

DECANAL LEADERSHIP: MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS

*E. Thomas Sullivan**

DEANING: what is it really? It is about leadership and management. That much we know. Each of these responsibilities has been defined in various ways. John W. Gardner, for instance, said that “leadership is a performing art.” Howard Haas observed that leadership really “is an attitude and a state of mind.” Sarah Weddington noted that “leadership is the ability to impact the lives of others.” Further, Robert Greenleaf stated that a leader is one who aspires to serve others.

Because a law school’s constituencies are so varied, how one manages and leads must, by definition, be multifaceted. If one attempts to describe the characteristics of leadership, many descriptions emerge. A leader must be visionary and have the ability to communicate the vision and aspirations for the institution. The leader must be confident and decisive, but also a good listener. The leader must have integrity and be seen by others to be honest and trustworthy, and one who creates a climate of trust. The leader needs to be persistent, not impatient. The leader also must have drive, energy, and enthusiasm for the job, as well as being a long-term strategic thinker who is also setting and reaching new goals. The usual should not define the leader’s agenda or calendar. One must look beyond the routine of the day. Leaders produce change through sound judgment and a consensus-style of community building.

As Woodrow Wilson said, “the ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people.” To build coalitions, the leader must consult frequently and listen carefully. Equally important is a positive attitude that helps facilitate confidence in and reliability of the leader. Overall, the leader must be able to articulate and communicate a plan for change and harmony that will be persuasive and appreciated by a large number of the constituent group.

There are, of course, major differences between leading and managing. In contrast to the characteristics of leadership described above, management requires organizing, planning, motivating, economizing, and careful attention to detail. A manager must function at the micro level, while the leader generally should reserve the majority of his or her time to the macro level of planning. This can be accomplished by selecting well an administrative team and by delegating some decision-making to one’s administrative colleagues. Selective delegation can ensure an effective balance between leading and managing.

* Dean and William S. Pattee Professor of Law, University of Minnesota Law School. The author has been influenced by and has drawn from for this essay the research and scholarship of John W. Gardner, Daniel Goleman, Howard Gardner, James MacGregor Burns, Robert K. Greenleaf, and Stephen R. Covey. For a more thorough review of the thoughts sketched here, see generally JAMES MACGREGOR BURNS, *LEADERSHIP* (1st ed. 1978); STEPHEN R. COVEY, *THE HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE* (1989); HOWARD GARDNER, *LEADING MINDS* (1995); JOHN W. GARDNER, *LEADERSHIP PAPERS: THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP, THE TASK OF LEADERSHIP, THE HEART OF THE MATTER, LEADERSHIP AND POWER* (1986); DANIEL GOLEMAN, *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE* (1995); and ROBERT K. GREENLEAF, *THE POWER OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP* (1998). Footnotes are available on request from the author. The author would like to thank Robert Bruininks and Gene Borgida for their thoughtful comments.

To be effective and to be seen as effective, a law school dean must strive to be good at both leading and managing. With both, the perception by the constituent group is as important as is the reality of the situation. The final judgment on the success of the dean also will depend on the institutional context, including the expectations of the constituents as seen through the institution's traditions and culture.

Importantly, the common thread that connects the two characteristics—the skill to manage and to lead—of a successful dean is how the dean “manages relationships.” With multiple constituencies, how the dean interacts and manages the relationship among and between the often-conflicting goals of each constituent group is the key to success.

As Daniel Goleman has written so well, sheer intelligence or brilliance does not define or predict success at leading or managing. Rather, “emotional intelligence” is the crucial element. This includes the dean's personality, style, temperament, persistence, empathy, social deftness, good listening skills and understanding of human emotions.

Being smart about other people's strengths, weaknesses, needs, temperaments, motivations, desires, and goals is the literacy of managing relationships in a positive, productive way. Understanding this discernment of interpersonal skills and the nature of human conduct transcends all of a dean's talents and functions and indeed the dean's competencies to lead, to manage, and to motivate others toward shared goals. Decanal leadership, then, is defined by the process through which the dean cultivates and manages relationships with all the relevant constituencies.