



Second Circle Leadership

Disconnected leaders are typically stymied when it comes to sensing trends of change, making effective plans, deeply motivating others, and implementing game-changing actions.

By [Robert Pater](#) | Jun 01, 2017

Leaders have to perform in the spotlight and under pressure. So meet Patsy Rodenburg, a renowned performance guru whose students include stars Daniel Craig, Judi Dench, Orlando Bloom, Joseph Fiennes, Ewan McGregor, Ian McKellen, Daniel Day-Lewis, and many others. She's very clear that the goal of performing is to affect and move others, not to merely seek attention, elevate status, try to impress, or even to dominate others. Everything she teaches is directly applicable to anyone wishing to become a more effective influence agent or to relate to others more fruitfully.

Her main principle? In her book, "The Second Circle: How to Use Positive Energy for Success in Every Situation," Rodenburg emphasizes connectedness as a path to achieving these goals. This totally resonates with me; I've long believed that disconnection is the cause of many of the world's ills and fall-downs. I've seen many people who are disconnected: a) from their environment and nature, b) from others, and c) ultimately from themselves, physically and emotionally. Too many live and work as if they were electrical leads that don't complete a circuit; they wind up with short-outs or become depleted due to their power failing to flow. Importantly, such disconnected leaders are typically stymied when it comes to sensing trends of change, making effective plans, deeply motivating others, and in implementing game-changing actions.

Separation and isolation are the bane of reaching and working with and through others. This isn't just my perception. Eminent work motivation expert Frederick Herzberg wrote in "Up the Staircase to Productivity Burnout" in *IndustryWeek* that the biggest problem many leaders fail to overcome is being disconnected—

separated from what workers are really doing, isolated from customers' problems, and even unaware of the deeper issues of other leaders within their organization.

In contrast, the strongest leaders I've encountered have developed attuned sensing mechanisms. They don't make plans or take actions in their own bubble. They reach out to gauge others changing concerns and reactions. They are connected, not self-absorbed, well understanding that real contact is a necessary foundation to building real influence.

Patsy Rodenburg offers a learnable solution. Here is my leadership take on her three "circles" of performing:

1. "First Circle" refers to a person being too consumed with himself. This is generally associated with over-thinking, being too wrapped up in internal plans or wants, being withdrawn or so ego-consumed that he has no clue about the fears, hopes, concerns, or reactions of others. Leaders in this state are preoccupied with running their own pre-scripted agenda, often trying too hard to remember what to say or what they've planned in the past, and are not enough aware of others' moment-to-moment reactions. Such would-be persuaders miss opportunities to make needed clarifications and often appear to be removed or "in their head" and are unable to spark change.
2. "Third Circle" communications are on the other extreme. These stem from an "I have it and I'm going to get you to do it" approach. This is based on a leader trying so hard to make an impression that she forgets how she's coming across, or from a limited mindset that equates being "powerful" or "persuasive" with pushing or manipulating others to toe the leader's line. Their entire thrust is the future, never on what's happening *now*. While this may work with some people for a limited time, too many Third Circle communications come across as insensitive, boorish, blustery, bullying, or desperate—and few things are less persuasive than desperation. Third Circling typically reduces credibility and incites pushback.
3. Rodenburg defines "Second Circle" as "a state of mind and body where confident, relaxed control allows us to establish intimacy and human connection where and when we want it." There's a strong connection between the communicator and with others.

Here, communications are two-way, even when one side might be talking more. People feel connected with one another in these moments. I know that, like all states of mind, this may be difficult to get across in writing, but I also know you know the feeling of being connected with others. Where you are "present" (and have a strong "presence"), really listening and making contact, rather than just going through the motions or plowing through a pre-scripted agenda without

monitoring how their responses shift. I also assume you've experienced how powerful and moving real connectedness can be. When it comes to creating step change, the energy that comes from connectedness far overshadows just transmitting data or merely heightening intellectual "awareness."

By being disconnected themselves, First and Third Circle leaders are modeling and thereby encouraging disconnectedness that shows up as minimal buy-in, reduced motivation, or disengagement.

I've found it's challenging to mindfully live and work within Second Circle all of the time. But I remind myself that I've made strong connections before and just have to relax, drop pretensions, and share and ask, rather than declare and dictate. The results, gratifyingly, speak for themselves.

I've seen how Second Circle communications can set the stage for significant breakthroughs in others' motivation and mindset, which then can blossom into significant, statistically eye-popping Safety and other improvements.

(Thanks to Brian Pater for introducing me to Patsy Rodenburg's work.)

About the Author

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