

# Discussions in Leadership

## On Principled Leadership: It's the Person, Not the Title

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During an evening class last year, an MBA student asked a question that just about knocked me off my chair, "Well, leadership is an interesting topic, but why should I study it? After all, I'm just getting my MBA so I can be more marketable." At that moment, I'm not sure I adequately answered that student's question, but since then I have had many thoughts about it. Consider that a piece of paper is not what makes someone "marketable." Instead, the value comes through the development one goes through during the educational process. Further, "marketability", in my view, is a minor objective when compared with the tremendous need for principled leadership in the world today. That student's comment solidified and reconfirmed my own commitment to increase the amount of time, energy and resources I spend on the development of existing and future principled leaders. It also confirmed my belief that the core Leadership Dynamics course and the related electives for further leadership development are an essential component of the MBA program.

After 27 years, it would be easy to grow tired of talking about and teaching leadership. Instead, I am reinvigorated at the University of San Francisco, largely owing to the bright and challenging students who exhibit, in its best sense, "the beginners mind." Equally enlivening and inspiring is the USF vision to educate ethical and moral leaders. In this article, I focus attention on three ideas, each of which is relevant to my student's question and perhaps to your own inquiry as to why you are

here: the distinctions between leading, managing and bossing; the simplicity of principles and the struggle we face as we grow into a people of principle; and the commitment and conviction we exhibit as the people being followed.

The pedagogy we use to foster principled behavior in the leadership courses is not a faddish reaction to the flood of recent events in newspapers and on TV. Recent attention on principled and ethical leadership has many organizations gearing up to capitalize upon it, and that is a good thing because something might actually be accomplished, even if only by default. But history teaches that every generation has had to navigate the developmental process that constitutes its own territory of principled behavior. With assistance from those of us who have weathered (and been weath-

Pieta, he said his method was to cut away stone and expose the beautiful work of art hidden within. With that in mind, perhaps we can discern what effective leadership is by first attending to what it is not. Leadership is not a position or the arrival at a station in life with a resultant title bestowed, although it is often perceived that way. Leadership is not achieved through rank nor can it be purchased with money, even though there are those who chase rank and spend money under the guise of leadership. It is not a function of age, occupation or lifestyle. Additionally, it is not synonymous with managing or bossing, although it often referred to in that manner. Thus, if leadership is not the obtaining or owning of the title President, CEO, CFO, Managing Director or Prime Minister, then what is it?

*Leadership is the art and dynamic practice of effective*

conditions coalesce to bring it to our attention. If we take the time to sharpen our awareness then ask ourselves some simple questions, we can begin to form an understanding of the basis of our own ideas about leadership. To what degree am I a person of influence? Who and what am I influencing right now? To what influences am I subject, particularly without my immediate cognitive awareness? When I engage with other people, to what degree and in what direction do I influence them? Am I (are we) creating outcomes, and if so, in what direction are the outcomes moving. Are the outcomes constructive or destructive? What forces (seen and unseen, heard and unheard, felt and unfelt) affect me right now, and hence my future?

I often ask both beginning and advanced leadership students to engage in a series of exercises meant to uncover

automatic responses and honestly ask yourself: what is the basis for my reactions whenever I hear something like this or meet someone like this? How long have I been doing this? When did it start for me? What price do I pay for this approach? What does it really get me? What do my actions and reactions produce in the lives of other people?" I believe that this type of practice is fundamental for those who want to grow in their ability to practice the art of leadership.

As mentioned earlier, in their career progress, some individuals take on the role or position of manager or boss. The role of a manager is defined as that charged with the establishment and attainment of objectives. Significant to this is the optimal use of energy, time, money, material and human resource. Managers plan, organize, and direct things and people so as to maximize task accomplishment. The role of boss rests on an authority granted to a person through some system, seemingly giving him or her the right to direct actions by virtue of rank. Simply stated, bosses are people who, because of a title (or position or size), tell other people what to do. Whether or not someone demonstrates sound managerial skills, does not necessarily make them a good or a poor leader. A person may loudly or forcefully give orders, thus getting people to do things they otherwise might not, but this does not accurately measure their effectiveness as a good leader. In my observation, people are truly led when they are touched in ways that resound with their internal need for respect and trust. In those moments, consent is free and people genuinely move. Leaders form bonds of trust and respect with the persons they are influencing. Hence someone can be a leader, and a very powerful one, because they wholeheartedly resound with others, yet never hold a position of authority or title. After examining the *leaders* I have followed in my life, I found them to be people who cared about me and the situation we were in, more so than about their role or position or authority. Many of these

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ered by) decades of applying these concepts, it is your turn, as leaders of this next stage in the world's development, to grapple with the challenge of being a principled leader.

### Leadership

What is leadership? How does one begin to exercise it effectively? When Michelangelo created the

*influence*. It is the manner in which one person relates to another, the result of which creates within that person an energetic or physical movement towards something. Usually without awareness, we are subjected to leadership and we apply it every day. The process of influence can be analogous to the moist air all around us, invisible until and unless certain con-

the subtleties of influence exposed by their own listening. In particular, I ask them to notice and to keep a journal about their own automatic emotional and physical reactions and responses as they engage with other people. The questions are: "Do you truly hear what other people are saying, or do you just catch the words and wait to put forward your own opinion? When you are listening to others, what are your agreement patterns? Are you aware of the foundations upon which you base these agreements? What pattern does your automatic disagreement take? Do you hastily disagree out of a need to be heard or to be right yourself?"

The next step is to practice the following, "As you become aware of your quick responses, give yourself permission to go deeper. Listen deeply, with all of your faculties, to what is going on, and in those moments, suspend your judgment of self and others. Step aside from your



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great leaders have in fact been my subordinates on an organizational chart, most often not thought of formal leaders, managers, or bosses.

A simple example of effective leadership in action is that of a young child so fixed on an idea or goal, that she or he, even without awareness, is able to move their parent willingly in the direction of that idea or goal through a simple glance or facial expression or sound. Conversely, an example of poor leadership could be a parent forcing an ill-advised idea or desire upon their son or daughter, creating short-term satisfaction for the parent but long-term resentment in the child and destruction of their family relationship. In these examples, the child is the leader and the parent is the boss.

What follows is a method I call

### "The Five Step Path to Effective Leadership"

It has assisted thousands of people, many of whom were managers and bosses, expand their development as leaders.

1. *Get and remain present with the people around you, and in that process, be externally focused on those you are attempting to lead.* Spend the majority of your time looking for and at their strengths and uniqueness. This will open up your creative and intuitive abilities as they relate to people and process. You will gain insight into what your followers have to offer and you will establish relationships in order to build rapport and respect.

2. *Begin to consider ways you can encourage and inspire people to develop, practice and unleash their personal strengths and uniqueness.* This starts with you authentically being yourself and allowing others to be themselves. Encouragement and inspiration involve risk, fear, and vulnerability on the part of both leader and follower. As such, this step will take continual vigilance and practice.

3. *Be clear about the directions you are giving.* You are pointing a way for others to follow. This clarity requires self-examination and an understanding that directing is more than a function of verbal command. It is based primarily upon what one does, secondarily on the tone one establishes during the delivery of a message, and least of all on the words one uses. If you find people mov-

ing in a direction you don't desire, consider the likelihood that the followers could *think* that is the way you have pointed. This may be altogether inaccurate, but by



considering this possibility you can make responsible and non-blaming corrections. In giving directions, make absolutely certain that you pay attention to your own experience and remain grounded in your own principles. Also, make certain you understand the guiding principles of your followers.

4. *As often as possible, get yourself out of the way of the people you are influencing.* On one level this requires a

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### Leaders form bonds of trust and respect with the persons they are influencing.

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solid understanding of your own personal values and motives. Simultaneously, this means giving people permission to do the best they can in their own way. Making mistakes is part of the learning, growing, leading and following process. Make room for mistakes - yours and others. There is nothing more inspiring than someone who, by acknowledging their own mistakes, allows others to develop and grow. There is nothing more demoralizing than someone who gives opportunities, and then micro-manages the process, or removes the opportunities before there has been a real chance to succeed or fail.

5. *Make it a point to learn as much as you can from those you think you are (or should be) leading.* Again, leadership is not about position. Most often the genius ideas and methods are created by those who follow.

When a follower recognizes that his or her idea has been genuinely received and acted upon by the leader, then the follower's confidence grows. The follower then expands his or her capacity and appreciation of self, seeing as Michelangelo did, *what's*

*hidden inside.* In that moment, the follower becomes the leader that has been there to be realized, and the leader becomes the leader of other leaders.

A caveat to the five steps above is to be sincere in your dealings with other people, or as that word means at its root level, be "without wax." Strong people don't have to "wax over," or polish themselves to cover up and hide their mistakes or shortfalls,

healthy people recognize their own humanity, and in so doing, encourage others to do the same. This may be a challenging directive, particularly if one has a need to save face, but the result is strong and honest relationships between you and those to whom you are responsible.

### Principles

As one grows in the understanding of influence and how it works there is an opportunity to examine deeper questions, many of which are worth the investment of a lifetime. Some people squarely face these questions. Others choose to ignore them, but their actions of ignorance do not make these questions irrelevant or unimportant. Some of these questions are: Who am I? What are the principles upon which I stake my life? Where am I going? What difference does my life make? What

does it matter that I am alive today? With whom and to what am I deeply connected? Great teachers throughout history have asked people to open a dialogue within themselves, seeking their own answers to these questions. These questions can be found

at the heart of Jesuit education and are as relevant now as they were to Ignatius Loyola in the 15th Century, when he founded the Jesuit order and created the Spiritual Exercises.

Honesty, respect, humility, clarity, paying fairly, and seeking consensus are values most of us appreciate in others and would like others to appreciate in us. No one likes to be treated dishonestly or thought of disrespectfully. We detest arrogance in others, particularly when it is directed at us. We revolt against being manipulated or coerced, and abhor takers and thieves. But when we find ourselves under life's great stresses and pressures: in a position of accomplishing things but at extremely high costs to ourselves, our families or our reputations; or when stockholders or constituencies cry for action that runs contrary to the deepest aspects of our souls; how do we hold on to the principles we have been espousing and professing?

Walking a principled path is a journey of self-understanding, an awakening to our own strengths and weaknesses. Discovering our principles is a dynamic and authentic process of dealing with personal reality. It is at times uncomfortable and disquieting. So how do we, those charged with responsibility of developing the next generation of principled leaders, create a learning environment and opportunities for you to engage in this process?

Some years ago I designed a very challenging men's leadership course, which opened and continued with the question, "What are the

principles upon which you have staked your life?" Certain course concepts were delivered in lecture form but subsequently the class process shifted into a more experiential mode. Teams were formed then taken to different starting points in rugged outdoor terrain. Each team received a compass and a map and was shown a mark indicating the unique remote location where their goal, in this case their dinner, was waiting. By intention, the maps contained no marks to indicate the starting point: the physical location at the beginning of the exercise. The facilitators gave these instructions, "Dinner awaits you. *All you have to do is find out where you are.* The conditions of this exercise are - initially you may participate or not. If you choose out, you may observe but cannot give input to the rest of your team for the duration. If you choose in, you and your team will be allowed to move only during times when you are in complete 'consensus.' These rules will be in effect until you reach your goal." Because it seemed very simple, participants, for the most part, chose in.

Simple it was; easy it was not. Most teams stood at their starting points, stuck for hours while the real challenge unfolded and began to surface. Disagreements about what to do emerged. Cliques and alliances formed and debates flourished. People got positioned about being *right*, and wasted energy trying to make other people *wrong*. Some demanded that they lead and commanded that others *should* follow. Distrust bloomed and spread as participants began to suspect each other, and sometimes the facilitator, as potential saboteurs who were acting with the explicit purpose of hindering the success of the team. Out of exhaustion and frustration, some members became silent and passively resistant. Then patterns of compliance appeared and voices began to be heard, "I'll do whatever the rest of you want; I'm tired... let's just get the food." Some groups began their trek with unexamined assumptions - spending hours in discussion, without ever the word "consensus" being spoken, let alone forming an agreement about what "consensus" might look like. Teams heard their facilitators announce again and again, as they attempted to move, "Stop! You cannot move because consensus does not exist." Participants became frustrat-

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ed and angry, and cracks in integrity began to surface. The team process as well as individual effectiveness was sorely tested.

Over a night of silence and journaling each participant was asked to reflect on how his actions during the exercise aligned with episodes during his life. The debriefing next morning was richly rewarding, as students disclosed personal insights from the exercise. A participant offered, "Yesterday, when we started the class, I heard the questions about the principles upon which I stake my life. Before the exercise, I would have told you that mine were 'honesty' or 'integrity' or 'trust.' Then, during the walk, things became stressful for me and I began to withhold, and shine people on. What others saw in me as consensus was pretense and a lie. I thought about that all night long and took a good look at my life, my family, my business and the things that really matter to me. In all honesty, I have to admit that yesterday's walk to get dinner taught me a lot about me, my blind spots and the positions I take that don't serve me or others. Particularly when things don't go my way or when I am fatigued, I begin to deceive, cut corners, or try to bully others; and if that fails, I give up and think I don't matter and have no ability to influence the group."

This level of self-discovery and self-honesty is the foundation of principled leadership learning. In short, to get where one wants to go, one must honestly confront and continually assess where one actually is. People of principle never cease working on themselves and their own growth process. They continue to ask those crucial questions: "Who am I?" "Where am I going?" "What are the principles upon which I would stake my life?" And most importantly, "Am I truly living by those principles?"

### Commitment and Conviction

Deep awareness of how one influences and is influenced is the challenge for any person aspiring to leadership, for we are always influencing and being influenced as we chart the course of our lives. How well actions align with words is the crucial test for those aspiring to act with character and principle. Additionally, each person must know whether his or her own prin-

ciples in action create constructive or destructive outcomes. The commitment and the conviction to live a life of constructive influence is the grist of principled leadership. This requires a living discourse that unrelentingly examines personal and group motivations, costs, and outcomes. It is a sincere, life long, attempt to understand our own values and attitudes and how we embody them physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. It requires acknowledging,

sometimes joyfully, at times painfully, that our life is a dynamic process, continuously reinforced or undermined by individual and group actions and feelings. It demands a daily willingness to come face to face with the fact that, whether one is aware of it or not, one's life points in directions that others can see; and in their seeing, they are sometimes motivated to follow. This commitment and conviction demands that we be cognizant of many things including our own weaknesses. To paraphrase a well-known parable, each of us must own the lumber yard we have assembled within our own eyes lest we harshly judge the speck of sawdust we find in the eye of a partner or adversary.

### Final Notes

Some years ago, I attended my oldest son's graduation from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. The assembled ocean of families, the thousands of soon-to-be-graduates awaiting their degrees, and the thrill of the day held me in a trance. With that day's commencement speech, Frank H.T. Rhodes ended his 18-year career as one of Cornell's most beloved presidents. He eloquently took the candidates on a journey through their academic years. He asked each to recall the joys and trials that had formed their educational experiences in and around the town of Ithaca. Then he turned his attention to Homer's Ithaca, and the legendary adventure of Odysseus. He spoke of Odysseus' hardships in the Trojan Wars, followed by ten years of wandering and struggles against great adver-

saries: the Laistrygonians, the Cyclops and Poseidon; and of his longing to return to find Penelope, most precious to his heart. As he spoke of Odysseus' conviction, he related it to the events of the present day, saying:

"...conviction matters, because conviction guides knowledge into particular directions. It guides our search for knowledge, and it guides our application of knowledge. Ours is an age that lacks conviction. The ultimate sin for some is to declare one value superior to another or one activity more

President Rhodes' commencement speech was very moving. But something else more impressive struck me as he conferred degrees upon those who had spent so much time and money at Cornell. As the MBA Candidates from the university's Johnson School of Management stood in unison, Rhodes pronounced, "I now confer upon you the Degree of Masters in Business Administration, with all of its rights and all of its privileges..." then paused, and slowly added, "... and all of its responsibilities."

SOBAM, this bold undertaking will assist students, alumni and leaders from public and private sectors to continue their development with the essentials touched upon in this article. The CPL programs under design revolve around the blending of five themes.

1. Principled leaders must exhibit sound and effective interpersonal and person centered behavior.
2. The theories and concepts that underpin principled leadership must be integrated into each course design.
3. Learning must be grounded in practice and experience.
4. Principled leadership is best taught in a diverse environment from an interdisciplinary perspective.
5. Ethics, morality, a dedication to a higher service to others, and a spiritual dimension to one's life promote principled leadership.

To the MBA student who some months ago asked me, "Why should I study leadership?", I responded, "Even with my years of leadership training and experience, I'm not certain I can do justice to your question with a quick reply. But when you have your MBA degree in hand, and have adequately marketed yourself, ask the people who work for you that question. They will probably have the answer that you are seeking."

By the way, I feel the need to ask you... Do you know you are being followed?

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worthy than another. We flee from judgment because we confuse it with being judgmental. But without conviction, there can be no direction, and without direction, there can be no journey. Yogi Berra once said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it," but Seneca was closer to the truth: "If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is the right wind." There might still be movement, but from one unplanned destination to another. And so I hope Ithaca has given you convictions, for they are the truths you will live by as the journey proceeds. What compass of conviction guides your journey?"

Leadership is the influence one has with another. Principles are the underpinnings present during action. Some principles are constructive and others are not. The art is to know the difference and to act appropriately during the process of influence, which is occurring in this present moment. To integrate leadership and principles requires a commitment and a conviction that lasts a lifetime.

### CPL's Five Themes

Eight faculty from three USF schools and a current MBA candidate, assisting with research, have recently pooled talents to develop the USF Center For Principled Leadership. Housed within

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## University of San Francisco School of Business & Management

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*Kathy Kane, Professor SOBAM and Lance Giroux, Adjunct Faculty SOBAM*

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