

# Thinking and Learning about Leadership

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## Introduction

Leadership is one of the most widely talked about subjects and at the same time one of the most elusive and puzzling. Americans often yearn for great, transcending leadership for their communities, companies, the military, unions, universities, sports teams, and for the nation. However, we have an almost love-hate ambivalence about power wielders. And we especially dislike anyone who tries to boss us around. Yes, we admire the Washingtons and Churchills, but Hitler and Al Capone were leaders too—and that points up a fundamental problem. Leadership can be exercised in the service of noble, liberating, enriching ends, but it can also serve to manipulate, mislead and repress.

"One of the most universal cravings of our time," writes James MacGregor Burns, "is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership." But exactly what is creative leadership? A Wall Street Journal cartoon had two men talking about leadership. Finally, one turned to the other in exasperation and said: "Yes, we need leadership, but we also need someone to tell us what to do." That is to say, leadership for most people most of the time is a rather hazy, distant and even confusing abstraction. Hence, thinking about or defining leadership is a kind of intellectual leadership challenge in itself.

What follows are some thoughts about leadership and education for leadership. These thoughts and ideas are highly personal and hardly scientific. As I shall suggest below, almost anything that can be said about leadership can be contradicted with counter examples. Moreover, the whole subject is riddled with paradoxes. My ideas here are the product of my studies of political leadership and my own participation in politics from the town meeting level to the White House staff. Some of my ideas come from helping to advise universities and foundations and the Houston-based American Leadership Forum on how best to go about encouraging leadership development. Finally, my thoughts have also been influenced in a variety of ways by numerous conversations with five especially insightful writers on leadership—Warren Bennis, James MacGregor Burns, David Campbell, Harlan Cleveland, and John W. Gardner.

## Teaching Leadership

Can we teach people to become leaders? Can we teach leadership? People are divided on these questions. It was once widely held that "leaders are born and not made," but that view is less widely held today. We also used to hear about "natural leaders" but nowadays most leaders have learned

their leadership ability rather than inherited it. Still there is much mystery to the whole matter. In any event, many people think colleges and universities should steer clear of the whole subject. What follows is a set of reasons why our institutions of higher learning generally are "bashful about teaching leadership." These reasons may overstate the case, but they are the objections that serious people often raise.

First, many people still believe that leaders are born and not made. Or that leadership is somehow almost accidental or at least that most leaders emerge from circumstances and normally do not create them. In any event, it is usually added, most people, most of the time, are not now and never will be leaders.

Second, American cultural values hold that leadership is an elitist and thus anti-American phenomenon. Plato and Machiavelli and other grand theorists might urge upon their contemporaries the need for selecting out and training a select few for top leadership roles. But this runs against the American grain. We like to think that anyone can become a top leader here. Hence, no special training should be given to some special select few.

Third, is the complaint that leadership training would more than likely be preoccupied with skills, techniques, and the means of getting things done. But leadership for what? Leadership in service of what ends? A focus on means divorced from ends makes people—especially intellectuals—ill at ease. They hardly want to be in the business of training future Joe McCarthys or Hitlers or Idi Amins.

Fourth, leadership study strikes many as an explicitly vocational topic. It's a practical and applied matter—better learned in summer jobs, in internships, or on the playing fields. You learn it on the job. You learn it from gaining experience, from making mistakes and learning from them. And you should learn it from mentors.

Fifth, leadership often involves an element of manipulation or deviousness, if not outright ruthlessness. Some consider it as virtually the same as learning about jungle-fighting or acquiring "the killer instinct." It's just not "clean" enough a subject matter for many people to embrace. Plus, "leaders" like Stalin and Hitler gave "leadership" a bad name. If they were leaders, then spare us their clones or imitators.

Sixth, leadership in the most robust sense of the term is such an ecumenical and intellectually so all-encompassing a subject that it frightens not only the timid but even the most well-educated of persons. To teach leadership is an act of arrogance. That is, it is to suggest one understands far more than even a well-educated person can understand—history,

ethics, philosophy, classics, politics, biography, psychology, management, sociology, law, etc. . . . and to be steeped deeply as well in the “real world.”

Seventh, colleges and universities are increasingly organized in highly specialized divisions and departments all geared to train specialists. While the mission of the college may be to educate “the educated person” and society’s future leaders, in fact the incentive system is geared to training specialists. Society today rewards the expert or the super specialist—the data processors, the pilots, the financial whiz, the heart surgeon, the special team punt returners, and so on. Leaders, however, have to learn to become generalists and usually have to do so well after they have left our colleges, graduate schools and professional schools.

Eighth, leadership strikes many people (and with some justification) as an elusive, hazy, and almost mysterious commodity. Now you see it, now you don’t. So much of leadership is intangible, you can’t possibly define all the parts. A person may be an outstanding leader here, but fail there. Trait theory has been thoroughly debunked. In fact, leadership is highly situational and contextual. A special chemistry develops between leaders and followers and it is usually context specific. Followers often do more to determine the leadership they will get than can any leader. Hence, why not teach people to be substantively bright and well-read and let things just take their natural course.

Ninth, virtually anything that can be said about leadership can be denied or disproven. Leadership studies, to the extent they exist, are unscientific. Countless paradoxes and contradictions litter every manuscript on leadership. Thus, we yearn for leadership, but yearn equally to be free and left alone. We admire risk taking, entrepreneurial leadership but we roundly criticize excessive risk taking as bullheadedness or plain stupid. We want leaders who are highly self-confident and who are perhaps incurably optimistic—yet we also dislike hubris and often yearn for at least a little self-doubt (e.g., Creon in *Antigone*). Leaders have to be almost single-minded in their drive and commitment, but too much of that makes a person rigid, driven and unacceptable. We want leaders to be good listeners and represent their constituents, yet in the words of Walter Lippmann, effective leadership often consists of giving the people not what they want but what they will learn to want. How in the world, then, can you be rigorous and precise in teaching leadership?

Tenth, leadership at its best comes close to creativity. And how do you teach creativity? We are increasingly made aware of the fact that much of creative thinking calls upon unconscious thinking, dreaming, and even fantasy. Some fascinating work is being done on intuition and the nonrational—but it is hardly a topic with which traditional disciplines in traditional colleges are comfortable.

Leaders themselves often complain that the incentives for leadership are not as great as the disincentives. Many people shy away from leadership responsibilities saying it “just isn’t worth it.” A survey of some 1,700 business, government, and professional leaders revealed a number of striking reasons for this question. See table 1.

## Relationships

A few other initial observations need to be made about leadership. Chief among these is that the study of leadership needs inevitably to be linked or merged with the study of followership. We cannot really study leaders in isolation from followers, constituents, or group members. The leader is very much a product of the group, and very much shaped by its aspirations, values, and human resources. The more we learn about leadership, the more the leader-follower linkage is understood and reaffirmed. A leader has to resonate with followers. Part of being an effective leader is having excellent ideas, or a clear sense of direction, a sense of mission. But such ideas or vision are useless unless the would-be leader can communicate them and get them accepted by followers. A two-way engagement or two-way interaction is constantly going on. When it ceases, leaders become lost, out of touch, imperial, or worse.

The question of leaders linked with followers raises the question of the transferability of leadership. Can an effective leader in one situation transfer this capacity, this skill, this style—to another setting? The record is mixed indeed. Certain persons have been effective in diverse settings. George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower come to mind. Jack Kemp and Bill Bradley, two well-known and respected members of Congress, were previously successful professional athletes.

Scores of business leaders have been effective in the public sector and vice versa. Scores of military leaders have become effective in business or politics. Some in both. However, there are countless examples of those who have not met with success when they have tried to transfer their leadership abilities from one setting to a distinctively different setting. Sometimes this failure arises because the new group’s goals or needs are so different from the previous organization. Sometimes it is because the leadership needs are different. Thus, the leadership needs of a military officer leading a platoon up a hill in battle may well be very different from the leadership requirements of someone asked to change sexist attitudes and practices in a large corporation or racist and ethnic hatred in an inner city. The leadership required of a candidate for office is often markedly different from that required of a campaign manager. Leadership required in founding a company may be exceedingly different from that required in the company’s second generation.

Another confusing aspect about leadership is that leadership and management are often talked about as if they were the same. While it is true that an effective manager is often an effective leader and leadership requires, among other things, many of the skills of an effective manager, there are differences. Leaders are the people who infuse vision into an organization or a society. At their best, they are preoccupied with values and the longer range needs and aspirations of their followers. Managers are concerned with doing things the right way. Leaders are more concerned with identifying and then getting themselves and their organizations focused on doing the right thing. John Quincy Adams, Herbert Hoover, and Jimmy Carter were often good, sometimes excellent managers. Before coming to the White House, they were all recognized for being effective achievers. As businessmen, diplomats,

**Table 1**  
**What Leaders Say Are the Obstacles to Leadership in America**  
**(Percentage)**

	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Not Important</i>
The system does not favor the most capable individuals	54	35	11
Our educational system does not provide people with leadership skills	48	37	15
American voters look for the wrong qualities in leaders	46	44	10
Leaders are not fully appreciated	23	49	28
Leaders are not given enough financial compensation	21	48	31
The pressures of leadership positions are too great	18	51	31
Leadership roles demand too much time	17	45	38
Potential leaders are deterred by fears of lack of privacy	16	43	41
The responsibilities of leadership roles appear too great	14	44	42
The times make effective leadership impossible	10	39	51

**Source:** The Connecticut Mutual Life Report on American Values in the '80s (Hartford, Conn., 1981), 188.

governors or cabinet members, they excelled. As presidential leaders, they were found wanting. None was invited back for a second term. While none was considered an outright failure, each seemed to fail in providing the vision needed for the times. They were unable to lift the public's spirit and get the nation moving in new, more desirable directions.

As this brief digression suggests, being a leader is not the same thing as being holder of a high office. An effective leader is someone concerned with far more than the mechanics of office. While a good manager is concerned, and justifiably so, with efficiency, with keeping things going, with the routines and standard operating procedures, and with reaffirming ongoing systems, the creative leader acts as an inventor, risk taker and generalist entrepreneur—ever asking or searching for what is right, where are we headed and keenly sensing new directions, new possibilities and welcoming change. We need all the talented managers we can get, but we also need creative leaders. Ironically, too, an effective leader is not very effective for long unless he or she can recruit managers to help them make things work over the long run.

### Characteristics

One of the most important things to be said about leadership is that it is commonly very dispersed throughout a society. Our leadership needs vary enormously. Many of the great breakthroughs occur because of people well in advance of

their time who are willing to agitate for change and suggest fresh new approaches that are, as yet, unacceptable to majority opinion. Many of the leadership needs of a nation are met by persons who do not hold high office and who often don't look or even act as leaders. Which brings us to the question of defining leadership. Agreement on a definition is difficult to achieve. But for the purposes at hand, leaders are people who perceive what is needed and what is right and know how to mobilize people and resources to accomplish mutual goals.

Leaders are individuals who can help create options and opportunities—who can help clarify problems and choices, who can build morale and coalitions, who can inspire others and provide a vision of the possibilities and promise of a better organization, or a better community. Leaders have those indispensable qualities of contagious self-confidence, unwarranted optimism and incurable idealism that allow them to attract and mobilize others to undertake demanding tasks these people never dreamed they could undertake. In short, leaders empower and help liberate others. They enhance the possibilities for freedom—both for people and organizations. They engage with followers in such a way so that many of the followers become leaders in their own right.

As implied above, many of the significant breakthroughs in both the public and private sectors of this nation have been made by people who saw all the complexities ahead of them, but so believed in themselves and their purposes that they

refused to be overwhelmed and paralyzed by doubts. They were willing to invent new rules and gamble on the future.

Good leaders, almost always, have been get-it-all-together, broken-field runners. They have been generalists. Tomorrow's leaders will very likely have begun life as trained specialists. Our society particularly rewards the specialist. John W. Gardner puts it well:

All too often, on the long road up, young leaders become "servants of what is rather than shapers of what might be." In the long process of learning how the system works, they are rewarded for playing within the intricate structure of existing rules. By the time they reach the top, they are very likely to be trained prisoners of the structure. This is not all bad; every vital system re-affirms itself. But no system can stay vital for long unless some of its leaders remain sufficiently independent to help it to change and grow.

Only as creative generalists can these would-be leaders cope with the multiple highly organized groups—subsystems within the larger system—each fighting for special treatment, each armed with their own narrow definition of the public interest, often to the point of paralyzing any significant action.

Overcoming fears, especially fears of stepping beyond the boundaries of one's tribe, is a special need for the leader. A leader's task, as a renewer of organizational goals and aspirations, is to illuminate goals, to help re-perceive one's own and one's organization's resources and strengths, to speak to people on what's only dimly in their minds. The effective creative leader is one who can give voice and form so that people say, "Ah, yes—that's what I too have been feeling."

Note, too, however, that leaders are always aware of and at least partly shaped by the higher wants and aspirations and common purposes of their followers and constituents. Leaders consult and listen just as they educate and attempt to renew the goals of an organization. They know how "to squint with their ears." Civic leaders often emerge as we are able to agree upon goals. One analyst has suggested that it is no good for us to just go looking for leaders. We must first rediscover our own goals and values. If we are to have the leaders we need, we will first have to agree upon priorities. In one sense, if we wish to have leaders to follow, we will often have to show them the way.

In looking for leadership and in organizational affiliations—people are looking for significance, competence, affirmation, and fairness. To join an organization, an individual has to give up some aspect of his or her uniqueness, some part of their soul. Thus, there is a price in affiliating and in following. The leader serves as a strength and an attraction in the organization—but psychologically there is also a repulsion to the leader—in part because of the dependence on the leader. John Steinbeck said of American presidents that the people believe that "they were ours and we exercise the right to destroy them." Effective leaders must know how to absorb these hostilities, however latent they may be.

The leader also must be ever sensitive to the distinction between power and authority. Power is the strength or raw force to exercise control or coerce someone to do something, while authority is power that is accepted as legitimate by subordinates. The whole question of leadership raises countless issues about participation and the acceptance of power in superior-subordinate relationships. How much participation

or involvement is needed, is desirable? What is the impact of participation on effectiveness? How best for the leader to earn moral and social acceptance for his or her authority? America generally prizes participation in all kinds of organizations, especially civic and political life. Yet, we must realize too that a part of us yearns for charismatic leadership. Ironically, savior figures and charismatic leaders often, indeed almost always, create distance and not participation.

One of the most difficult tasks for those who would measure and evaluate leadership is the task of trying to look at the elements that make up leadership. One way to look at these elements is to suggest that a leader has various skills, also has or exercises a distinctive style and, still more elusive, has various qualities that may be pronounced. By skill, I mean the capacity to do something well. Something that is learnable and can be improved, such as speaking or negotiating or planning. Most leaders need to have technical skills (such as writing well); human relations skills, the capacity to supervise, inspire, build coalitions and so on, and also what might be called conceptual skills—the capacity to play with ideas, shrewdly seek advice and forge grand strategy. Skills can be examined. Skills can be taught. And skills plainly make up an important part of leadership capability. Skills alone, however, cannot guarantee leadership success.

A person's leadership style may also be critical to effectiveness. Style refers to how a person relates to people, to tasks and to challenges. A person's style is usually a very personal and distinctive feature of his or her personality and character. A style may be democratic or autocratic, centralized or decentralized, empathetic or detached, extroverted or introverted, assertive or passive, engaged or remote. This hardly exhausts the diverse possibilities—but is meant to be suggestive. Different styles may work equally well in different situations. However, there is often a proper fit between the needs of an organization and the needed leadership style. A fair amount of research has been done in this area—but, much more remains to be learned.

A person's behavioral style refers to one's way of relating to other people—to peers, subordinates, rivals, bosses, advisers, the press. A person's psychological style refers to one's way of handling stress, tensions, challenges to the ego, internal conflicts. Considerable work needs to be done in these areas—particularly if we are to learn how best to prepare people for shaping their leadership styles to diverse leadership situations and needs. But it is a challenge worth accepting.

James MacGregor Burns, in his book on Leadership, offers us yet one additional distinction worth thinking about. Ultimately, Burns says, there are two overriding kinds of social and political leadership: transactional and transformational leadership. The transactional leader engages in an exchange, usually for self-interest and with short-term interests in mind. It is, in essence, a bargain situation: "I'll vote for your bill if you vote for mine." Or "You do me a favor and I will shortly return it." Most pragmatic officeholders practice transactional leadership most of the time. It is commonly a practical necessity. It is the general way people do business and get their jobs done—and stay in office. The transforming or transcending leader is the person who, as briefly noted ear-

lier, so engages with followers as to bring them to a heightened political and social consciousness and activity, and in the process converts many of those followers into leaders in their own right. The transforming leader, with a focus on the higher aspirations and longer range, is also a teacher, mentor and educator—pointing out the possibilities and the hopes and the often only dimly understood dreams of a people and getting them to undertake the preparation and the job needed to attain these goals.

Of course, not everyone can be a leader. And rarely can any one leader provide an organization's entire range of leadership needs. Upon closer inspection, most firms and most societies have all kinds of leaders and these diverse leaders, in turn, are usually highly dependent for their success on the leadership performed by other leaders. Some leaders are excellent at creating or inventing new structures. Others are great task leaders—helping to energize groups at problem solving. Others are excellent social (or affective) leaders, helping to build morale and renew the spirit of an organization or a people. These leaders are often indispensable in providing what might be called the human glue that holds groups together.

Further, the most lasting and pervasive leadership of all is often intangible and noninstitutional. It is the leadership fostered by ideas embodied in social, political or artistic movements, in books, in documents, in speeches, and in the memory of great lives greatly lived. Intellectual or idea leadership at its best is provided by those—often not in high political or corporate office—who can clarify values and the implications of such values for policy. The point here is that leadership is not only dispersed and diverse, but interdependent. Leaders need leaders as much as followers need leaders. This may sound confusing but it is part of the truth about the leadership puzzle.

## Leadership Qualities

In the second half of this essay, I will raise in a more general way, some of the qualities I believe are central to leadership. Everyone has his or her own lists of leadership qualities. I will not be able to discuss all of mine, but permit me to offer my list and then describe a few of the more important ones in a bit more detail.

### Leadership Qualities—A Tentative List

- Self-knowledge/self-confidence.
- Vision, ability to infuse important, transcending values into an enterprise.
- Intelligence, wisdom, judgment. Learning/renewal.
- Worldmindedness/a sense of history and breadth.
- Coalition building/social architecture.
- Morale-building/motivation.
- Stamina, energy, tenacity, courage, enthusiasm.
- Character, integrity/intellectual honesty.
- Risk-taking/entrepreneurship.
- An ability to communicate, persuade/listen.
- Understanding the nature of power and authority.
- An ability to concentrate on achieving goals and results.
- A sense of humor, perspective, flexibility.

Leadership consists of a spiral upwards, a spiral of self-improvement, self-knowledge and seizing and creating opportunities so that a person can make things happen that would not otherwise have occurred. Just as there can be a spiral upwards, there can be a spiral downwards—characterized by failure, depression, self-defeat, self-doubt, and paralyzing fatalism.

If asked to point to key qualities of successful leadership, I would suggest these:

### Leaders Are People Who Know Who They Are and Know Where They Are Going

"What a man thinks about himself," Thoreau wrote, "that is what determines, or rather indicates his fate." One of the most paralyzing of mental illnesses is wrong perception of self. This leads to poor choosing and poor choosing leads to a fouled-up life. In one sense, the trouble with many people is not what they don't know, it is what they do know, but it is misinformed or misinformation.

Leaders must be self-reliant individuals with great tenacity and stamina. The world is moved by people who are enthusiastic. Optimism and high motivations count for a lot. They can lift organizations. Most people are forever waiting around for somebody to light a fire under them. They are people who have not learned the valuable lesson that ultimately you are the one who is responsible for you. You don't blame others. You don't blame circumstances. You simply take charge and help move the enterprise forward.

I am sure many of you have been puzzled, as I have been, about why so many talented friends of ours have leveled off earlier than needs to be the case. What is it that prevents people from becoming the best they could be? Often it is a lack of education, a physical handicap or a disease such as alcoholism. Very often, however, it is because people have not been able to gain control over their lives. Various things nibble away at their capacity for self-realization or what Abraham Maslow called self-actualization. Family problems, inadequate financial planning, and poor health or mental health problems are key factors that damage self-esteem. Plainly, it is difficult to handle life, not to mention leadership responsibilities, if persons feel they do not control their own lives. This emotional feeling of helplessness inevitably leads people to believe they aren't capable, they can't do the job. It also inhibits risk-taking and just about all the qualities associated with creativity and leadership.

Picture a scale from, at one end, an attitude of "I don't control anything and I feel like the bird in a badminton game"—to the other end of the scale where there is an attitude of "I'm in charge." Either extreme may be pathological, but plainly the higher up, relatively, toward the "I'm in charge" end of the scale, the more one is able to handle the challenges of transforming or creative leadership.

Thus, the single biggest factor is motivating or liberating would-be leaders in their attitude toward themselves and toward their responsibilities to others.

Leaders also have to understand the situations they find themselves in. As observed in Alice in Wonderland, before we decide where we are going, we first have to decide where we

are right now. After this comes commitment to something larger and longer term than just our own egos. People can achieve meaning in their lives only when they can give as well as take from their society. Failure to set priorities and develop significant personal purposes undermines nearly any capacity for leadership. "When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind."

### Setting Priorities and Mobilizing Energies

Too many people become overwhelmed with trivia, with constant close encounters of a third rate. Leaders have always to focus on the higher aspirations and needs of their followers. Leadership divorced from important transcending purpose becomes manipulation, deception and, in the extreme, is not leadership at all, but repression and tyranny.

The effective modern leader has to be able to live in an age of uncertainty. Priorities have to be set and decisions have to be made even though all the information is not in—this will surely be even more true in the future than it has been in the past. The information revolution has tremendously enlarged both the opportunities and the frustrations for leaders. Knowing what you don't know becomes as important as knowing what you do know. A willingness to experiment and explore possible strategies even in the face of uncertainty may become a more pronounced characteristic of the creative leader.

The creative priority setter learns both to encourage and to question his or her intuitive tendencies. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., said that "to have doubted one's own first principles is the mark of a civilized man" and so it continues to be. The ability to look at things differently, and reach out for more and better advice is crucial. The ability to admit error and learn from mistakes is also vitally important. Leaders need to have considerable self-confidence, but they also must have a dose of self-doubt. Leaders must learn how to communicate the need for advice and help, how to become a creative listener, how to empathize, and understand. In Sophocles's compelling play, *Antigone*, the tragic hero, King Creon, hears his son's advice but imprudently rejects it or perhaps does not even hear it. But it, Haemon's, is advice any leader should take into account:

Let not your first thought be your only thought. Think if there cannot be some other way. Surely, to think your own the only wisdom, and yours the only word, the only will, betrays a shallow spirit, an empty heart. It is no weakness for the wisest man to learn when he is wrong, know when to yield. . . .

So, father, pause and put aside your anger. I think, for what my young opinion's worth, that good as it is to have infallible wisdom, since this is rarely found, the next best thing is to be willing to listen to wise advice.

Leaders need to be able to discover their own strengths and the strengths of those with whom they work. They have to learn how to share and to delegate. They have to be able to make people believe they are important, that they are or can be winners. People yearn to think that what they are doing is something useful, something important. The transforming or creative leader knows how to nourish conviction and morale within an organization.

Good leaders know how to serve as morale-builders and renewers of purpose, able to get people to rededicate themselves to long-cherished but sometimes dimly understood values. Motivation is sometimes as much as 40 to 50 percent of the leadership enterprise. You can do very little alone with just faith and determination, yet you can do next to nothing without them. Organizations of all kinds need constantly to rediscover or renew their faith, direction, and sense of purpose.

### Leaders Have to Provide the Risk-Taking, Entrepreneurial Imagination for Their Organizations and Communities

Leaders are able to see things in a different and fresh context. Warren Bennis suggests that creative leadership requires the capacity to recontextualize a situation. Willis Hannon suggests a leader is one who reinterprets situations and challenges and comes up with new approaches, insights and solutions.

A third grade class begins and the teacher says: "Class, take out your pencils and paper and draw a picture of anything you can think of." Students begin to draw—balls, trees, automobiles, and so forth. Teacher asks Sally, in the second row: "What are you drawing?" Sally says, "I'm drawing a picture of God." Teacher says: "But no one has ever seen God, we don't know what he looks like." An undaunted Sally responds: "Well, they sure will when I get through!"

This little story illustrates the sometimes irrational self-confidence and "failure is impossible" factor that motivates the galvanizing leader. The founding revolutionaries in America, Susan Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., Saul Alinsky, and countless others had the vision of a better and newer society and they, in effect, said, "They'll know a better or more just society when we get through."

Mark Twain once said, "A man is viewed as a crackpot until his idea succeeds." We need a hospitable environment for the dissenter and the creative individual. We need to avoid killing the spark of individuality that allows creativity to flourish. We kill it with rules, red tape, procedures, standard operating restrictions and countless admonitions "not to rock the boat."

Creativity is the ability to recombine things. To see a radio here and a clock there and put them together. Hence, the clock radio. Open-mindedness is crucial. Too many organizations are organized with structures to solve problems that no longer exist. Vested interest grows up in every human institution. People all too often become prisoners of their procedures.

Psychologist David Campbell points out that history records a long list of innovations that come from outside the "expert" organization. (See also John Jewkes, *The Sources of Invention*.) The automobile was not invented by the transportation experts of that era, the railroaders. The airplane was not invented by automobile experts. Polaroid film was not invented by Kodak. Handheld pocket calculators were not invented by IBM, digital watches were not invented by watchmakers. Apple computers and herbal tea are yet two more examples. The list is endless and the moral is vivid.

Leaders get organizations interested in what they are going to become, not what they have been. Creative leadership requires also not being afraid to fail. An essential aspect of creative leadership is curiosity. The best way to have inventive

ideas is to have lots of ideas, and to have an organization that welcomes fresh ideas—whatever their merit. As any scientist knows, the art of research requires countless experimentation and failure before you get the results you want, or sometimes the unexpected result that constitutes the true breakthrough.

Leaders recognize the utility of dreaming, fantasy and unconscious thinking. One advocate of creative thinking writes,

Production of dramatically new ideas by a process of purely conscious calculation rarely seems to occur. Unconscious thinking, thinking which you are unaware of, is a major contribution to the production of new ideas. . . .

### Leaders Need to Have a Sense of Humor and a Sense of Proportion

Leaders take their work seriously, but do not take themselves too seriously. Humor relieves strain and enables people to relax and see things in a slightly different or fresh light. Effective leaders usually can tell a joke, take a joke, or tell a good story. They also usually know the art of telling parables. Lincoln, FDR, and JFK come quickly to mind, while Hoover, Nixon, and Carter were humorless men. Adlai Stevenson put it this way, "If I couldn't laugh, I couldn't live—especially in politics."

In this same light, leaders need to be able to share the credit. Leadership sometimes consists of emphasizing the dignity of others and of keeping one's own sense of importance from becoming inflated. Dwight Eisenhower had a slogan he tried to live by which went as follows: "There's no telling how much one can accomplish so long as one doesn't need to get all the credit for it."

Thus, leaders need to have a sense of proportion and a sense of detachment. They must avoid being workaholics and recognize that they will have to be followers in most of the enterprises of life and leaders only a small fraction of the time. Emerson put it well when he tried to answer the question, "What is success?"

To laugh often and love much, to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give one's self; to leave the world a lot better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition: to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exaltation, to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—this is to have succeeded.

Humor, proportion and also compassion. A person able to understand emotions and passion and at least on occasion to express one's self with passion and conviction. Enthusiasm, hope, vitality and energy are crucial to radiating confidence.

### Leaders Have to Be Skilled Mediators and Negotiators, but They Also Have to Be Able to Stir Things Up and Encourage Healthy and Desired Conflict

An old Peanuts cartoon has a dejected Charlie Brown coming off a softball field as the game concludes. In exasperation he whines, "How can we lose when we are so sincere?" Sincerity or purity of heart are not enough to succeed in challenging leadership jobs.

The strength of leaders often lies in their tenacity, in knowing how to deal with competing factions, knowing when to compromise, when to amplify conflict, and when to move an organization or a community away from paralyzing divisiveness and toward a vision of the common good.

Most citizens avoid conflict and find conflicts of any kind painful. The truly effective leader welcomes several kinds of conflict and views conflict as an opportunity for change or revitalization.

Stirring things up is often a prerequisite for social and economic breakthrough. Women's rights, black rights, consumer protection, tax reform movements and even our election campaigns are occasions for division and conflict. They are a reality the leader has to learn to accept, understand and turn to his advantage. Harry Truman said,

A President who's any damn good at all makes enemies, makes a lot of enemies. I even made a few myself when I was in the White House, and I wouldn't be without them.

George Bernard Shaw and others have put it only slightly differently. Reasonable people, they observe, adjust themselves to reality and cope with what they find. Unreasonable people dream dreams of a different and better world and try to adapt the world to themselves. This discontent or unreasonableness is often the first step in the progress of a person as well as for a community or nation.

But be aware that "stirrer uppers" and conflict-amplifiers are often threatening in any organization or society. In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. This may well be, as the proverb has it. But in the kingdom of the one-eyed person, the two-eyed person is looked upon with considerable suspicion and may even be considered downright dangerous.

Thus, it takes courage and guts as well as imagination and stamina to be the two-eyed person in a one-eyed world. Harlan Cleveland points out that just about every leader has had the experience of being in an office surrounded by experts. The sum of the meeting will be, "Let's do nothing cautiously." The leader is the one who has to say, "Let's take the first step." He or she is the functional equivalent of the first bird off the telephone wire, or what Texans call the "bell cow." The experts always have an excuse. They are like the losing tennis player whose motto is: "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you place the blame."

### An Effective Leader Must Have Integrity

This had been suggested earlier in several implicit ways, but it is perhaps the most central of leadership qualities. A leader must be able to see people in all of their relationships, in the wholeness of their lives and not just as a means to getting a job done, as a means for enhanced productivity.

Some may call it character, others would call it authenticity, compassion, or empathy. Whatever we call it, character and integrity are much easier kept than recovered. People can see through a phony. People can readily tell whether a person has respect for others. Respect and responsibility generally migrate to those who are fair, compassionate and care about values, beliefs, and feelings of others. Persons who cannot rise above

their prejudices usually fail. A person who permits a shell to be built up around his heart will not long be able to exercise creative leadership. Michael Maccoby captures this concern.

The exercise of the heart is that of experiencing, thinking critically, willing, and acting, so as to overcome egocentrism and to share passion with other people . . . and to respond to their needs with the help one can give. . . . It requires discipline, learning to concentrate, to think critically, and to communicate. The goal, a developed heart, implies integrity, a spiritual center, a sense of "I" not motivated by greed or fear, but by love of life, adventure and fellow feelings.

A leader's integrity requires also that he or she not be captured by peer pressures, protocol, mindless traditions or conventional rules. The truly effective leader is able to see above and beyond normal constraints and discern proper and desirable ends. The leader also possesses a sense of history and a concern for posterity. This ability, an exceptional capacity to disregard external pressures, is the ability that separates leaders from followers.

### The Leader Has to Have Brains and Breadth

In the future, even more so than in the past, only the really bright individuals will be leaders. Harlan Cleveland highlights this quality well when he writes:

It used to be that a leader was a two-fisted businessman who chopped up the jobs that needed to be done, then left everyone alone and roared at them if they didn't work right. . . .

Loud commands worked if one person knew all things, but because of the way we now make decisions, through committees, a person charging around with a loud voice is just in the way.

Today's leaders must widen their perspectives and lengthen the focal point of their thinking. Leaders today have to learn how to thread or weave together disparate parts and move beyond analytical to integrative thinking. This will require well-read, well-traveled persons who can rise above their specialties and their professions. It will require as well persons who are not afraid of politics, but who rather view the art of politics as the art of bringing about the difficult and the desirable.

### American Leadership

The creative political leader must work in a tension-filled world between unity and dissent, majority rule and minority rights and countless other contradictions. Tocqueville said of us, "These Americans yearn for leadership, but they also want to be left alone and free." The political leader is always trying to reconcile this and other paradoxes—but the important point is to be able to live with the paradoxes and dilemmas. And beyond this, the political leader must also be able to create, and preserve, a sense of community and shared heritage, the civic bond that ties us—disparate and feisty, rugged individualists together.

Effective leaders of today and tomorrow also know how to vary their styles of leadership depending on the maturity of their subordinates. They involve their peers and their subordinates in their responsibility networks. They must be good educators and good communicators. They also have to have

that spark of emotion or passion that can excite others to join them in the enterprise.

Most effective leaders will also be effective communicators: good writers, good speakers, and good conversationalists. A few noted scientists may get by with mumbling, but they are the exception. For so much of leadership consists nowadays in persuading and informing that someone who cannot communicate well, cannot succeed. To paraphrase George Orwell, "If people cannot communicate well, they cannot think well, and if they cannot think well, others will do their thinking for them."

America is especially good at training experts, specialists and managers. We have plenty of these specialist leaders, but they are almost always one-segment leaders. We are in special need of educating multisegment leaders—persons who have a global perspective and understand that the once tidy lines between domestic and international, and public and private are irretrievably blurred. Indispensable to a leader is a sense of breadth, the intellectual capacity to handle complex mental tasks, to see relationships between apparently unrelated objects, to see patterns in incomplete information, to draw accurate conclusions from inchoate data.

Vision is the ability to see all sides of an issue and to eliminate biases. Vision and breadth of knowledge put one in a strategic position—preventing the leader from falling into the traps that shortsightedness, mindless parochialism often set for people.

None of these qualities can guarantee creative leadership, but they can, when encouraged, provide a greater likelihood of it. We need all the leadership we can get—in and out of government. The vitality of nongovernmental America lies in our ability to educate and nourish more citizen-leaders. Those of us who expect to reap the blessings of freedom and liberty must undergo the fatigues of supporting it and provide the leadership to sustain it.

### Learning about Leadership

Permit me to return again to the question of whether leadership can be learned, and possibly taught. My own belief is that students cannot usually be taught to be leaders. But students, and anyone else for that matter, can profitably be exposed to leadership, discussions of leadership skills and styles, and leadership strategies and theories. Individuals can learn in their own minds the strengths as well as limitations of leadership. People can learn about the paradoxes and contradictions and ironies of leadership, which however puzzling, are central to appreciating the diversity and the dilemmas of problem solving and getting organizations and nations to function.

Learning about leadership means recognizing bad leadership as well as good. Learning about leadership means understanding the critical linkage of ends and means. Learning about leadership also involves the study of the special chemistry that develops between leaders and followers, not only the chemistry that existed between Americans and Lincoln, but also between Mao and the Chinese peasants, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, between Martin Luther King Jr., and civil



rights activists, between Jean Mormet and those who dreamed of a European Economic Community.

Students can learn to discern and define situations and contexts within which leadership has flourished. Students can learn about the fallibility of the trait theory. Students can learn about the contextual problems of leadership, of why and when leadership is sometimes transferable, and sometimes not. Students can learn about the crucial role that advisors and supporters play in the leadership equation. Students can also learn about countless problem-solving strategies and theories, and participate in role-playing exercises that sharpen their own skills in such undertakings.

Students of leadership can learn widely from reading biographies about both the best and the worst leaders. Plutarch's *Lives* would be a good place to start. Much can be learned from mentors and from intern-participant observing. Much can also be learned about leadership by getting away from one's own culture and examining how leaders in other circumstances go about the task of motivating and mobilizing others. Countless learning opportunities exist that can sharpen a student's skills as a speaker, debater, negotiator, problem clarifier and planner. Such skills should not be minimized. Nor should anyone underestimate the importance of history, economics, logic, and a series of related substantive

fields that help provide the breadth and the perspective indispensable to societal leadership.

Above all, students of leadership can make an appointment with themselves and begin to appreciate their own strengths and deficiencies. Personal mastery is important. So too is the ability to use one's intuition, and to enrich one's creative impulses. John Gardner suggests, "It's what you learn after you know it all that really counts." Would-be leaders learn to manage their time more wisely. Would-be leaders learn that self-pity and resentment are like toxic substances. Would-be leaders learn the old truth that most people are not for you or against you but rather preoccupied with themselves. Would-be leaders learn to break out of their comfortable imprisonments; they learn to cast aside dull routines and habits that enslave most of us. Would-be leaders learn how to become truly sharing and caring people—in their families, their professions and in their communities. And would-be leaders constantly learn too that they have more to give than they have ever given, no matter how much they have given.

Let me conclude by paraphrasing from John Adams:

We must study politics [and leadership] and war [and peace] that our sons [and daughters] have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.



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