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*Bound Together in the
Cords of Everlasting Love
Forging Bonds between
Leader and Follower*

On June 6, 1831, Joseph Smith laid his hands upon the head of Symonds Ryder to ordain him an elder. A former leader in the Campbellite movement in Ohio, Symonds was an avid and promising convert, and no doubt Joseph and Hyrum Smith were particularly happy to have someone of his prominence and gifts join the Church. A revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants promises blessings to Ryder (see D&C 52:37), yet within days Symonds Ryder renounced the Church and its prophet. This was no casual falling away: Symonds became one of the Church's most vocal and active opponents and probably participated in the mob that tarred and feathered Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in Hiram, Ohio, in 1832.¹

What is striking about Symonds Ryder's story is not simply that he apostatized—many abandoned the Church in its fledgling years—but it is his reason for leaving that is surprising. Joseph and Sidney had issued two letters to Symonds extending

to him a call to serve a mission. In both cases, Joseph misspelled his last name as *Rider* instead of *Ryder*. Offended by the error, Symonds “was led to doubt if [Joseph] were called at all by the Spirit of God, because of the error in spelling his name!”²²

Symonds Ryder could not accept that a prophet of God might make a mistake that amounted to a personal slight. Certainly personal pride played a role in Ryder’s reaction. Also, perhaps he couldn’t resolve the tension he felt between his belief in Joseph as a representative of God’s truth and his disappointment at the apparent offense. After all, Joseph had led Ryder toward a lofty, even divine, cause. Ryder could not maintain his belief in the Church’s cause when its prophet seemed fallible.

Ryder’s apostasy is an example of a thorny issue for leaders who are trying to convey a lofty vision to their followers; that is, when we invite people to join us in a noble cause, they may expect us as leaders to be infallibly noble. If Joseph Smith, with his charismatic and prophetic gifts, sometimes fell short of the expectations of others, how much more should we as leaders be concerned about letting people down?

Anyone in a leadership position wants to inspire those who follow. But people hold inspirational leaders to a higher standard of behavior than they do mere managers. This high expectation places a heavy burden on inspirational leaders and makes the relationship with followers potentially fragile. How are leaders to deal with heightened expectations of themselves when they seek to lead people in a noble cause? The experiences of Joseph and Hyrum Smith provide instructive insight.

“Cords of Everlasting Love”

Joseph and Hyrum were clearly endowed with divine gifts for leadership, as many of their followers testified. Joseph was said to have an arresting appearance, penetrating eyes, and imposing dignity. Josiah Quincy referred to him as “a man

of commanding appearance, . . . *a fine-looking man* is what the passer-by would instinctively have murmured.”³ Hyrum was also a compelling personality. While less charismatic than Joseph, he was described as “tall, well-framed, with a fine, handsome countenance, . . . and his face was full of intelligence and spirit. . . . He was amiable, and vivacious, withal exceedingly courteous and fascinating to all with whom he ever had [a relationship].”⁴

Surely the Lord blessed Joseph and Hyrum with these outward qualities to help them win the devotion of the early Saints, but some of their gifts for leadership were behavioral and can be emulated. For example, both men showed intense loyalty to each other and to their friends. They tried hard to build lasting relationships with others and to stay loyal to those relationships even through hardship and contention. Joseph’s loyalty is touchingly conveyed in a letter to his wife, Emma, written while he was jailed in Richmond, Missouri. Speaking of his fellow prisoners, Joseph wrote that “we are bound together in chains as well as the cords of everlasting love.”⁵ These cords of love sustained Joseph and Hyrum through their darkest days, but also often chafed when followers failed to return their loyalty.

How did Joseph and Hyrum go about forging these bonds? What can we learn about the leader-follower relationship from their successes as well as from their trials? Examining Joseph’s and Hyrum’s behavior can help explain why they were often so remarkably effective at creating bonds of devotion as they led the early Saints toward a Zion society, and why those bonds sometimes unraveled into rancor and personal resentment even while Joseph and Hyrum remained true to the vision upon which their leadership was based.

The Source of Relationship Bonds

What is it that binds people to their leaders? Organizational scholars have shown that feelings of obligation strongly motivate

most of us.⁶ When we receive a gift or a favor from someone, we feel an urge to give something in return. This innate need to reciprocate is like a glue that holds society together. It is also the basis for many of our personal relationships. Indeed, we probably would lose trust in a friend or colleague who consistently received help from us but was never willing to give help in return.

Generally, when someone does you a favor, you feel an obligation to pay it back in kind if possible. If someone compliments you, you don't offer to weed his or her yard; and it would seem hollow and misguided to write a check to a friend who has given you powerful spiritual advice. Rather, you repay personal kindness with similar kindness, financial help with recompense when possible, and the sharing of wisdom with efforts of good faith to follow it. To understand why the bonds between the Smiths and their followers were so deep, we need to understand the types of obligations they had to one another.

Thus, to understand how a leader like Joseph Smith earns the devotion of his followers, we have to look at what is exchanged. What offerings flow between leader and follower? From this viewpoint, we can see that people felt a bond with Joseph and Hyrum in large measure because they felt an *obligation*—not only to the Church they led but also to the brothers themselves.

Three Types of Obligations

“Men will work hard for money,” said theologian Harry Emerson Fosdick; “they will work harder for other men. But men will work hardest of all when they are dedicated to a cause.”⁷ Scholars recognize three types of incentives that link people together, as Fosdick crisply articulates. One type is money; economic exchange is, of course, at the heart of most employment relationships.

Beyond economics, however, people give their loyalty to people they love or respect. They offer encouragement, moral

support, and their best time and efforts, expecting that their loyalty will be returned. These bonds of mutual commitment create a sense of belonging. Members of social clubs, for instance, expect that fellow club members will stand by them and support them, and they in turn feel obligated to stick up for the club.

Finally, we create ideological bonds. We can feel bound to an organization because of a shared commitment to a cause that goes beyond financial or social interests. People who join philanthropic organizations form these kinds of bonds. They feel obliged to contribute to some greater good, and they also feel that the organization is obliged to promote the cause in good faith. If the organization doesn't live up to the ideology, people often feel moral outrage. This is why, for instance, people become so resentful of nonprofit organizations that engage in fraudulent or self-serving behavior.

Joseph and Hyrum fostered all three types of bonds—economic, social, and ideological. They encouraged *economic* interdependence among the early Saints, they promoted loyalty and *social* cohesion, and they stood for a powerful *ideological* cause, all of which bound people to the Church. The brothers created a “spiritual bond” among themselves, the Saints, and their Heavenly Father.

Joseph's ability to create economic, social, and ideological bonds with followers explains in great measure his tremendous influence and the depth of the loyalty of many of his followers. Hyrum's influence and coleadership often reinforced and sometimes eased tensions within those bonds. Unhappily, the complex challenge of managing all three types of bonds might explain why so many friends of Joseph and Hyrum at last abandoned them.

Economic Bonds

Although the possibility of economic advancement might seem an unlikely motivation for joining a church, early Latter-day Saints recognized that there were economic benefits to Church membership. The Church had a strong impact on local economies wherever the Saints gathered. Church members naturally did business with other Church members. Indeed, some people might have joined the Church for economic reasons as much as for religious reasons. Even those truly converted to the Church likely felt a stronger attachment to it because of such economic ties.

These bonds were seriously disturbed by the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Company. In 1836, after the Ohio legislature refused to issue the Church a bank charter, Joseph formed the company to meet the banking needs of the Saints. It was only one of many banklike organizations in America that collapsed during the economic panic of 1837. Since it was operated by Church leaders, the company blurred the boundaries between religion and commerce in Kirtland. When it failed, many Church members became disillusioned and left the Church, showing how economic bonds can interfere with social and ideological bonds.⁸

Joseph tried to strengthen the economic bonds among the Saints with his doctrine of the United Order, in which members of the kingdom of God would have all resources in common. The aims of the order were to eliminate poverty and inequality and to foster intense unity among the Saints. Although the ideal of the United Order was never realized, Joseph clearly meant for the Saints to be bound together by obligations to help one another economically.⁹ Lastly, Joseph and Hyrum's extensive business dealings with Church members (shopkeeping, landlording, and the like) show that they believed the bonds among the Saints were economic as well as social and ideological.

Economic bonds usually endure because of self-interest; we typically maintain economic bonds with others because they profit us in some way. In the case of the United Order, Joseph sought to help the Saints rise above self-interest by consecrating their belongings to others. Apparently, though, the Saints were not ready to give up the desire for personal profit; self-interest was one reason that the ideal of the United Order was never fully realized. Until people are ready to consecrate things fully to others, leaders should recognize that economic bonds will most likely work only when they serve the self-interest of their followers.

Social Bonds

Unlike economic bonds that serve self-interest, social bonds go deeper, linking us to those we love and respect. Joseph and Hyrum were remarkably effective at creating personal attachments to their followers. Their social bonds with individuals were fundamental to their leadership. Stories abound of Joseph's sociability and intense loyalty to his friends. He hosted countless visitors in his home—so many and so often that they repeatedly hindered his translation work. He spoke with tenderness and emotion about his friends. Likewise, Hyrum knew how to foster strong relationships with others. Joseph once said of him, "If Hyrum could not make peace between two who had fallen out, the angels themselves might not hope to accomplish the task."¹⁰ Hyrum was also firmly loyal in fulfilling personal obligations to others. For instance, he made a permanent place in his family for Hannah Grinnel after she tended to his wife, Jerusha, in her dying days.¹¹ For Joseph and Hyrum, leadership was not about distancing themselves from followers but rather about forging intimate connections with them.

Both Joseph and Hyrum stayed loyal to friends, even to those who proved unfaithful. In fact, Joseph's intense and

enduring loyalty often got him into trouble when his friends turned on him. Most notably, Joseph persisted in defending the impressive but deceitful John C. Bennett, who joined the Church in Nauvoo, apparently seeing an opportunity to become prominent and rich. Despite Bennett’s transparent and repeated disloyalty to Joseph and despite mounting evidence of his deceit, Joseph repeatedly forgave him out of brotherhood.¹² Ultimately Bennett became an outspoken, aggressive opponent of the Church, and Joseph’s prolonged loyalty to him gave ammunition to his critics.

The Prophet should not be faulted too much for his undue trust in Bennett. Joseph’s faith in the bonds between himself and his followers made him an effective leader; distrust of others would have hindered that success. Joseph and Hyrum both believed that social bonds, forged at eye level and with hand on shoulder, were essential to shepherding followers.

Ideological Bonds

The most durable bonds Joseph and Hyrum forged with the Saints were ideological or spiritual. Unlike economic or social bonds, these bonds link people under the banner of a divine cause as well as to God himself. When leaders foster such bonds, followers feel bound to each other and to their leaders in a common commitment to a grand mission. Of course, the goal of Joseph and Hyrum Smith was not to attract a following based on economic benefits or personal appeal, but rather to forge a permanent and unshakable bond between the Saints and their Heavenly Father; the economic and social bonds that Joseph and Hyrum established among the Saints were simply a means to that end.

Joseph strengthened the spiritual bonds among the Saints using compelling and lofty language. His revelations encouraged people to “establish the cause of Zion” (D&C 6:6) and “to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good” (D&C 21:7). He

prophesied that “Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; . . . Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments” (D&C 82:14). In the Wentworth letter, Joseph poetically promised that “no unhallowed hand can stop the work . . . till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country and sounded in every ear.”¹³

Joseph’s enthralling vision of a triumphant march toward the perfect kingdom of Christ caused followers to feel bound together in the most important effort on earth. Unlike the typical manager, who focuses on policy and efficiency, Joseph led by entrusting his followers with a sacred charge to advance the cause of Zion. This obligation bound them not only to Joseph and the Church but also to God himself.

Although Hyrum was less apt than Joseph to wax poetic about the cause of Zion, his actions were eloquent in its behalf. In Doctrine and Covenants 11, Hyrum is personally charged to “seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion” (v. 6) and is promised that he “shall be the means of doing much good in this generation” (v. 8). Hyrum’s unfailing loyalty to Joseph and to the Church no doubt helped others remain true to the cause of Zion. Hyrum strengthened the spiritual bonds of the Saints even amid worldly disappointments. For example, Hyrum once asked Charles C. Rich to forgive Joseph, who had been forced to sell property earlier promised to Rich: “Do not think hard, Brother Charles, for Brother Joseph has a hard row to hoe. . . . Be of good courage, for God will come and save us.”¹⁴ Thus Hyrum appealed to the shared spiritual bond in order to overcome a threat to the economic bond. He reveals the value of fostering spiritual and ideological bonds: they allow the leader to invoke higher-order principles to resolve problems in economic and social relationships.

In summary, Joseph and Hyrum fostered all three of these types of bonds to unite people. From a secular point of view,

it was Joseph's gift for establishing these bonds that earned the loyalty of so many people. Should all leaders then strive to create economic, social, and ideological bonds with their followers? Not necessarily. As we have seen, trying to manage all three bonds can be perilous.

Church members today also commonly share economic, social, and ideological bonds with other members. They might do business with each other (the economic bond), both out of loyalty to the Church (the spiritual bond) and out of friendship or fear of giving offense (social bonds). Unfortunately, these bonds of unity within a ward or a stake can lead to the exclusion of members of other faiths. Moreover, many people find it hard to differentiate economic and social bonds from spiritual bonds; as a result, misunderstandings between members over business dealings can lead to accusations of hypocrisy or unworthiness. Such issues caused many trials for Joseph and Hyrum. Any leader who wants to create a lofty vision for followers should understand these perils.

Perils of Ideological Bonds

Joseph's experience helps us to understand not only the benefits of ideological leadership but also the dangers. One such danger comes when the leader is held to a higher standard than is reasonable. Note that some researchers have discovered that when a company declares a grandiose social mission, the employees are more likely to express outrage at the company's shortcomings.

Another danger of ideological leadership is that people within an organization with strong ideological bonds expect more from one another. For instance, they might expect special treatment (discounts, free services, personal favors) in their economic dealings. If they do not get treated this way, they might claim that the ideological bond has been weakened. A Church member might say, "If my boss were really a good

Latter-day Saint, he wouldn't have gotten after me for turning in my report late." The same thing can happen when social bonds are threatened. For instance, if members think their bishop has slighted them socially, they might use the spiritual bond against him: "If he understood what it means to be a bishop, he never would have said that to me."

In short, people sometimes have a hard time distinguishing economic bonds from social and spiritual bonds. In Joseph's case, his faithful followers did so; others were unable to. Joseph's economic strategies sometimes proved to be ill advised. Many of his followers did not trust their spiritual bonds with Joseph when economic bonds were threatened. As one historian has pointed out, "Some Saints concluded that if Joseph could not foresee and prevent the failure of the [Kirtland Safety Society], he could not be a prophet of God,"¹⁵ even though a revelation had warned the Church that "in temporal labors [Joseph shall] not have strength, for this is not [his] calling" (D&C 24:9).

At times people questioned Joseph's spiritual leadership because they thought he fell short of the ideals of the social bonds. For example, some felt that a prophet should not be as sociable as Joseph was. His love of wrestling and of energetic horseplay with children endeared him to many and created social bonds with young people. Others, however (including even Hyrum on one occasion), thought such behavior inappropriate for a prophet of God. Symonds Ryder's apostasy over a so-called personal slight also shows how some can see failure to live up to social bonds as evidence of spiritual unreliability.

Those who abandoned Joseph for economic or social reasons perhaps revealed more about themselves than they did about Joseph. Had they been strongly bonded to the cause of Zion that Joseph advocated, they would have remained loyal to him regardless of being disappointed in his apparent

economic or social failings. Joseph's writings and revelations are full of acknowledgments of his own imperfections—hardly the material of self-promotion. Given this recognition of his own shortcomings, Joseph's goal was certainly not to bind people to himself. Rather, Joseph and Hyrum wanted to bind people to God and to a vision of his purposes. Because they themselves felt so committed to that higher purpose, they may have occasionally underestimated the importance of managing social and economic bonds with those who did not share that commitment. Joseph probably did not imagine that someone would quit the Church over a misspelled name. The Smiths could only hope that the Saints were as spiritually bound to the cause of Zion as they were. Sadly, Joseph and Hyrum were frequently disappointed in this hope.

Clearly, whether in church, business, or civic organizations, leaders who promote a lofty cause may unwittingly raise unreasonable expectations in some followers. Even trivial shortcomings (such as the misspelling of a name) can result in accusations of fraud, hypocrisy, opportunism, or worse. In this way, disenchanted followers often use their leaders' grand causes against them.

Lessons for Leaders

By examining how Joseph and Hyrum managed relationships with followers who varied in their economic, social, and spiritual bonds with them, both ecclesiastical and secular leaders can glean some important lessons. None of us will lead a cause as far-reaching as that of the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum. Still, Church leaders today face some of the same challenges Joseph and Hyrum faced in managing the complex expectations of the members. Business and government leaders with bold missions confront similar challenges. What lessons do Joseph and Hyrum provide about leading in cause-driven organizations?

Recruit coleaders. One effective strategy Joseph and Hyrum used was coleadership (as described in other chapters of this book). Because economic, social, and ideological pressures can overwhelm one person, a leader should partner with others (coleaders) who can help meet the expectations of many. Coleaders provide a variety of faces and voices for the organization. Within the Church, we refer to these groups as councils; indeed, there is divine wisdom in the extensive use of councils and presidencies in the Church. Joseph and Hyrum's coleadership in the Church provides a compelling example of both the unity and the balance of roles that a president and counselors should strive for.

The two brothers balanced one another remarkably well. Some people saw Hyrum as the “milder” and “more serious” of the two, while Joseph was often seen as being more “cheerful and happy.”¹⁶ They sometimes traded off the roles of protector of the cause and protector of relationships. During Joseph's difficulties with Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum was the one who pleaded earnestly for mercy on Sidney's behalf. Hyrum's pleas moved Joseph to tears; but mastering his emotions, Joseph held firmly to a standard: “The time has now come when we must act upon principle and not upon sympathy.”¹⁷ In his decision to excommunicate Sidney, Joseph agonized over the two competing obligations weighing upon him—fidelity to principle (i.e., ideological bonds) and fidelity to his relationship with Sidney (i.e., social bonds). While in this case Joseph sacrificed a social bond to the demands of principle, it was important for Hyrum to represent that social bond. Especially in such heart-wrenching dilemmas, coleadership can often ensure a more satisfactory outcome.

Develop “true believers.” Leaders can learn from Joseph and Hyrum the need to develop rock-solid true believers in the cause. Despite many defections from the early Church, Joseph and Hyrum enjoyed the loyalty of friends whose devotion to the

cause allowed these members to overlook the leaders' personal failings. Such friends included Elder Parley P. Pratt, whose commitment to the cause of Zion helped him to overcome a temporary disaffection with Joseph, and President Brigham Young, who never questioned their integrity and who carried their cause forward after they were martyred. Leaders of cause-driven organizations must not underestimate the importance of nurturing commitment to the cause. A quick or casual mission statement is not sufficient to build the strong bonds among leaders and followers needed to achieve the mission.

Leaders of secular organization must also recognize that not all followers will become true believers and that championing a noble cause can be a double-edged sword. Although it may inspire and motivate those who embrace it, a noble cause is also likely to create heightened expectations that the leader or organization may not always be able to fulfill. A cause should never, therefore, be espoused lightly or as a motivational gimmick. Creating ideological bonds in a business is particularly tricky because economic exchange is always part of the relationship. As with Joseph, followers may doubt the credibility and genuineness of the cause if things do not go well financially. Thus an ideological vision raises the bar for economic decisions.

Differentiate between the three kinds of bonds. Leaders must help followers distinguish among economic, social, and ideological bonds. For instance, Church members must be taught that economic bonds do not come automatically with ideological bonds. That idea can lead to unethical or even illegal behavior such as providing special discounts, favors, or free services to fellow members but not to others. The same is true with social bonds. Arguably, the early Saints were expelled from Missouri and Nauvoo in part because the ideological bonds that held them together caused neighbors to feel alienated and

threatened. This kind of estrangement is always a danger when strong ideological bonds are not shared by others.

Expect criticism. Leaders of cause-driven organizations must prepare themselves for public and sometimes venomous critiques from their followers. When leaders fall short in meeting their obligations, as all do at some time, disappointed followers might openly question not only the leaders' competence but also their very commitment to the causes they espouse. Causes tend to become moral absolutes, so leaders are held to them absolutely. As a result, disappointed followers often use the language of the cause to express their grievances in the form of moral outrage or claims of hypocrisy. Like Symonds Ryder, followers may magnify a leader's minor error into a deep ideological failing. Inspirational leadership is thus not for the thin-skinned; still, a group of wise and committed coleaders can support the leader against such critiques.

Conclusion

As ideological coleaders, Joseph and Hyrum Smith were highly successful. Despite the turmoil in the Church during their day, their vision persisted to form the bedrock of the most successful American religious movement. We can learn much from them about building a cause-driven organization. At the same time, their experiences show how hard it is to enlist the enduring commitment of others. Managing economic relationships and personal loyalties while pursuing a great mission is the ultimate leadership test. As the cases of Symonds Ryder and Sidney Rigdon illustrate, no leader is likely to keep all followers happy in a cause-driven organization. Even the most enthusiastic followers may defect. Any cause-driven leader will alienate some, and such leaders may find that, like Joseph, their names will be had for both good and evil. Perhaps this is the price we must pay if we are to become leaders like Joseph and Hyrum Smith.

Notes

1. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 170, 178.
2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:261 n.
3. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past: From the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 380–81, quoted in Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 3–4.
4. Susa Young Gates, *Lydia Knight's History* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 35, quoted in Pearson H. Corbett, *Hyrum Smith—Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 148.
5. Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, November 12, 1838, Richmond, Missouri, quoted in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 406.
6. J. W. Graham and D. W. Organ, “Commitment and the Covenantal Organization,” *Journal of Managerial Issues* 5, no. 1 (1993): 483–502.
7. Harry Emerson Fosdick, in *Vital Quotations*, comp. Emerson Roy West (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 38.
8. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 336.
9. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 181–83.
10. Quoted in Osborne J. P. Widtsoe, “Hyrum Smith, Patriarch,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, April 1911, 56.
11. Jeffrey S. O’Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith: A Life of Integrity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 178 n. 7.
12. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 460–61.
13. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 247.
14. Hyrum Smith to Charles C. Rich, February 5, 1837, Charles C. Rich Collection, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
15. O’Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith*, 165.
16. O’Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith*, 15.
17. Wandle Mace, Autobiography, 65–66, Church History Library.