

Leadership: Myth or Reality

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Leadership is a topic that most of us think about at one time or another. Some of us have studied leadership extensively. Others are content to model ourselves after those leaders who we have come to respect and admire. At sometime in our life each of us has chosen to lead. It may have been on a sports team, a class project, or in a social group, as a teacher, department chair, or dean. There were moments when we were successful and moments when we failed.

The leadership successes were satisfying and reinforcing; the failures were disappointing and often painful. However, as time passes and memories fade, most of us search for ways to strengthen our leadership abilities. The moments of disappointment become a learning experience.

My own leadership learning experience began when I accepted the assignment as interim department chair when our chair took a sabbatical leave. It was a one-year assignment and thankfully it passed quickly. Looking back, I could point to many moments of success. For example: the department moved into a new facility, we received additional funds for new computers, and we completed an evaluation to downsize our curriculum. The results were good: the department had improved. However, there were many moments of failure. I was exhausted, frustrated, and disappointed.

The disappointment fueled a need for me to learn more about leadership, and I set out to identify what it meant to be an effective leader. I had a vague idea about the extent of the leadership literature; I had no idea how extensive it actually is. My first step was a review of the articles on the subject that had appeared in the *Journal of Technology Studies* and its predecessor, the *Journal of Epsilon Pi Tau*, over the past 12 years.

Leadership Articles

This journal turned out to be an excellent source of leadership articles. In the past 12 years, six journal articles dealt with the leadership issue. Another three dealt with attributes used to study and measure leadership effectiveness.

According to one article, "The Power of Leadership for Technology Education" (Wenig, 1987), personal leadership comes from influencing others, having a positive attitude, and being persistent. The author provided a list of 15 leadership characteristics, an additional 10 "distinctive" characteristics, and 6 steps to gain influence over others.

A year later, Wenig (1988) published a second article titled "A Leadership Model for Implementing Technology Education." The author concluded that leadership is a "transformational process" that includes persuading, "participative" decision making, and blending individual objectives with organizational objectives. He offered a leadership model with five building blocks, six skills, and seven steps for implementation.

Three years later in a third installment on leadership titled "New Leadership Realities for Technology Education," Wenig (1991) recommended a set of core values titled "people literacy." He defined people literacy as "allowing all to live more harmoniously together" (p. 27). He concluded with 7 new realities of leadership, 9 leadership improvement factors, and 12 action steps to achieve effective leadership.

The three Wenig articles included a comprehensive and exhaustive review of the leadership literature. The author recommended 77 items that are needed to be an effective leader, including leadership characteristics, steps, building blocks, skills, and factors. Much enlightened, I turned to the last three articles.

In 1990, Ezell focused on effective leadership in an article titled "Effective Leadership Can Support Faculty." He defined effective leadership as "effective leadership, in contrast (to just leadership) is when others perform in accordance with the leader's intentions and at the same time find their own needs satisfied" (p. 12).

This article included a listing of 7 information management skills, 10 interaction skills, 4 descriptors for improving motivation, 4 guidelines for renewing faculty commitment, and 8 means for encouraging faculty.

The fifth article focused on research criteria for the study of leadership. Bensen and Paige (1996) identified 37 leadership attributes. The next year, Paige (1997) provided a follow-up, the sixth article which asserted that the 37 attributes "appear to provide a valid descriptor of leadership" (p. 33). To those 37 attributes

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Paige added 7 qualities required of higher education leaders and 13 selection criteria for department chairmen.

These six articles combined provided several lists containing 167 leadership descriptors, guidelines, attributes, qualities, and selection criteria. That is a bewildering number of factors. I realized that I had to refine my search and focus on leadership self-help publications in the public domain.

Internet

I decided to go high tech and search the Internet. I was deluged by leadership information. In our rapidly changing world, many people are passionately engaged in producing and consuming leadership newspaper articles, web sites, seminars, books, videotapes, cassette tapes, and CDs. There are hundreds of newspaper articles. There are 1,461 leadership development web sites. The web site for Barnes and Noble identifies 408 items and another 1,132 items that are out of print. A hit on the web site for Amazon.com identified another list of 1,301 items.

In a recent article from the business section of the *San Francisco Chronicle* titled "Leadership Lessons from the Mythic and Dead," DeBare (1998) reported that "American publishers are spewing forth an unprecedented stream of books claiming to offer leadership lessons from the lives of dead, fictional and otherwise unlikely figures" (p. B1). The author found that a sliver of the 1,700 leadership books published over the past 10 years claim to offer leadership principles from Attila the Hun to *Star Trek Voyagers: The Next Generation*. The author was particularly attracted to such titles and quotes as the following:

- **Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun** (Roberts, 1990) "A wise chieftain never kills the Hun bearing bad news" (p. 33).
- **Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership** (Jones, 1995) "When Jesus returned from the dead, he prepared a fish barbecue on the shore—sort of a team picnic" (p. 33).
- **Make It So: Leadership Lessons from "Star Trek: The Next Generation"** (Roberts & Ross, 1996) "In space, officers can ill afford to allow their crew to become distracted by misdirected competition" (p. 33).

Three Best Selling Books

Then I reviewed the two leadership book lists from the web sites of Barnes and Noble, and Amazon.com; I found the same three books in the top five on each list:

- **The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership** (Maxwell, 1998).

- **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People** (Covey, 1989).
- **The 9 Natural Laws of Leadership** (Blank 1995).

That is a total of 30 laws and 7 habits. I reviewed all three to identify how they might differ from what I had found in the six articles from the *Journal of Technology Studies*.

In *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Maxwell (1998) found that the two themes of trust and character are woven throughout the fabric of his 21 irrefutable laws. More specifically, his sixth irrefutable law, the Law of Solid Ground, stipulates that trust arises from strong character and is the foundation of leadership. According to Maxwell, people will forgive occasional mistakes based on ability, but they won't trust someone who has slips in character. Even occasional lapses in character are lethal to a leader.

In his 11th irrefutable law of the Inner Circle, Maxwell (1998) recommended that a leader's potential is determined by the people closest to him, those who make up the inner circle of leadership. Maxwell explained that for an organization to reach a new level of effectiveness, the old leadership must be replaced. He recommended that upon assuming a new leadership position, a leader should move "his people" in and displace the inner circle of leadership from the past. He suggested that the most effective way to accomplish the transition is to "move out" the bottom third of the old leadership circle and then move your best leaders into the top third position, displacing downward the remaining two thirds of the old guard. You repeat this process over a two- to three-year period. In this way the weakest leaders in the organization go first and cause the least disruption.

The two themes of effective leadership and effective management are often contrasted in his book. Maxwell (1998) pointed out that one *myth* about leadership is that a manager is in reality a leader. "The main difference between the two is that leadership is about influencing people to follow, while management focuses on maintaining systems. Managers can maintain direction but they can't change it" (p. 14). Maxwell (1998) further noted:

The ability to lead is really a collection of skills nearly all of which can be learned and improved....Leadership is complicated. It has many facets: respect, experience, emotional strength, people skills, discipline, vision, momentum, timing—the list goes on. (p. 23)

Maxwell (1998) developed his 21 irrefutable laws while serving as pastor of the largest church in North San Diego County. I wonder how Maxwell's boss (the Big Guy) would feel

about his tactics of stealth replacement of the old leadership guard as found in the 11th irrefutable law. Maxwell has since left the church to run his international for-profit leadership and publication business. I was not comfortable with the 11th law, and I found several of Maxwell's irrefutable laws unacceptable altogether.

Maxwell's (1998) 21 irrefutable laws lose their impact by the end of the book. I looked for something more manageable. Seven habits are a lot more attractive than 21 laws. I turned to Covey's (1989) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. In this book Covey recommended developing personal character (the first three habits) and then personal effectiveness (the next three habits). The book has been a #1 national bestseller with over 10 million copies sold.

Covey (1989) stated that his book is the outcome of an extensive review of the past 200 years of leadership literature. He found in a review of the past 50 years of leadership literature that authors focused on the "personality ethic." Covey described the personality ethic as superficial, focusing on "social image consciousness, personality techniques, quick fixes, and social Band-Aids." In contrast he recommended that the previous 150 years dealt with the "character ethic." Covey does not discard the personality ethic in favor of the character ethic. He believed that both are required today to produce the most effective leaders. Covey concluded that one can have an appearance of successful leadership based on the personality ethic. However, he stated firmly that without the foundation of a strong character ethic the success will be superficial and temporary.

Covey (1989) defined the "character ethic" as a set of 11 principles. These principles are woven into the fabric of his first three habits. He emphasized that the following principles make up the foundation of leadership success:

- **Integrity:** doing what you say you will do.
- **Humility:** an unassuming nature.
- **Fidelity:** faithfulness, loyalty, conforming to truth.
- **Temperance:** moderation, self-restraint.
- **Courage:** resolve and firm control of oneself.
- **Justice:** fair treatment and due reward in accordance with honor.
- **Patience:** enduring affliction with calmness.
- **Industry:** hard work, diligence.
- **Simplicity:** the quality of being simple.
- **Modesty:** a moderate estimation of oneself.
- **Golden Rule:** Treat others as you want to be treated.

Covey's first three habits, which focus on

developing the character ethic, include the following:

- **Be Proactive:** take responsibility for leadership.
 - **Begin with the End in Mind:** develop a mission statement that embodies character principles.
 - **Put First Things First:** set goals.
- The next three habits focus on personality techniques:
- **Think Win/Win:** the path of shared achievement.
 - **Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood:** listen and empathize, then ask for the same.
 - **Seek Synergies:** 1 + 1 = 3.

Like Maxwell (1998), Covey (1997) made a distinction between leadership and management. The differences are an important theme in Covey's book. To clarify, he offered this story:

You can quickly grasp the important difference between the two if you envision a group of producers cutting their way through the jungle with machetes. They're the producers, the problem solvers. They're cutting through the undergrowth, clearing it out.

The managers are behind them, sharpening their machetes, writing policy and procedures manuals, holding muscle development programs, bringing in improved technologies and setting up working schedules and compensation programs for machete wielders.

The leader is the one who climbs the tallest tree, surveys the entire situation, and yells, "Wrong Jungle!" (p. 101)

But how do the busy, efficiency producers and managers often respond? "Shut up. We're making progress."

Covey's book offers many practical procedures for implementing and strengthening these six habits. The value that I gained from Covey's book stood head and shoulders above the others. However, I was still looking for simplicity, and I moved on to *The 9 Natural Laws of Leadership* by Blank (1995).

Blank's (1995) *The 9 Natural Laws of Leadership* should be a quick read. It is not. Blank calls for no less than a paradigm shift in leadership dynamics. He named this new dynamic the "quantum leadership paradigm."

Blank (1995) recommended that all leadership theories are based on classical physics that has its roots in 17th-century Newtonian laws. Following a Newtonian leadership paradigm requires an explanation of leadership in the form of parts that go together to make up the whole. According to Blank, from a Newtonian point of view, leadership can be explained with lists of attributes, factors, steps, and models. The list of leadership items identifies effective leadership. Effective lead-

ership is contingent on the strength or weakness of the list. If we fail at leadership, we look at our list to see if we need to strengthen it, add to it, subtract from it, and/or replace it with another list. According to Blank, all the leadership lists don't work because they are all myth.

Blank (1995) noted that real leadership is not a list, position, title, or habit but an event. A collection of these events happening independently in fields of consciousness between a leader and followers is called effective leadership. These random events of leadership rise and fall dependent on the synergy of partnership between the leader and followers. Blank calls this form of "real" leadership the quantum leadership principle.

The basis of Blank's quantum leadership principle is the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. Heisenberg is the pioneer of quantum physics. Quantum physics replaced Newtonian laws of matter in the 1930s. The quantum theory of matter proposes that to measure a quantum particle one must suspend its motion. However, it is in the motion that the particle exists. Once suspended, you no longer have the particle; you are left with the impression it leaves. It is Blank's view that this quantum theory also applies to leadership itself.

However, it is the junction between a leader and his or her followers where leadership truly exists. Blank (1995) concluded that when you try to measure leadership, it disappears and all that is left to be measured is a description of the impression left behind. He reported that all lists of leadership factors, steps, and criteria are the entrails of leadership, not leadership itself.

Blank (1995) supported his new dynamic with nine natural laws drawn "from the most compelling insights of many thoughtful practitioners and scholars"(p. 10) who have focused on the meaning and practice of leadership. The nine natural laws are:

- A leader has willing followers-allies.
- Leadership is a field of interaction—a relationship between leaders and followers-allies.
- Leadership occurs as an event.
- Leaders use influence beyond formal authority.
- Leaders operate outside the boundaries of organizationally defined procedures.
- Leadership involves risk and uncertainty.
- Not everyone will follow a leader's initiative.
- Consciousness—informational processing capacity—creates leadership.
- Leadership is a self-referral process. Leaders and followers process information from their own subjective, internal frame of

reference.

Blank's (1995) book is complex. To be a better leader, Blank suggested all that is required to understand and grasp his quantum leadership paradigm is some curiosity about quantum physics, a healthy dose of imagination and perception, and his nine natural laws.

Last November while browsing an airport bookstore, I found Maxwell's, Blank's, and Covey's books. Large stacks of all three books were placed prominently on the top shelf of the business self-help section. However, right next to Covey's book was a small book by Dubrin (1997) titled *10 Minute Guide to Leadership*. Here, I thought, was the end of my journey. Beginning with the 167 factors found in the 6 journal articles, through the 4 leadership books, Maxwell's 21 irrefutable laws, Blank's 9 natural laws, and Covey's 7 habits, I finally found effective leadership that could be accomplished in 10 minutes!

Throughout all the literature I read, the art of storytelling plays a central role in explaining effective leadership. Just about every leader is a good storyteller. These stories are sometimes real and sometimes myth. Remember these stories: Ronald Reagan's house on the hill, George Washington's chopping down the cherry tree, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech. Tichy (1997), author of *The Leadership Engine*, asserted that good storytelling is essential for effective leadership. According to Tichy:

It's about taking people from where they are now to where they need to be. The best way to get people to venture into unknown terrain is to make it desirable by taking them there in their imaginations, by telling them a story. (p. 54)

That's it; I am ready to relax, reflect, sort through my lists, review my laws, work on my seven habits, tell some stories, and draw some conclusions. The phone rings and it's my brother chiding me that I can't stop now. He is sending me a must-read book on leadership.

Working with Emotional Intelligence

In the mail comes Goleman's (1998) new book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. Filled with the lessons of humility, fidelity, temperance, and courage, I moved modestly forward and opened the book.

Goleman (1998) has researched the star performers in over 500 companies. He identified the skills that distinguish the star performers from the failures. He suggested that the single most important factor in getting ahead and being effective is not IQ, advanced degrees, or technical expertise, but *emotional intelligence*. He found that the higher one

goes on the leadership ladder the more vital all aspects of *emotional intelligence* become. Goleman asserted that in 80% of the cases, emotional intelligence is the determining factor in who is hired and who is fired, who is passed over and who is promoted. He found that those who are isolated or explosive, unable to manage change or conflict, are toxic to the organization.

According to Goleman (1998), emotional intelligence is the continual strengthening of the following factors:

- Self-awareness.
- Self-confidence.
- Self-control.
- Commitment.
- Integrity.
- Ability to communicate and influence.
- Initiating.
- Accept change.

Considering it all, I ask, What do I know now about effective leadership that I did know before? Well, I think that my abilities are more

management than leadership. The literature illuminates that my emotional intelligence is an area that needs strengthening. My strengths are my character ethic and personality ethic. And I can create my own list of leadership themes:

- To be a leader you must have followers; if you don't you're just out for a walk.
- Leadership is something we can learn and strengthen over a lifetime.
- Good management is not leadership.
- You can attain a leadership position, but you won't stay there very long without a strong character ethic.
- You must be able to capture your vision of moving your followers from A to B by telling a good story.
- Emotional control is fundamental.

And as Winston Churchill believed, "leadership success is going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm" (Hayward, 1997, p. 46).

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