



## **Leadership Lessons from a Cabbie** **By Dr. Jim Beaubien**

---

Leadership can turn up in the most unexpected places. Let me explain what I mean.

On a recent trip, I encountered a passionate cab driver with a cause. He was upset with city hall for its intention to pass a law that would prevent vehicles that are more than five years from being used as cabs. He felt this was wrong. City hall should be concerned about the car's condition, not its age. If passed, the law will significantly increase costs and threaten many cab drivers' ability to earn a living.

In order to fight city hall's intentions, he's organized more than 250 cab drivers. Each is being asked to contribute \$100 to a defense fund and the resources are being used to retain legal assistance to take the city to court. He said that about 80% paid up right away. The other 20% are dragging their heel with some taking the stance that they won't pay until all the others pay. They are concerned some people will get a free ride.

He told me how he uses the story of the lion and the hyena to influence the non-payers. His story goes something like this: The lion doesn't kill to feed the hyena, she hunts to feed herself. If lions worried about hyenas getting their prey, they would never hunt. Lions hunt for themselves and if the hyenas are lucky, there is something left over for them. If we are going to deal with the city, you have to be a lion. You aren't paying \$100 to take care of the other guy; you are paying the \$100 to take care of yourself. It is in your best interests and if the other guy gets a few scraps, so what?

His story was passionate, sincere and convincing.

Obviously there are leadership lessons here all of us can apply to our workplaces.

First, look beyond your immediate circumstances and see the big picture: The cab driver didn't see a simple law restricting vehicle age. Rather, he saw a law that would infringe on the ability of dozens of cab drivers to earn a living. Concern about the future mobilized him into action.

Second, get others onside: He knew he couldn't fight city hall alone. It would require a joint effort and pooled resources to deal with the proposed changes. His lion and hyena story is a brilliant use of reframing to appeal to peoples' sense of self-interest.

Third, let your passion show. I was thoroughly engaged by this man's passion for his cause. He really believed in what he was doing and his enthusiasm inspired support.

Who would expect to encounter such top-drawer leadership skills in a cab driver?  
I was sorry when the ride ended.