potentially paralyzing grip. It has granted no immunities. To be human is to be lonely" (p. 9).

Leadership and Loneliness – Do They Go Together?

Succession to the top leadership position in an organization is necessarily isolating in that it separates leaders from others (who now directly report to them) and leaves them without peers.

As a result, their own normal dependency needs for contact, support, and reassurance rise up and overwhelm them...the term “loneliness of command” has been used frequently in the context of leadership. The inability to test one’s perceptions, the tendency to lose touch with reality because one occupies a top position, is a danger anyone can fall victim to when in a leadership position. (Kets de Vries, 1989, pp. 6-7)

The “top” is not typically a crowded place. Gumpert and Boyd (1984) found that 52% of CEOs frequently felt lonely. Similarly, Gumpert and Boyd (1984) found a “pervasive sense of loneliness” (p. 18) reported by small business owners. While not all data suggests leaders are necessarily lonelier than their employees or a control group (Bell, 1985; Hojat, 1982), most available research clearly indicates that executives and leaders are indeed lonely at the top (Bell et al., 1990). On the other hand, Wright (2012) argued against the assumption that every leader is lonely. He suggests, rather, that the intensity and frequency of loneliness experienced by working people varies and depends upon the qualitative aspects of one’s work environment and not solely by an objective environmental condition, such as position in the organizational hierarchy. These varying findings and positions on leadership and loneliness raise the question of what happens to individuals as they climb the ladder of success. Is success accompanied by happiness or by loneliness? Reinking and Bell (1991) pointed out that those who aim for high portions often find themselves estranged from others, especially from coworkers. It is difficult, if not impossible, to get close to those against whom we are competing.

A large variation can be seen in what makes individuals feel lonely and the way they perceive relationship deficiencies in the workplace. Consequently, Wright, Burt, and Strongman (2006) observed social deficiencies at work, i.e., the qualitative lack of social support at work is less responsible for loneliness than one’s personal characteristics that impede desired relationships and interpersonal closeness (Parker & Asher, 1993). For instance, Riesman (1950) posited that as people climb the organization ladder they might discover their duties no longer revolve around technical competence but rather aim toward manipulating and persuading others. Similarly, Bell, Rolof, Van Camp, and Karol (1990) contended that this shift eliminates the social communication executives may have enjoyed in the past. Additionally, leaders may find “each promotion

carries greater responsibilities and longer hours, burdens that may reduce the amount of time available for communicating with intimates. Hence, the advancing employee may eventually find that his or her relationships and family relations have deteriorated through neglect” (Bell et al., 1990, p. 10).

When individuals move into leadership positions, they are expected to fulfill the organization’s strategic and structural needs. Additionally, a leader is often expected to meet the dependency needs of employees. However, when no one is available to respond to the leaders’ needs for company and support, they may experience loneliness. Thus, as employees reach the top, they find that one of the reasons leaders feel isolated is because they may become the target of their employees’ ideals, wishes, feelings, and fantasies (Kets de Vries, 1989).

Employees are known to attach to their leaders’ mystical qualities much like with *transference*. They respond as though the leaders were a significant authority figure from their past, such as a parent or a teacher; when this occurs, the distinction between their past and present disappears. Such transference onto the leader adds to the stress and eventual isolation of the leader (Cooper & Quick, 2003). Transference can be acted out in several ways and can affect employees as well as leaders. Subordinates may idealize their leaders and recreate the sense of security and importance they felt in childhood when they were cared for by omnipotent parents, thus feeling a sense of security and stability. They give in to their leaders’ whims, become “yes-men,” and actually, “allow” the leader to operate in a bubble where they begin to believe they are as good as their adoring employees make them believe they are. As a result, some leaders may become dismissive of their employees, may exploit them, and then terminate them when they feel they no longer serve their purposes. Such behavior may result in employees reacting angrily and blaming the leaders for not living up to what they fantasized, for greatly disappointing them. Hostility and lack of cooperation may result. In response, leaders may be tempted to retaliate, fire those they perceive to be “against” them, and imagine various unrealistic plots and malicious attempts to dispose of them (Kets de Vries, 1989). Thus, it is easy to understand why leaders may feel isolated, shunned, and eventually lonely.

“It is not just lonely at the top, it can be disengaging too” (Jones, 2005, in Wright, 2012, p. 47). Often, the social distance maintained by executives serves as a major contribution to the loneliness they experience. Wright (2012) argued that social isolation

is a professional hazard in high positions. Leadership positions within organizations often do not foster work environments where friendship and social intimacy are possible, thereby loneliness may develop. Likewise, some 40 years ago, Slater (1970) pointed out that both social institutions and private organizations emphasize individualism and success through independence and competition, which undermines a sense of belonging, community, and engagement with others.

Leadership advancement leads to non-reciprocal relationships with subordinates. Leaders are expected to provide support, although it is usually unavailable to them (Blake & Mouton, 1978; Moyle, 1998). As Johnson and Hall (1994) pointed out, leaders may experience social isolation and loneliness if they have no support from their subordinates or from a group of their equals.

Another contributor to loneliness may be that, on the way to the top, aspiring leaders engage in beneficial relationships that will help propel them to the desired position; however, once leadership positions are reached, those relationships may be unsuitable, non-beneficial, or too time consuming, and the leader may disengage. Cooper and Quick (2003) suggested that, as the isolation and loneliness continue, depression may result. And as depression deepens, it invites further feelings of isolation and disconnection, which may lead to irrational and even harmful behaviors and business decisions, alcoholism, drug use, and other means of escape.

Additionally, technology now allows workers and leaders to be stationed in various locations rather than sharing geographical space. As such, it minimizes, or even eliminates, informal networking and reduces opportunities for relationship development, thus contributing to feelings of isolation and alienation. While distance alone may not lead to loneliness, it may contribute to those feelings, especially when the person/executive is not seeking support, friendship, and casual interactions at work (Mulki, Locander, Marshall, Harris, & Hensel, 2008).

Another contributing factor to leaders' loneliness is their access to more resources and possessing more power (Hsiao-Yen Mao, 2006). Consequently, employees and others may approach and befriend them to seek their resources or help (e.g., information or money). Additionally, they avoid employees, as they perceive a lack of free will on the part of their subordinates in befriending them, which perpetuates their feelings of loneliness (Kipnis, 1972). Executives commonly execute orders; appraise their subordinates' performance (and sometimes negatively) (Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer 2001);

and, thus, distance themselves from their employees (Granovetter, 1982; Messe, Kerr, & Sattler, 1992).

The relationship between leadership and loneliness may be affected by the cultural context. For example, Banai and Reisel (2007) examined organizational loneliness in six countries that differ on a wide range of general cultural values. Research in India, reported by Banai and Reisel (2007), showed that the country's collectivist values influenced employees' needs. Indian workers apparently prefer jobs that are instrumental in achieving and maintaining family welfare. Consequently, leaders also must behave according to those values, which are shaped by the educational and cultural institutes to which almost everyone is exposed (Ingelhart & Baker, 2000). Countries with Western, more individualistic values, utilize management practices that focus on skill-based living, as well as providing tools that employees need. Management in collectivist nations, in contrast, emphasizes interdependence between the employees and the firm for which they work in order to enhance the association between the employee's own identity and that of the organization (Earley & Gibson, 1998; House, Hanges, Mansour, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

The broader concept of work alienation may also play a role in leaders' loneliness. Work alienation depicts the phenomenological experience of severe disengagement covering a worker's sense of self, relating to self-alienation and social alienation (Banai & Reisel, 2007). Seeman (1983) suggested that such alienation also includes powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement. According to Hodson (1996), leaders' work alienation is a function of modern organizational realities, such as role conflict, social affliction, and/or disconfirmed career expectations (Korman, Witting, Berman, & Lang, 1981). Similarly, Yilmaz (2008) observed another cause of leader loneliness: the perception that others may be a threat. This perception may lead to anxiety and alienation, which inevitably may affect the interaction between the executive, the organizational structure, and subordinates. In addition, it may affect work performance and one's organizational commitment, defined as valuing the organizational benefits above one's own (Ozsoy, Ergül, & Bayik, 2004; Yilmaz, 2008).

Those who perceive themselves to be socially isolated are at an increased risk of developing dementia, Alzheimer's disease, lower cognitive ability, and memory problems (Bazargan & Barbre, 1992; Wilson et al., 2007).

1. Research has demonstrated the connection

between loneliness and poor health: lonely leaders are prone to high-calorie, high-fat diets, a sedentary lifestyle, increased blood pressure, and dangerous weight gain (Lauder, Mummary, Jones & Caperchione, 2006).

2. Loneliness has been identified repeatedly as a risk factor for depression (Cacioppo et al., 2006). Depressed leaders cannot be expected to function well and serve as a lightning rod for their subordinates.
3. Lonely individuals express more feelings of helplessness and stress than the non-lonely (Hawkley, Burleson, Bernston, & Cacioppo, 2003). While stress may motivate individuals to challenge themselves and grow, lonely leaders likely do not perceive the growth promoting elements in stress (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2007).

Schoenmakers, van Tilburg, and Fokkema (2012) suggested that loneliness occurs when a discrepancy is found between an actual relationship and one that is desired. That gap can be closed by improving existing relationships or making new ones, which is considered an active coping approach that focuses on changing person-environment relationships. Lowering expectations about friends, and relationships in general, implies regulating the emotions linked to those relationships (Heylen, 2010). For example, should leaders expect employees to share, not expect other executives to seek their company and advice, or not expect that support, trust, and rapport will always be available? Schoenmakers et al. (2012) reviewed various approaches available to reduce loneliness and concluded that organizations that initiate interventions for the lonely should not only help the lonely develop a high-quality social network, but also should help them adjust their expectations to realistic populations (Stevens & Van Tilburg, 2000; Schoenmakers et al., 2012).

Thus, career success seems strongly associated with loneliness (Bell et al., 1990). The life of the executive on the organizational ladder, whether business or education, is highly competitive, leading to estrangement from peers and coworkers (Bell et al., 1990). As Seidenberg (1980) observed, "Corporate men are lonely both in their travels and in their offices....They secretly yearn for more trust and genuine friendship, which are absent both from competitors on the outside and inside the organization" (p. 186).

The Ravages of Loneliness on Leaders

Rook (1992) and Cacioppo et al. (2002) argued that poor relationships could adversely affect health and well-being, even with the absence of such blunt acts as criticisms, betrayal, or other social wounds. Thus, it stands to reason that leaders may be vulnerable and suffer negative consequences when the relationships they previously formed at work change or threaten to change. For example, changes in leadership, poor work performance, or in the leader's role may hamper relationships with others at work or may be perceived as a threat to those relationships (Hsiao-Yen Mao, 2006).

Leaders hold their positions to lead, guide, show the way, and point their followers in the most effective and beneficial direction. Most certainly, loneliness will be a disturbing element in their ability to function. As the adverse correlates of loneliness previously described indicate, leadership loneliness is rarely a welcomed experience; thus, it is quite clear that leaders need to learn to cope with loneliness, if experienced, or lower its chances to occur. Fortunately, extensive research has been conducted in search of coping strategies.

What Can Leaders Do To Minimize Isolation?

Leaders can do several things to prevent or at least minimize negative outcomes and health problems associated with loneliness. Described below are several of techniques that Goleman (1998) and others have suggested to help leaders overcome these negative symptoms.

- *Executive/Leader Coaching* is one of the most effective methods of dealing with lack of feedback from within the organization (Morris & Tarpley, 2000). Executives are offered a safe, confidential forum for examining ideas, concerns, and challenges they may face. The coach is someone who is knowledgeable about the organization and/or psychological counseling and with whom the executive can freely and confidentially speak (Kilburg, 2000).
- *Peer support of other leaders.* Peers at the upper levels of organizations are difficult to find. Some, the more fortunate executives, may find peers outside the organization or a friend in another non-competitive organization. For those who cannot

connect with either, there are organizations, such as the Young Presidents Organization (YPO), that afford young executives the opportunity to learn from each other (Cooper & Quick, 2003).

- *Confidantes*. Leaders need to address their personal lives, emotions, intimate fears and concerns, struggles, and failures. A natural confidant of many executives is a spouse or life partner. A good marriage, a caring partner, and open communication provide the type of setting a leader needs to unload, to share, and to hear from a supportive friend (Romano, 1985; McCullough, 2001). “There are things that we discuss only with people who are very close to us. These important topics may vary with the situation or the person: we may ask for help, probe for information, or just use the person as a sounding board for important decisions — but these are the people who make up our core network of confidants” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006, p. 353). These individuals influence the actions of others in a constructive and meaningful way. Leaders and executives need such individuals in order to function both personally and professionally at their optimal level (Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1993).
- *Journal writing*, which leaders may be doing on a regular basis in relation to their work, is one of the easiest and simplest methods of dealing with feelings of isolation (Pennebaker, 1997). For example, writing about troubling events helps resolve unfinished business that leaders may otherwise carry home with them on a daily basis, as it is impossible for the leader to resolve all the issues faced during the day.
- *Peer Assisted Leadership (PAL)* is a program intended to help school leaders reduce their isolation, though it could easily be adapted to other leadership settings (Dwyer et al., 1983). PAL assists participants in identifying and understanding their own and other leaders’ school actions. Leaders are encouraged to assume a non-evaluative stance and, by doing so, become more accustomed to accept their own behavior and to seek assistance and guidance from peers once they leave the training program (Dussault & Barnett, 1996).
- *Becoming authentic leaders in the organization* refers to leaders who bring integrity to their work,

operate in a transparent manner, garner courage and optimism in the face of challenge, and agree to be guided by an unfailing moral compass (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Diddams & Chang, 2012). Authenticity embodies an encouraging alternative to fear and helplessness in the workplace (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Authentic leaders know and act upon their true values, beliefs, integrity, and strengths (Avolio, Griffith, Wernsing, & Walumbwa, 2010).

- *Reaching out to colleagues*. In a study of Flemish educational leaders, Kelchtermans et al. (2011) found they experienced isolation and exclusion. The educational leader’s position is a lonely one. By definition, the leader does not have a peer-group within the organization, nor are there “real” colleagues. Consequently, Kelchtermans et al. (2011) questioned where the educational leader belongs. Research on teachers clearly pointed out their great need for belonging, and the quality of their relationship with colleagues was tremendously important to them (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Achinstein, 2002). School leaders share that need, as many were teachers previously. However, they do not feel they “belong” among their subordinate teachers. And thus, reaching out to colleagues, i.e., other educational leaders, could greatly assist in coping with or even preventing loneliness.
- *Increasing one’s circle of friends in and out of work*. Cooper and Quick (2003) suggested, “While little to nothing can be done about the nature of the executive position and the isolation and loneliness that accompanies it, leaders and executives can become aware of the risks and potential outcomes that accompany [it, and]... address [them]...by seeking out the type of support that is most beneficial” (p. 7). Hsiao-Yen Mao (2006) conducted a study on Taiwanese employees and leaders and found a negative correlation between a person’s organizational level and workplace friendship. The relationships found in organizations are superior-subordinate, peer, mentor-protégé, and friendships (Sias & Perry, 2004). Among those, friendships are unique, in that they are voluntary and for personal, socio-emotional benefits. Friendship can influence job effectiveness, not only by affecting leader-follower relations (Boyd & Taylor, 1998), but, more importantly, by serving as systems for decision

making, mobilizing resources, or transmitting information (Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Hsiao-Yen Mao, 2006).

- *Self-development and understanding* may be the much-desired effects of the increased self-intimacy, renewal, and growth that often are the results of active participation in organized focus groups (Parents Without Partners, Alcoholics Anonymous, PAL, etc.) and of receiving professional help and support (Rokach & Brock, 1997). When the decision is made to consult a mental health professional, a new brand of connection is brought into one's life — a connection with someone who can help with improved feelings and functioning. When a positive rapport is established, both the client and therapist are deeply involved in a unique relationship geared toward helping the client benefit from the discussions with the therapist, who possesses the ability and training on the manner in which to provide the client with reliable attention and understanding, maintaining a focus on the client's world and problems. Therapy can help the lonely leader in many ways. First, the lonely individual is relieved to be able to talk with another human being about important issues. Another benefit is that the lonely leader can share strong, painful emotions without censoring them or worrying about the effect on the relationship with the other person, i.e., the counselor.
- *Spirituality and rituals.* André (1991) suggested one may successfully deal with loneliness by finding solace, that “emotional experience of a soothing presence. In a turbulent world, solace calms us. In the face of adversity it gives us composure” (p. 108). Ritual is an important source of solace in that it provides rewarding connections to the past and the future and anchors the individual to time and space. Thus, religion and faith may not only provide the person with connectedness to other worshippers, but also with the solace that comes from feeling related to a protective and powerful supreme being. The public in the Western Hemisphere, in reaction to a money and capital-oriented culture, appears to address the alienation promoted by an individualistic culture by increasing attendance in religious services and developing a stronger spirituality. It is safe to suggest that at least a part of those who attend religious services are present, not because of

religious “duties,” but to be among others, to feel part of a group, and to partake in common practices and beliefs (André, 1991). And it should be noted, that André and others argue that *spirituality is different from religiosity*. Pargament and Sweeney (2011) defined spirituality as “the continuous journey people take to discover and realize their spirit, that is, their essential selves... for as long as people engage in these various means with the intent to enhance their search to discover and realize their essential selves, they are participating in spiritual quest” (p. 58). Spiritual struggles and quests, the questions, conflicts, and tensions about matters that may be of deepest meaning to the individual, have led to profound personal growth, an increased ability to make meaning of the situation and experience of loneliness, and engagement in positive problem-solving actions (Pargament, Murray-Swank, Magyar, & Ano, 2005; Park, 2005; Pargament, 2007). Those who attain spiritual growth are better able to accept the reality of their situation [and can, thus, adjust to whatever they need to face in a more appropriate manner]; develop creative coping strategies; find meaning in their trauma or stressful situation; grow from adversity; and generate the motivation to access their social support network (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Pargament & Sweeney, 2011).

Conclusion

Leaders and their associates, or followers, are seen as partners in a dance. Both parties carry a heavy responsibility to ensure work is performed successfully. Reaching the top position carries with it the ‘risk’ of experiencing isolation, inability to share with subordinates, and a heavy responsibility that many times must be carried alone by the leader. While leaders are susceptible to loneliness and isolation in their position, there are various ways that they can act in order to address it. They must be willing to listen and to have respect for their colleagues and subordinates, which will contribute to real understanding of the leader and his/her employees, and vice versa (Kets de Vries, 1989). A variety of strategies that can be very useful also have been covered. Some depend on reaching out to others, like obtaining some coaching, peer support and confidants, while other approaches can be generated by the leader himself/herself, i.e., journal writing, self-

development and self-understanding, and spirituality. Regardless, loneliness in leadership, though perhaps inevitable, is not unchangeable if individuals utilize strategies to cope effectively.

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