

PART I

CHARACTER LEADERSHIP

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1 WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Twixt kings and tyrants there's this difference known:
kings seek their subjects' good, tyrants their own.

Robert Herrick¹

We began by observing that leadership is a necessary requirement of life. French President and Second World War hero Charles de Gaulle once observed that human beings can no more survive without direction than they can without eating, drinking, or sleeping. Putting aside the fact that de Gaulle exemplified “the one great person theory” of leadership and that he was most probably talking about himself, his larger point is true.

Today we accord movie star status to many of our leaders. Some of them become cultural icons and cultural role models. For example, the president of the United States is, arguably, the most photographed person in the world. Barack Obama's first inauguration was the most reported event of its time. Former President Bill Clinton is a celebrity. The media have tracked every turn in the life of business leaders like Bill Gates or Steve Jobs. Where once saints dominated our imagination and were looked to for guidance, political and business leaders now play that role.

Why is leadership such a fascinating topic? Why are we so enthralled by leadership and curious about the private and public lives of leaders? According to military historian John Keegan, we are intrigued, inspired, and intimidated by those who wear the “mask of command.”² We are mesmerized both by the successful exploits and by the front-page failures of individual leaders. We love them, we hate them. We shun them, and yet we seek them out. Many of us

10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders: Leadership and Character, First Edition.

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think that leadership is a magical amulet. If we can just get the right person, the right leader, in the right job, success will naturally and necessarily follow. Leadership seems crucial for personal and organization success.

But how do we define what seems to be a critical and necessary ingredient for success? Unfortunately, although many of us can recognize leaders and leadership, few can give these terms an exact definition. Even when we can describe the concepts denoted by the words we employ, we find ourselves unable to reduce that concept to a few words: we all agree that leadership is important, but we disagree in stating what it is. W. B. Gallie refers to these kinds of words as “essentially contested concepts” and argues that they are a regular part of our lives and vocabulary.³ The challenge is to go beyond points of disagreement and discover the ideas that are essential to all our understandings of the concept.

Above all, it is important to begin by noting what leadership is *not*. According to John Gardner, leadership should never be confused or directly equated with social status, power, position, rank, or title.

Even in large corporations and government agencies, the top-ranking person may simply be bureaucrat number one. We have all occasionally encountered top persons who couldn't lead a squad of seven year olds to the ice cream counter.⁴

Perhaps business ethicist Price Pritchett puts it even more exactly when he says: “Putting a man in charge and calling him a leader is like giving a man a Bible and calling him a preacher. Bestowing the title doesn't bestow the talent.”⁵ The simple fact is, an appropriate label for any person giving orders, monitoring compliance, and administering performance-based rewards and punishments could be “supervisor” or “manager,” but not necessarily “leader.”⁶

A Reflection

But if the term “leadership” does not apply to all people within organizations who exercise responsibility, nor does it mean that only the “top dog” of an organization exercises leadership. Leadership can (and *should*) arise at all levels of an organization when challenges must be faced and important tasks accomplished. A primary duty of all leaders is to inspire and empower each member of the organization to be a leader within his/her own area of responsibility. At the close of the Second World War, General Dwight Eisenhower put this well when he wrote in his war biography:

In the end, the success of D-Day wasn't superior generalship or years of careful planning. Nor was it our superiority in numbers and supplies. Rather it was the initiative and leadership of countless individual GIs that won the battle for us. It was the courage of men who took charge of the situations they found themselves in and their private determination to prevail.⁷

In their influential book *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner argue that, while there are a multitude of leadership definitions, they all share a common focus or a central theme. Leadership, of every kind and at every level, is about offering others an “action guide,” a plan, a challenge, a goal, a purpose that they are willing to embrace and carry on. Leadership is about motivating and mobilizing people to get “something” done, be that extraordinary or otherwise. Leadership is a catalyst for action. Of course, whether that action is moral or immoral, good or bad, positive or negative has to be determined through normative analysis and debate. But the conclusion is the same: all forms of leadership are action-based and action-driven. Although we agree with Kouzes and Posner that leadership is essentially about deliberate and concerted effort and action, we would argue that leadership is also about the personality and character – the ethical substance – of a particular leader. We believe that ethics is what defines leadership.

Bernard Bass, leadership historian and scholar, has observed: “There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.”⁸ He is right. Having said this, the following definition encapsulates our most basic and shared convictions about leadership:

Leadership is a power-laden, value-based and ethically driven relationship between leaders and followers who share a common vision and accomplish real changes that reflect their mutual purpose and goals.

This definition has five basic components. Let's look at them in the ascending order of their importance to the concept:

- 1 power-laden;
- 2 relationship between leaders and followers;
- 3 common vision;
- 4 accomplish real changes;
- 5 value-based and ethically driven.⁹

Power-laden All forms of leadership make use of power. The term comes (indirectly) from the Latin adjective *potis* (“powerful, capable”) and verb *posse*

(“to be able to”). Power is about control. To have power is to possess the capacity to control change or to direct it. Power need not be coercive, dictatorial, or punitive. It can be used in a non-coercive manner, for instance to orchestrate, mobilize, direct, and guide members of an institution or organization in the pursuit of a goal or series of objectives. The central issue of power in leadership is not “Will it be used?” but rather “Will it be used wisely and well?” In the best of all possible worlds, leaders who seek power should do so out of a sense of service, not for the purposes of personal aggrandizement and career advancement.

Relationship between leaders and followers One of the most common errors in thinking about leadership is to focus on single individuals. But leadership does not reside exclusively in a single person. Rather it is a dynamic relationship, between leaders and followers alike. Leadership is always plural; it always occurs within the context of others. E. P. Hollander argues that, while the leader is the central and often the most vital part of the phenomenon of leadership, followers are necessary factors in the equation and often have an almost equal importance.

Without responsive followers there is no leadership . . . [Leadership] involves someone who exerts influence, and those who are influenced . . . The real “power” of a leader lies in his or her ability to influence followers.¹⁰

Leadership does not take place in a vacuum. Whether passively or actively, leaders cannot lead unless followers follow. “Leaders and followers,” James MacGregor Burns writes, “are engaged in a common enterprise; they are dependent on each other, their fortunes rise and fall together.”¹¹

Directly connected to the issue of followers is the time-honored question: Are leaders born or made? We believe that leaders, good or bad, great or small, arise from the needs and opportunities of a specific time and place. Great leaders require great causes, great issues, and, most importantly, a hungry and willing constituency. If this were not true, would there have been a Lech Walesa, a Martin Luther King, Jr., or a Nelson Mandela?

Common vision The first job of leadership is to define reality. Leaders reach their goals by identifying, shaping, and representing the shared ideas and values of their organization. This constitutes the leader’s vision. Leadership is always ideologically driven and motivated by a philosophical perspective on the challenges facing the community. All leaders have an agenda – a series of beliefs, proposals, values, ideas, and issues they wish to put on the table. In fact, as Burns has suggested, leadership only asserts itself, and followers only

become evident, when there is something at stake – ideas to be clarified, issues to be determined, values to be adjudicated.¹² President Franklin D. Roosevelt understood this when he said: “All our great Presidents were leaders of thought at times when certain historic ideas in the life of the nation had to be clarified.”¹³ What is true of the presidency is true at every level of organizational life and leadership.

Accomplish real changes All forms of leadership are about transformation. Leadership is not about maintaining the status quo; it is about initiating change in an organization. Simply sustaining the status quo is equivalent to institutional stagnation. “The leadership process,” says Burns, “must be defined . . . as carrying through from decision-making stages to the point of concrete changes in people’s lives, attitudes, behaviors [and] institutions.”¹⁴

This emphasis on change suggests the following formula for the emergence of leadership:

leadership = talent + challenge + timing + results

Although we are attempting to describe and define our ideal of leadership, all forms of leadership seek to accomplish results. To adapt the words of Vince Lombardi, when all is said and done, more *should* be done than said!¹⁵ Peter Drucker argued throughout his long career that leadership was all about performance and results. Effective leadership is not about making speeches or being liked; leadership is defined by results, not by attributes.¹⁶ Leadership comes to be *so that* something gets accomplished, something gets changed for the better. Simply put, leaders who aren’t getting results aren’t truly leading. Or, more specifically, leaders who aren’t getting the desired results aren’t fulfilling their mandate.¹⁷

In their book *Results-Based Leadership*, Dave Ulrich, Jack Zenger, and Norm Smallwood convincingly argue that, while it is faddish in leadership literature to talk about leaders as people who master competencies and emanate character, neither of these accomplishments is enough. The authors argue that, although organizational capabilities such as agility, adaptability, or mission directedness and personal attributes like character, virtue, or ethics are vital, it is not enough simply to possess these qualities. Although skills and attributes constitute the DNA of leadership, effective leaders must connect them to results. The authors’ formula is simple: *Effective leadership = skills and attributes × results*. Results are a leader’s brand, a leader’s signature. Ulrich, Zenger, and Smallwood argue that a leader’s job requires more than skills, character, knowledge, and action; it also demands the capacity to foster positive change:

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Leaders exhibiting attributes without results have ideas without substance. They teach what they have not learned. They can talk a good scenario and even act on sound general principles, but they fail to deliver. The means – attributes – have become their end. Often popular because of their charm or charisma, they are not long remembered because their leadership depended more on who they are and how they behave than on what they accomplish.¹⁸

With regard to the character, attributes, and skills of a leader versus the real achievement of intended results, one can ask: How do we look at leaders who fail to produce results, or produce only negative ones? How would history evaluate an Abraham Lincoln if, during the presidential election campaign of 1864, William Tecumseh Sherman had not taken Atlanta Georgia? How would we look at Lincoln if General George B. McClellan had won the election, sued for peace, and allowed the Confederacy to continue to exist as an independent nation and to maintain the legal status of slavery? How would history look at and evaluate the leadership ability of Mahatma Gandhi if India were still the crown jewel of the British colonial empire? How would history judge the efforts of Martin Luther King, Jr., if his 13 years of public ministry and leadership in the Civil Rights Movement had not resulted in significant legal and cultural changes regarding the rights and dignity of African American citizens? If they had all failed, if these iconic leaders had not produced results, would we revere them as we do? Would we honor them for their intentions and efforts? Probably. Would we respect them for their commitment? Certainly. But would we hold them up as role models to aspire to? No. Would we refer to them as successful? Again, no.

But not all change is good. Leaders can effect change that takes organizations in negative directions. As we will see in the next chapter, destructive change does not qualify as the ideal goal of leadership. Furthermore, change can also be of short duration. Beneficial changes that fail to endure or to take root in organizational life also miss the leadership test.

Value-based and ethically driven Leadership aims at positive change in the life of an organization or community. This means that leadership is always an ethical enterprise. Peter Drucker, one of the most skilled observers of organizational life, concludes, on the basis of more than 65 years of studying management, that the primary purpose of all business organizations and the grounds and rationale for all forms of managerial authority is to make the human condition more secure, more satisfactory, and more productive.¹⁹ More colloquially, Tony Dungy, former NFL coach, said: “It is not about you . . . Your only job [as a coach, as a leader] is to help your team be better.”²⁰ Cen-

turies before Drucker or Dungy, St. Augustine, himself a formative leader of early Christianity, clearly suggested in the *City of God* that the first and final job of leaders is to attempt to serve the needs and wellbeing of the people they lead.²¹

Ethics, Virtue, and Character

The moral quality of leadership is summed up in the understanding that real leaders are ethical and possess both virtue and character. “Ethics,” “virtue,” and “character” are all classical Greek concepts. In antiquity, ethics, *ēthikē* (ἠθική), started off as the study of human behavior or custom. It was used to identify the distinguishing values of a civilization, a community, or a person. The corresponding Latin word, *mos* (“custom”), lives on in English words like “mores,” “moral(ity),” and “morals.” While many people believe that “morality” and “ethics” have different meanings, we will use them interchangeably. An ethical person is someone of moral integrity. A moral philosopher is also called an ethicist.

Since the time of the Greeks, the discipline of ethics – morality – has focused on the question: “What ought I to do with others?” In private conversations with one of the authors, business ethicist Ed Freeman and theologian Frank Griswald emphasize this understanding. “Ethics,” says Freeman, “is how we treat people face to face, person to person, day in and day out over a prolonged period of time.” In Griswald’s view, “ethics is about the rules we choose to live by once we decide we want to live together.” To say, therefore, that leadership is *value-based and ethically driven* and that real leaders are ethical is to say that leaders are always concerned with the question “What ought I to do?” They take seriously their responsibility toward *all* the people impacted by their decisions.

In the Greek world of Plato and Aristotle, *aretē* (ἀρετή) – “virtue” – meant something that is more appropriately translated as “excellence.” For the Greeks there were non-ethical, non-moral virtues. Beauty, martial skills, or athletic prowess were all excellences, virtues. But, when we speak of virtue, it is primarily the moral excellences we have in mind. What are the qualities of a person that lead to that person’s flourishing and to the flourishing of those around him/her? Honesty and fairness are among the crucial virtues for organizational leadership and success. In the chapters ahead we explore these and other moral virtues that are essential to leadership.

Greek philosophers insisted that virtue is a habit. By this they meant that it is not a one-time deed, but a skill or a disposition to act in a certain way,

which must be acquired through repetition and exercise. To remain in force and grow, virtue must be practiced again and again, and demonstrated across a range of life choices. Here virtue's wider meaning as "excellence" is helpful. Can we achieve high degrees of athletic performance without training? Can we develop musical skills without practice? The same reasoning applies to the moral virtues. Greek philosophers emphasized this when they said: "Do not judge a person until (s)he is dead." In part they believed this because only a completed life can stand as evidence to the full achievement of one's virtue.

The word "character" comes from a Greek noun meaning "etching" or "engraving": *charaktēr* (χαρακτήρ), itself derived from the verb *charassein* ("to engrave"). Originally *charaktēr* designated the marks impressed on a coin. Applied to human beings, *charaktēr* refers to the enduring marks or etched-in factors that have been impressed on a person's mind (*psuchē*, "soul"). These consist in the person's inborn talents as well as in the learned traits – those acquired through education and experience. These "engravings" set us apart, define us, and motivate our behavior.

Although much of character is impressed on us by the environment, the vagaries of time and place, and the biological (genetic) or behavioral influences of our parents, moral character is about what a person chooses to hold dear, to value, and to believe in. If you want to know about a person's moral character, check their values. People of character value honesty, integrity, and fairness. They value loyalty and, in consistency with the needs of organizational functioning, they are compassionate. They care about other people. In our view, character in precisely this sense is the foundation of leadership.

Gail Sheehy, in her book *Character: America's Search for Leadership*, argues that, while character is the most crucial element of leadership, it is also the most elusive one. In regard to leadership, says Sheehy, character is fundamental and prophetic. "The issues [of leadership]," she claims, "are of today and will change in time. Character is what was yesterday and will be tomorrow." Character establishes both our day-to-day demeanor and our destiny. Therefore it is not only useful but also essential to examine the character of those who wish to lead us. As a journalist and longtime observer of the political scene, Sheehy contends that the Watergate affair of the early 1970s serves as a perfect example of the links between character and leadership. As Richard Nixon demonstrated so well, "[t]he Presidency is not the place to work out one's personal pathology."²² Leaders rule us, run things, and wield power. Therefore, her argument runs, we must be careful about whom we choose to lead us. Because whom we choose is what we will be. If character is destiny, the destiny our leaders forge will be our own.

Notes to Chapter One

- 1 Robert Herrick, *Hesperides: Or, the Works Both Humane and Divine of Robert Herrick Esq.* London: Printed for John Williams and Francis Eglesfield, 1648, p. 289.
- 2 John Keegan, *The Mask of Command*. New York: Penguin Group, 1988.
- 3 W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts." *Aristotelian Society*, 56, 1956: 167–198.
- 4 John Gardner, *On Leadership*. New York: The Free Press, 1990, p. 2.
- 5 Price Pritchett, Chairman & CEO of PRITCHETT, LP. Dallas, TX. Reproduced with permission from Sandi Lindstendt, Permission editor.
- 6 J. W. Graham, "Transformational Leadership: Fostering Follower Autonomy, not Automatic Followership." In J. G. Hunt, B. R. Baglia, H. P. Crachler, and C. A. Schriesheim (eds.), *Emerging Leadership Vistas*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988, p. 74.
- 7 A CBS Broadcast of June 6, 1964, titled *CBS Reports: D-Day Plus 20 Years: Eisenhower Returns to Normandy* and reported by Walter Cronkite: Walter Cronkite in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum. Archivist, Herb Pankratz.
- 8 Bernard Bass, *Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research*. New York: Free Press, 1981, p. 7.
- 9 Al Gini, "Moral Leadership: An Overview." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 16, 1997: 323–330.
- 10 E. P. Hollander, *Leadership Dynamics*. New York: The Free Press, 1978, pp. 4, 7.
- 11 James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1979, p. 426.
- 12 *Ibid.*, Chapters 2 and 5.
- 13 Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Roosevelt's View of the Big Job." *New York Times Magazine*, September 11, 1932, p. SM1.
- 14 Burns, *Leadership*, p. 414.
- 15 Vince Lombardi, "When All Is Said and Done, More Is Said Than Done." In Dave Ulrich, Jack Zenger, and Norm Smallwood, *Results-Based Leadership*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1999, p. vii.
- 16 Peter Drucker, *The Effective Executive*. New York: Collins Business, 2006, pp. ix–xxii.
- 17 Dave Ulrich, Jack Zenger, and Norm Smallwood, *Results-Based Leadership*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1999, pp. viii, 27.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 19 Peter F. Drucker with J. P. Maciarriello, *The Daily Drucker: 366 Days of Insight and Motivation for Getting the Right Things Done*. New York: Harper Business, 2004, pp. 105, 195.
- 20 Tony Dungy with Nathan Whitaker, *The Mentor Leader*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010.
- 21 Saint Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, vol. 5.2: *The City of God*, edited by Whitney J. Ontes. New York: Random House, 1948, pp. 490–491

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(=Book XIX, Chapter 14): “those who rule serve those whom they seem to command; for they rule not from the love of power, but from a sense of the duty they owe to others.”

22 Gail Sheehy, *Character: America's Search for Leadership*. New York: Bantam Books, 1990, p. 66.