

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LEADERSHIP

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“Around the globe humanity currently faces three extraordinary threats: the threat of annihilation as a result of nuclear accident or war, the threat of a worldwide plague or ecological catastrophe, and a deepening leadership crisis in most of our institutions....the leadership crisis is the most urgent and dangerous because it is insufficiently recognized and little understood” (6, 154).

With the Presidential election only two months away, the United States population is currently faced with the important task of choosing the candidates who will best lead the country into the 21st century. In addition to considering each candidate’s stance on current political issues, it is equally important for voting Americans to consider what type of leadership each candidate will provide. In order for Americans to properly choose their leader, they must be aware of what effective leadership is, how America’s leaders have affected their lives in the past, and what type of leadership will be most beneficial to their future.

Before analyzing what type of leadership will be most effective for this country in the 21st century, it is imperative to obtain both an understanding

of what leadership is and what types of leadership exist. As defined by the business journalist John Mariotti, "A leader must create a clear understanding of - and a healthy dissatisfaction with - the current reality, a shared vision of a desired future, and an environment in which people are constantly motivated to achieve that vision" (12, 108).

Howard Gardner, in his new book Leading Minds, defines a leader as "a person who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influences the behaviors, thoughts and/or feelings of a significant number of his fellow human beings" (6, 155).

A well known leadership author, Peter Senge, was quoted in the USA Today, "My experience in America is that we have the most curious, deep ambivalences towards hierarchial leadership. I don't encounter it anywhere else in the world as much as here. We really revel in knocking our leaders down and whittling them down to size and making them almost subhuman...The only way I can make sense of this is that we are a very immature kind of teenage culture" (13, 3B).

This concept of different levels of maturity of leadership has been addressed by best-selling authors Stephen Covey and Scott Peck. Covey addresses this concept in his book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

“The Seven Habits are a highly integrated approach to moving from dependence, in which I expect you to take care of me; to independence, in which I take responsibility for myself; and finally, to interdependence, in which we cooperate to succeed together” (21, 7-8).

In A World Waiting To Be Born, Scott Peck relates that, “Over the past fifty years, psychotherapists, management consultants and other students of group behavior have come to discern that when groups evolve, they tend to do so in certain somewhat predictable stages. This is not to say that all groups evolve in wisdom, maturity, effectiveness, or civility. Most, in fact, do not. But when they do, there is an order and lawfulness to the process. These stages are pseudocommunity, chaos, emptiness, and community.”

“Pseudocommunity is a stage of pretense. The communication is filled with generalizations. It is polite, unauthentic, boring, sterile, and unproductive. The next stage is chaos in which group members try to convert, heal, or fix each other or else argue for simplistic organizational norms. It is an irritable and irritation, thoughtless, rapid-fire, and often noisy win/lose type of process that gets nowhere. Often at this stage, the group will dissolve or regress back to pseudocommunity. But if the group progresses to the next stage, emptiness, they will spend a lot of time

working to empty themselves of everything that stands between them and community. Some of those human universals are prejudices, snap judgments, fixed expectations, the desire to convert, heal, or fix, the urge to win, the fear of looking like a fool, and the need to control.”

“After a prolonged period, the group will enter the desired level, community. At this stage the organization is finally ready to go to work - making decisions, planning, negotiating at a high level of efficiency and effectiveness” (19, 274-275).

So there are stages and levels of group behavior and leadership maturity. Often the group dynamics will progress to a higher level only to regress back to the more immature level. To better analyze the different types of leadership, it is important to consider the driving factor in the leader’s decisions. At one extreme, the personal desires of the leader may be the driving factor, while on the other hand, a leader may sacrifice his own desires for the wishes of his followers. The Italian writer, Niccolo Machiavelli, and the religious leader, Jesus Christ, serve as examples of “poles” in this broad scope of leadership.

Christ lead by example. He went so far as to give his life for his followers. He taught that it is better to give than to receive. This is also

known as the Beta approach to management - the one based on the feminine, cooperative use of power. This end of the pole has the leader as servant.

On the other hand, Machiavelli, in his famous literary work The Prince, presents an example of the Alpha management style - the one based on the masculine, authoritative use of power. The Prince is the leader and the only thing of importance is that he stay in power as he manipulates his followers to accomplish his ends. At this end of the pole, the leader and his survival are all important.

So in summary, how is leadership defined? Obviously, leadership means different things to different people. Regardless of the leadership style, it is absolutely necessary that an effective leader possess the essential elements of integrity, spirit, heart, understanding, and trust. Perhaps the best way to define leadership is as Warren Bennis, a noted author on the topic, so eloquently states, "Leadership is like beauty; it's hard to define, but you know it when you see it" (12, 108).

While the importance of leadership is apparent, the general population does not have a great deal of trust or respect for the leaders of this country. In the last presidential election approximately forty percent of the eligible

voters did not participate. (20, 644) Although there are many factors that keep voters away from the polls, one key factor is the loss of trust in their choice for leadership.

“Vice President Al Gore recently told an apocryphal story that perfectly captures the tenor of the times. A government pollster, clipboard in hand, asked people whether they are more satisfied with government today. Five percent say they are more satisfied, 10% say less, and 85% refuse to answer because they think the question is part of a government plot” (6, 155). How did the citizens of the greatest nation on earth become so distant from their leaders? Several examples from recent history explain the gradual reduction of trust in the leaders of the United States.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy was a major changing point in the relationship between political leaders and the American public. “The controversy over who killed President Kennedy has raged since the 1964 Warren Commission investigation concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing the president, while five years later a special House committee concluded that the president was probably assassinated as the result of a conspiracy” (18, 2246).

The events that support the theory of a conspiracy are highlighted in

the following summary. "One gunman fired three shots from a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository. One missed the motorcade, the other two hit the president. However, at almost the same instant that Kennedy was hit, so was Texas governor John Connally, sitting in front of him. If Connally was struck by a separate bullet, there had to be a second gunman and thus a conspiracy. For one bullet to pass through Kennedy's neck, zigzag through the car, hit Connally in the back, exit the front of his chest, smash through his right wrist, and come to rest in his left thigh, it had to change course several times. It had to be a 'magic' bullet."

"Although autopsy notes were destroyed almost immediately after Kennedy's body was first examined, doctors and nurses testified to the Warren Commission that they saw an exit-type wound in the back of the president's head, which could have only been caused by a gunman shooting from the front of the motorcade. This testimony ties in with a frame from the famous film, shot by amateur cameraman Abraham Zapruder, which shows the president's head snapping backwards, as though being hit from the front, and at least a half dozen serious witnesses say they heard a shot coming from the grassy knoll ahead of the motorcade."

"Furthermore, the Zapruder film indicates that all the shots were fired

in less than eight seconds, however Oswald's bolt-action rifle, fitted with a telescopic sight, was not a precision, fast-action weapon. Evidence indicates that whoever fired the rifle that day was an expert, as most of the crack snipers brought in by the Pentagon have failed to reproduce the feat. However, in the U.S. Marines, Oswald was remembered as a poor shot, and friends who hunted with him say he was mediocre" (16, 44).

Even today, the release of the information related to the assassination of President Kennedy is controlled by a five-member commission of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee (18, 2246). So it is no surprise that "to this day, 80% of the American public believes that Lee Harvey Oswald was part of a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy, based on the contradicting facts surrounding the case" (16, 44). The truth has been kept from the American public. Unfortunately, something in addition to the truth was lost during this time. The American people began to suspect and then know that their leaders just were not telling them the truth.

"Americans have rudely discovered that they had been taught what the writer Thomas Powers has called a 'child's history' of their government. And as psychologists know, when children discover vital flaws in their parents for the first time, they often begin searching frantically for other imperfections"

(17, 60).

It did not take long for the public to find “imperfections” in the handling of Vietnam. Once again, the American people were misled. Almost to the end, our leaders reported that victory was at hand. Finally, when the terrible experience was over, approximately 50,000 Americans had lost their lives and the greatest nation on earth had lost a war.

Robert McNamara wrote the following in his book, In Retrospect: “I want to put Vietnam in context. We of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations who participated in the decisions on Vietnam acted according to what we thought were the principles and tradition of this nation. We made our decisions in light of the values. Yet we were wrong, terribly wrong. We owe it to future generations to explain why. I truly believe that we made an error not of values and intentions, but of judgment and capabilities. I say this warily, since I know that if my comments appear to justify or rationalize what I and others did, they will lack creditability and only increase people’s cynicism. It is cynicism that makes Americans reluctant to support their leaders in the actions necessary to confront and solve our problems at home and abroad” (8, xx).

After the Johnson administration, Richard Nixon in the early 1970's

“concealed secret ventures in Southeast Asia and lied about his own obstruction of justice over Watergate. In 1976, when the U.S. Senate’s Church Committee revealed that the CIA had, among other plots, asked the Chicago Mafia boss Sam Giancana to rub out Fidel Castro, Gerald Ford warned that the name of every president since Harry Truman could be blackened. In the 1980's and 1990's, Ronald Reagan and George Bush dissembled about the Irancontra affair” (17, 60).

These examples illustrate the general disregard of the leader for his followers. This led to a general decline in the followers respect and trust. Obviously, all of these events were tragedies, but even worse was the way the American people were deceived by their leaders. Instead of being open and honest with the public, the leadership manipulated, destroyed and altered information.

What type of leadership do we need for the future? First and foremost, the leadership must be honest and worthy of trust. As has been so thoroughly detailed already in this paper, this factor is a must. Next, people need to have realistic expectations of their leader. “We must come to expect a leader, not a caterer; a real person, not a superman; a spiritual director, not a Big Daddy” (19, 315). Finally, leaders are needed who will facilitate

participation and community. The concept of community involves “being together with both individual authenticity and interpersonal harmony so that people become able to function with a collective energy even greater than the sum of their individual energies” (15, 272). Leaders of the future will not be expected to have all the answers, but rather will identify problems and facilitate solutions through others.

Reaching a new level of leadership will not be easy. As a society, America is mired at Covey’s second level of maturity, independence. But the business world has offered hope that the American society will move to the higher level, interdependence. Over the last twenty years, the business world has gained a new appreciation for the “group think process” better known as teamwork. While American’s trust in their leaders was declining, the Asian concept of “doing business” was flourishing in the world economy. In contrast to American culture which has always had a strong appreciation for the individual, the Asian culture is centered on the betterment of the group. In an attempt to become more competitive, American firms have adopted and copied Asian management styles. Now that the Asian group centered approach has successfully permeated the American business culture, the same principles may have the potential of solving our social and

political problems. This does not imply that the United States will ever totally adopt the Asian management style, but there are elements that if blended with our strong individualism could result in better solutions and perhaps a higher level of leadership.

A great deal is known about the requirements for successful group leadership, but current leaders and followers lack significant training and discipline to reach the higher levels necessary to address the issues and arrive at consensual solutions. Much of this training will start at the home, school, work, and the local community. Once it is practiced and understood at this level, it will then be demanded at higher levels of leadership.

Scott Peck has addressed the type of training that is required of our future leaders in his book, A World Waiting To Be Born. He has created a educational foundation called The Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE). "The purpose of this foundation is to teach the principles of community - that is, the rules for healthy and civil communication in groups" (15, 277).

FCE's mission statement is "to encourage people, in a fragmented world, to discover the ways of being together. Living, learning, and teaching principles of community, FCE will serve as a catalyst for individuals, groups,

and organizations to: communicate with authenticity, deal with difficult issues, bridge differences with integrity, and relate with love and respect” (15, 278).

Why aspire to this new level of leadership? As these higher skills are developed, solutions to significant problems that face not only the United States but the entire world will become more apparent. As long as the current leadership mode remains unchanged, the root causes of problems will not be addressed and will continue to lower society’s standard of living.

The concept of leadership is a very complex and dynamic topic. Likewise, it is extremely important and a great deal has been learned over the last fifty years. This paper has addressed a few of the critical elements that make up the concept of leadership. Hopefully, these elements will be helpful in facilitating your thought process as each of you do in fact select our leaders that will guide us into the 21st century.

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