

Column

Dinosaurs and Lemurs?

The term "willing suspension of disbelief" (also known as "movie magic") originates from theater, where the obvious constraints of a stage result in a stylized depiction of reality. It asks the audience to suspend their disbelief in this representation and suspend their analytical mind for the duration of the performance, to let their imagination accept the conventions as real.

In movies, that includes accepting things like space ships traveling at "warp speed," talking animals, aliens that all seem to look just like humans (even though they ostensibly evolved from who-knows-what on their planet), and, yes, even talking photo-realistic dinosaurs that exist at the same time as lemurs. It's Disney, for crying out loud!

As a Disney flick, Dinosaur does depart from some typical Disney conventions. For one, no bursting-into-song episodes: this one has a full, rich, orchestral soundtrack. For another, 3-D animation that is amazing in its detail and motion. The rest is pure Disney: a simple story well told. Mind you, maybe not for small tykes, as there is some violent behavior (even by dinosaur standards).

Reel Leadership: Dinosaur

by [Eric Paulsen](#)

The old way versus the new way?

Cultural perspective is a curious thing. The movie [Dinosaur](#) is the story of how two people... er, dinosaurs, both of the same species, implement leadership in vastly different ways based on the different cultures they grew up in.

One of the tenets of the Boeing Leadership Center is the development of change agents, leaders who go out and change our inherited corporate cultures into one company, with one vision and one culture that is focused on success.



The specific leadership lessons offered by Dinosaur are less an outline of important points than an introspection of leadership styles -- what works and drives the group to success and what thwarts success.

The movie opens with a stunningly spectacular animation sequence and a narrative that declares, "Sometimes the smallest thing can make the biggest changes."

We're introduced to our "hero", [Aladar](#), when he is still an egg, an [iguanodon egg](#). While nestled in his protective mother's nest, a nasty carnosaur crashes through the woods and disperses the herbivores, grabbing one for a snack. The egg tumbles out of the nest and endures a delightful odyssey of being found, carried, and lost by a number of prehistoric characters until he finally lands on an island. There, he is found by a troupe of frolicking [lemurs](#).

This particular band of lemurs, primates by genus, is of the highly social variety. The patriarch, Yar, wants to get

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rid of the newly-hatched baby iguanodon, while the wise matriarch, Plio (his daughter and the narrative voice of the movie), wants to raise him as one of their own. She wins. Thus we have an iguanodon who thinks and acts like a highly social, clan-oriented, 3-ton lemur. They work together, they play together, they help each other -- they do everything as a group, a family, a team.

While the lemurs do not have an official leadership development program to learn about different cultures, the Boeing Leadership Center does. It's called the [Global Leadership Program](#). By sending executives overseas on a Boeing project, the center immerses them in the history, politics, culture, and traditions of a specific region while teaching them the business practices, competitive dynamics, and market opportunities specific to that region. The benefits of learning about and from different cultures is as important to Boeing as it is to struggling iguanodons, maybe even more so.

Aladar's idyllic world is destroyed by meteors as they suddenly split the sky and pelt the landscape with flaming boulders. The meteor shower changes everything, forcing the rag-tag troupe into the harsh and desperate reality of survival.

As they roam the stark desert they find themselves in, they're first chased by velociraptors and then almost run over by a herd of relentlessly marching herbivore dinosaurs (many of them iguanodons like Aladar) on a trek to a "promised land" called the Nesting Grounds.

Aladar has never seen another dinosaur, so he doesn't know their ways. His introduction is a harsh one, with the dinosaur culture clashing mightily with his adopted lemur culture.



Zoom

Aladar with his adopted lemur family and his

They're introduced to the authoritarian leader of the herd, a hard-driving iguanodon named [Kron](#). He epitomizes the philosophy of "every dinosaur for him/herself." At one point, when they face a tough march ahead with no water, Kron's sister [Neera](#) implores to

him that forging ahead will mean losing half the herd. His response is, "Then we save the half that deserves to live." [Bruton](#), Kron's loyal, battle-scarred lieutenant, adds, "If a predator catches up, you're on your own."

Aladar, having been raised by lemurs, who are more team-oriented, is the antithesis of Kron's "you're on your own" mindset, taking time to poke and prod and help those who are weaker (but who end up offering the wisdom and support that helps everyone win). His response to Kron's philosophy is, "We watch out for each other, we *all* get to the Nesting Grounds!"

The benefits of cultural diversity, adaptability, perseverance, and thinking differently

As the story unfolds, we're presented with the ongoing struggle between the authoritarian leadership of Kron and the team-oriented leadership of Aladar. Also at odds are Kron's rigid attachment to the "old ways" and Aladar's adaptability and "thinking outside of the box."

Being a dinosaur raised by lemurs allows Aladar to look at things differently. When the herd approaches where a lake used to be and find it bone-dry, Kron exhorts the tired and thirsty herd to keep moving, while Aladar looks around and, with the help of his lemur friend, realizes that there might be water just beneath the bone-dry surface. Aladar digs with the help of his over-50-ton brachiosaurus compatriot Baylene and finds water, then prompts the older and more exhausted dinosaurs to drink first.

After resting briefly and quenching their thirst, Kron prods his herd to move on, marching double-time. Aladar's slower moving friends can't keep up. Aladar refuses to run ahead to catch up to the herd, instead staying back to help Baylene and [Eema](#). On their own now, Aladar is the defacto leader of this rag-tag troupe of 2 older dinosaurs, a young and playful misfit [ankylosaur](#), the lemurs, and himself.

Aladar's decision is noble and compassionate. However, it begs the question of how far you slow down a group to allow the slower participants to feel comfortable. At what

point do you make changes to keep pace with what has to be done?

Aladar, in his team-oriented leadership, inspires those around him to the point that in the one instance when his own hope fades in the face of a daunting challenge, [they step up and charge ahead](#).

They are believers; the ones who only knew the "every person for themselves" way of life are now team players. Together, they break through the final obstacle to the Nesting Grounds.

Even Bruton, Kron's loyal and tough lieutenant, can't help but reluctantly respect Aladar's leadership. He has encountered carnotaurs and is wounded enough that he was [left behind by the herd](#).

As carnotaurs encroach on their cave looking for a meal, Bruton, in an uncharacteristically compassionate gesture, yells at Aladar to lead the others away while he fights the carnivores. He has become a team player.

What is it that inspires this change of heart? At this point, a few dinosaurs are acting more like the lemurs, thinking in terms of moving forward as a group. Why?

Finding themselves in the Nesting Grounds and realizing that the main herd has not arrived and the old entrance will block their path, Aladar turns back to find the herd and tell them about this only route. What ensues is the final struggle for leadership, Kron insisting that they climb over the blocked entry even though many cannot make the climb, and Aladar trying to avoid struggle but insisting there is a safer, better route.

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The climactic scene finds the herd, including Kron's sister (and Aladar's love interest), following Aladar to the Nesting Place. When they find their way blocked by a nasty carnotaur, the herd starts to scatter -- much like the beginning of the movie when a carnotaur scatters herbivores, including



Zoom

Aladar leads the herd in standing united against the carnotaur.

Aladar's mother, and launches him on this odyssey. "If we scatter, he'll pick us off," Aladar exhorts. "Stand together!" Together they stand and face down the carnotaur with bellows and threatening gestures.

The movie ends on a typical Disney happy note, with Plio's caveat that reminds us that this story is but an episode in a much larger story, much like any leadership role that is an unending series of challenges; "None of us knows what changes, big or small, lie ahead. One thing is certain -- our journey's not over."

Questions to ponder

Obviously, nothing is as black-and-white as is depicted in this movie. Compare the leadership styles of Kron and Aladar. Think about it: Kron successfully led this group of dinosaurs year after year on their annual trek to their nesting place. What did he offer? What didn't he offer? What might have been sacrificed because of his leadership style?

Do the same for Aladar. While his leadership supplanted Kron's in the end, what might the herd have given up by following him? What did he offer? What didn't he offer? What might have been sacrificed because of his leadership style?

Describe an imagined synthesis of Kron's and Aladar's leadership styles, looking at both the best model and how that would benefit a company; and the worst synthesis and how that would impact a company, department, or team. 🌀

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