

Leadership Knowledge and Skill: An Enabler for Success as a Technology Education Teacher-Leader

By Robert E. Wenig

Introduction

While our technological society has rapidly moved into the digital-information age leadership has emerged as even more distinctive and essential for success (Reich, 2000). Experience teaches us that leadership can be exercised through noble uplifting pursuits or driven by corrupting repressive power. Leadership when positive creates a stimulating environment that builds a thriving organization but, when negative, it fosters a woefully oppressive and debilitation atmosphere which chokes performance. Historically, Americans love Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, but despised Hitler types who are autocratic tyrants. Research tells us that leaders are not born but emerge through a complex sociological process to satisfy some demanding need or want (Clark and Clark, 1996).

We are all familiar with the story of Winston Churchill, who during World War I was charged with poor military decisions ending in extensive loss of life. For nearly twenty years fame was derailed and influence ceased. Churchill referred to this time in his life as the wilderness years. Fortunately for England, Churchill took the advice of Benjamin Disraeli, who said, "The secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes." Certainly, it was Churchill time when he was elected Prime Minister of England in 1939 at the beginning of WW II. He more than anyone else rallied the English people through inspiring speeches and endless work to achieve eventual victory. Today, England, and others, consider Churchill, the greatest Englishman who ever lived. Similarly, great teachers rise to the challenge by becoming successful classroom leader through a combination of ever increasing knowledge and elevating experiences (Walling, 1994)

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to share the value of leadership knowledge and skill for enhancing the survival and performance of teachers and leaders.

Leadership and Performance

When performance of an individual, organization, or event is discussed leadership becomes the dominant subject. Recently a cartoon appeared in the Wall Street Journal where two men were having a heated discussion about leadership. Finally, one turned to the other and said, "Yes, we need leadership, but also we need someone to tell us what to do." Most people have difficulty attempting to understand or appropriately use leadership (Peters, 1992 and Drucker, 1993). They see it as hazy, confusing, or a distant abstraction.

Nevertheless, most people can comprehend the behaviors of great leaders and teachers when they can personally relate to their actions. Let me illustrate. Recently I visited an art museum displaying works of some of the worlds most famous artists. There were paintings by Monet, Picasso, van Gogh, Renoir and many others on display. The paintings I enjoyed the most were those that gave a clear depiction of something I am familiar with, such as a serene lake, a gathering of flowers, or people easily recognized as humans. There were other paintings on display that portrayed distorted figures, and blurred shapes and colors that defy description. Certainly, these too, are valued works of art that were carefully selected to represent the variety of creative expression, but the distant abstraction left me with a feeling of emptiness or even confusion. Similarly, the omnipotence or great secret of highly effective leaders and teachers is achieved when they cut confusion and haziness to relate and build understanding. An example of transforming from a hazy-confusing leaderless environment to a clearly functioning leadership process can be found in the small book, *The Leaders Compass* (2003) by Ruggero and Hailey. This is a must read by the beginning leader.

Clark and Clark, (1997) state, that with effective leadership any organization can increase its performance by at least 20-25 percent. Further, educational literature suggests that

an effective teacher-leader can also raise the learning level of his/her students by 15-25 percent. Accordingly, the relationship between gifted teachers and gifted leaders is very similar as Williams (2001) found in her dissertation that compared award winning local school technology teachers and their use of effective leadership practices. Hasting, (1991) agreed in her article, *Teachers as Leaders* saying, “teachers as leaders model the way or influencing their students to follow” (p.24.).

Leadership Defined

Bennis and Nanus, (1985), stated in their award winning book, *Leaders*, “Decades of academic analysis have given more than 350 definitions of leadership”(p. 4). Even today, the quest continues to specifically define just what is leadership. One stirring and profound definition of leadership that is well accepted by noted experts is Burns’ (1978) “transformational leadership” which is described in his classic and award winning book, *Leadership*. He defined a transformational leader as one who creates a vigorous and magnetic environment in which the leader and his/her followers raise each other to higher and higher levels of motivation and morality.

It happens when a leader can harness and focus an organizational member’s energy into a collective force resulting in a powerful empowering process that transforms both the individual and organization to higher and higher levels of performance. The best leadership thinking today (Covey, 1992; Kanter, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Reich, 2001; Senge et. al, 1999) about how to gain the highest level of organizational performance continues to include a leader who successfully uses transformational leadership. Again, transformational leader-teacher creates an environment that releases human potential then reinforces it by giving recognition and the opportunities for continuous personal growth (Walling, 1994; & Wenig, 1995).

Finally, after years of concerned involvement in leadership theory and application, I believe that it is more important to define leadership by what it “does” rather than by what it “is”. At first glance, what a transformational leader does seems so simple, yet it possess that

overwhelming powerful human propellant called “hope”. Accordingly, top leaders and teachers are a “merchant of hope” those who elevate the meaning and aspiration of others to form an organization under pinned by hope. Hope can be germinated by leaders-teachers who propel others-students to rise to higher and higher levels of success. Leadership then, when practiced at its positive best, produces hope, that propels individuals and organizations that transform dreams into visions and visions into actions - - “a vision community” (Barker, 1994). The leader-teacher who applies the powerful spirit and tenor of “hope”, establishes transformational leadership in the classroom/boardroom, the magical key ingredient to gaining a dynamic and fruitful future for all involved. Debbie Kennedy, (June, 1991) perhaps expresses the significance of hope in the following poem titled, “Our Dreams In Action”:

Dreams give us hope.

Hope ignites passion.

Passion leads us to envision success.

Recognition of opportunities inspires far-reaching possibilities

Far-reaching possibilities help us enlist support from others.

Support from others keeps us focused and committed.

Focus and commitment foster action.

Action results in progress.

Progress leads to achievement.

Achievement inspires dreams.

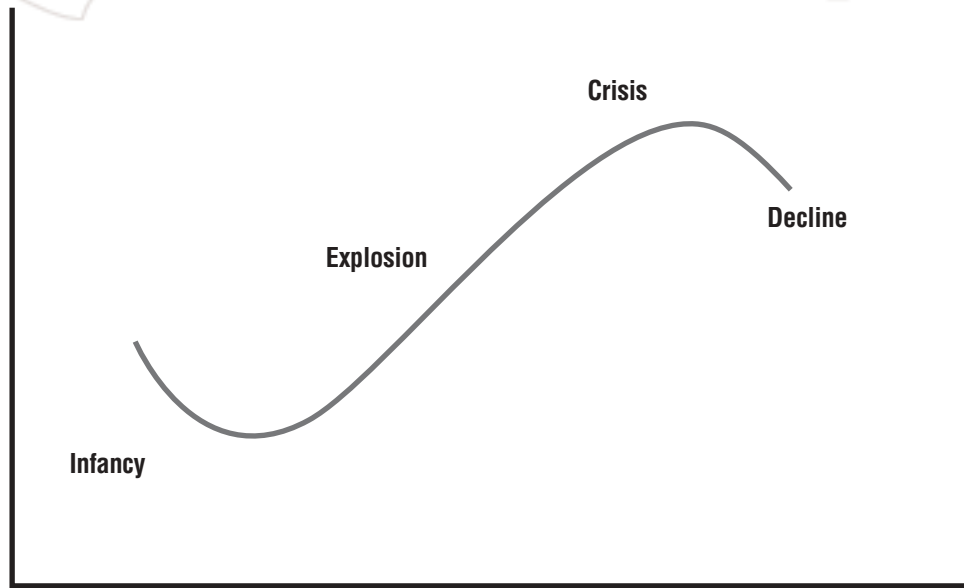
Dreams give us hope.

Perhaps Warren Bennis (2003 & 2003) ship expert, stated it best about *hope* when he stated, leadership involves creating larger visions and engaging people’s imagination in pursuit of them.

Leadership Knowledge for Survival

Rip Van Winkle went to sleep for twenty years. When he awakened, the American landscape had changed dramatically, and his bones creaked with age. The world around him was no longer one he understood or in which he could function well. Will history someday see that

Figure 1. The “S” Curve: The Life Cycle of An Organization.



classic story as a parable for leadership in American public and private organizations? George Santayana, the noted anthropologist, once observed that in our changing world we no longer salute our ancestors but bid them farewell. The world constantly searches for new knowledge and wisdom to answer very complex problems with simplicity. Let me illustrate. There is old parable about the grasshopper that decided to consult the hoary consultant of the animal kingdom, the owl, about a personal problem. The problems concerned the fact that the grasshopper suffered each winter from severe pains due to the savage temperature. After a number of these painful winters, in which all of the grasshopper’s known remedies were of no avail, he presented his case to the venerable and wise owl. The owl, after patiently listening to the grasshopper’s misery, so the story goes prescribed a simple solution. Simply turn your self into a cricket, and hibernate during the winter.” The grasshopper jumped joyously away, profusely thanking the owl for his wise advice. Later, however, after discovering that this important knowledge could not be transformed into action, the grasshopper returned to the owl and asked how he could perform this metamorphosis. The owl replied rather curtly, “Look, I gave you the principle, it’s up to you to work out the details!”

All parables, supposedly, contain a moral, and the moral here is that even if knowledge is provided survival is linked to actually performing the metamorphous. Again, transformational leadership elevates performance of individuals from the boardroom to the classroom. Leadership knowledge is paramount to change (Kotter, 1996), and change is the key to organizational survival (Senge, 1999).

The present-day “S” Curve (see Figure 1) evolved in the early part of the twenty-century from the work of Russian economist Nikolai Kondratieff and was popularized in America by Joseph Schumpeter in 1939. It represents the typical life cycle of an organization that last beyond infancy. Through dynamic and creative leadership, the opportunity for an organization to experience explosive growth is possible. However, over time things change; competition increases, cost rises, new technology suddenly appears, economic down-turn occurs, product demand falls, management falters, or whatever happens to trigger decline eventually ending in failure. When reviewing super successful surviving organizations (e.g., Ford, IBM, Johnson and Johnson, and 3 M) one finds a core ideology of visionary leadership one that has a passion for learning to stay competitive. Accordingly, organizations that are built to last (Collins & Porras, 1997) feverously keep

informed (knowledgeable) about the future which enables them to constantly plan and execute critical intervention strategies (see Figure 2) at key times to avoid stagnation and decline to propel continuous rebirth and growth.

There is a significant example of not staying competitive (realizing the “S” Curve) as found in American public schools. The word competition was foreign to the public educational system. Many thought that no outside force could or would attempt to provide K-12 education. Over time, public schools failed to implement key intervention strategies to meet their greatest challenge parent dissatisfaction with public school performance. Certainly, lack of parent confidence has triggered the advent of home schooling, charter schools, vouchers, and yes, even private businesses schooling children. All are pursuing a replacement to the traditional public school system.

Research has consistently said that the difference between model and poorly run schools is the “Whoever be chief among you let him be your servant principal’s leadership performance (Clark and Clark, 1997). It is obvious that TED can significantly benefit from possessing leadership knowledge and skills because the future belongs to the informed (Collins & Porras, 1997 & Peters, 1994). In time of drastic change, the learners inherit the future. The learned find them equipped to live in a world that no longer exists (Reich, 2001 & Senge et. al., 1999).

Finally, Servant-Teacher-Leader

Historically, the Bible reveals through endless stories examples of individual servant leadership, especially those in the New Testament. In 1966, Queen Elizabeth II, the present Queen of England, placed a large carved plaque in Westminster Abby which stated, “Whoever be chief among you let him be your servant.” “The term servant-leadership was first coined in the United States in a 1977 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf entitled, *The Servant First Leader* (Spears, 1995 P.2) Question. If the leader’s overwhelming desire is to serve when or how does the leader lead? Leading and Serving seems rather contradictory, or is it? Another perplexing question, does a leader lead first by serving or serving first then lead? To answer these ques-

tions, Greenleaf wrote:

“Servant-leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest-priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? ...At the core, servant-leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work...a way of being that has the potential to create positive change throughout our society” (Spears 1995, p.4).

Greenleaf went on to say, “When I started to write on the servant-leader theme, I was trying to communicate a basis of [hope]—not just for students but for everybody” (Spears, 1995 p.21). Hope or servant-leadership, then, provides a most powerful pronouncement again for the operational behavior followed by the best teachers and leaders.

Historically, we have some understanding of where the idea of servant came from, but what triggered Greenleaf to add servant to leader or leadership? Greenleaf (1984) stated that he conceptualizes and coined the term servant-leadership after Eventually; he comes to realize that it was his servant, Leo, who held him and his group together. After many years of wondering, the director finds Leo again, who as it turns out, is the head of the spiritual community that the director was seeking all along. Reading on it becomes more and more clear that the director is actually Hesse, himself, an autobiographical character. After Hesse (A Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946) was initiated in the spiritual order Leo and Hesse are talking and they are holding a small transparent sculpture of two figures joined together. One is Leo and other is Hesse who realized that his image was in the process of adding and flowing into Leo’s nourishment and strengthening. Reading the story about Hermann Hesse’s (1956-2003) *Journal to the East*. The story is about a party of seekers searching for enlightenment in the

form of a particular secret spiritual order. Leo, a servant, attends to their needs and does menial chores. Throughout the journey, the group is sustained by Leo's "spirit and his song." Leo eventually disappears. The party gets completely lost and gives up on the search. The party director carries on but suffers immense emotional and physical stress.

Peter Senge (1995), after reading the *Journey to the East*, "I knew that this man [Greenleaf] understood something, something we have lost in our modern transactional society, where 'what's in it for me' is the assumed bedrock of all actions." To make it very clear, servant-teacher-leader grand design focuses on serving others by adding and flowing together to achieve one image using nourishment and strength. Robert Frost said, "All great things are done for their sake." Senge adds, to think that this reorientation of spirit might be a foundation for true leadership stunned me.

The significance of the servant-leadership concept has led to the establishment of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership. Further, the 1995 publication, *Reflections on Leadership* also includes the writings of Greenleaf with companion reflections about Greenleaf works. The importance of the Greenleaf's was given further credence in the "Indianapolis Business Journal" which stated, "Servant leadership has emerged as one of the dominant philosophies being discussed in the world today (Spears, L. C, *Reflections on Leadership* 1995).

Summary

History has shown us that leadership can

either be positive or negative. When positive and of the highest quality it can enhance performance, whether in the classroom or boardroom, remarkably by 20-25%. The master teacher who seems to draw us out has thrilled us all. These same high qualities are also found in top leaders. The teacher-leader makes a difference—a big difference for they model the way to influence our lives. Through an examination of the literature and research, the author attempts to discover what makes leadership such a powerful force. The first research question dealt with how to gain and inspire support. The challenges and possible opportunities facing TED are also discussed.. Second question reviewed the research on effective TED teaching. The findings indicated that innovative teachers are professionally involved in their associations, have greater school support, use different instructional methods and are very creative.

The third research question provided information on how TED could apply the dynamics of leadership to sell its benefits. These processes include: developing communication power, applying various leadership development models, bringing about effective change, using visioning technology to set the course, and the need of research to apply the teacher-leader model for developing Technology Education for American youth.

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