

LEADERSHIP

*Don LeDuc**

BEFORE you read further, I want you to make a list of great leaders. Then, think about the qualities that led to their selection. After you've read this, review your list and your thoughts. It's quite a compelling exercise.

To prepare for this assignment, I read a number of the earlier articles in the *Symposium* series. They contain wisdom, insight, and good advice about the many roles, responsibilities, and pitfalls of being a dean. Their content is of great value to those who are or think they might like to be deans.

But I was surprised that few were about the nature of leadership itself. Above all else, the Dean is the leader at nearly all law schools. Certainly, the Dean should be, although because most law schools are in university structures, there are inherent limitations on decanal discretion that constrain the Dean's ability to lead effectively.

Given the many excellent *Symposium* essays that set forth various aspects of the Dean as academic leader, I thought a more abstract treatment of leadership might provide a different perspective. My premise is that leadership in legal education ought to be pretty much the same as leadership in any other context. I address leadership as a concept, and I comment based upon what I have read, experienced, and observed in others. I've tried to distill what I believe are the common and essential characteristics of good leaders and good leadership.

So much has been written about leadership that nearly everything that might be said about it has been said. Worse, when one thinks about the subject, what results is mostly a string of clichés, statements of the obvious, and platitudes, including what I write here. My justification for adding to the pile is that good leadership consists of simple principles that are worth repeating.

Leadership has numerous meanings and contexts, but I'm limiting my submission to the essence of leadership. I'm not going to talk about management, administration, talent, position, rank, or title.

A person can be a great leader without having great management or administrative experience or skills. On the other hand, good managers and administrators are not necessarily going to be good leaders, although they frequently are.

A person can be a leader because of talent in a particular line of endeavor—a leader in this or that field—usually meaning that the person is the best or one of the best among peers. A person can have great talent and not be a good leader. Conversely, a person with little or no talent can be a great leader. Consider the failings of baseball greats as managers or the success of Casey Stengel, a middling ballplayer who was among the greatest managers.

Nor am I concerned with leadership that exists solely because of position, rank, or title, such as holding elective office, being king, or having seniority status.

* President and Dean, Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

History is replete with examples of poor leaders in high positions in government, business, and politics.

My concept is that good leadership involves the ability to institute a cohesive effort by a significant number of others to accomplish a worthy goal. That means that the leader identifies the objective, inspires the effort, and sees it through to success, but does not mean that the leader must personally organize the effort, manage it, or control the details.

We know good leadership when we see it, even if we can't really describe it. Good leadership is intangible. Leadership can be learned, but it cannot be taught. Some are born leaders (a view not universally shared), others become good leaders through observation, experience, effort, and opportunity.

No two leaders are alike and what works to make one person a great leader may not work at all for another. There is no leadership mold into which we pour people to make them into leaders.

For most of us, the examples of good leaders are found among presidents, generals, public figures, and coaches. This is mainly because these are the leaders we learn about in history books, the media, and in popular culture. As this article has evolved, I've brought to mind many leaders either to use as examples from which to generalize or to test my premises. While our national orientation is to western civilization, some leaders from other parts of the world serve as examples for us.

So, here are the attributes that I associate with good leadership. Most great leaders will have these characteristics in some combination, although each leader will possess them to a greater or lesser degree.

Vision

A great leader doesn't just see the end, but defines the end. Leaders define the mission, establish the objectives, and set the agenda. They are goal-oriented and have a game plan. In a world beset with second-guessers, hindsight-blessed pundits, and Monday morning quarterbacks, they have foresight and the ability to see over the horizon.

Generally they articulate their vision well. Consider this mission statement: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and return him safely to the earth." John F. Kennedy, Special Message to Congress, May 25, 1961. Or the riveting vision in these words: "I have a dream . . . that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Martin Luther King, Speech at Lincoln Memorial, August 28, 1963. Sometimes the vision is found in deeds alone. For America, the vision of President Thomas Jefferson foreseeing what the Louisiana Purchase would do to transform his new country represents perhaps the nation's single most important act of leadership.

Focus

Great leaders keep their organizations focused on the mission and objectives. They sort the wheat from the chaff. They accept or reject that which helps or hurts the effort to fulfill the mission. Like great hurdlers, they see the finish line, not the barriers on the track, which they know are obstacles that will separate them from their competitors. They do not allow themselves to lose sight of the mission or to be diverted by criticism or objections. Lincoln rallied troops in the Civil War by saying: "Again I admonish you not to be turned from your stern purpose of defending your beloved country and its free institutions by any arguments urged by ambitious and designing men, but stand fast to the Union and the old flag." Abraham Lincoln, Speech to the 148th Ohio Regiment, August 31, 1864.

Coach Vince Lombardi, who spoke often about leadership said, "Success demands singleness of purpose." General George Patton's relentless pursuit of his objective in two European campaigns demonstrated several important leadership qualities, while providing a counterpoint about judgment and perspective.

Willpower

Great leaders have great will. They insist on the mission. They stick to it. They demand that others do the same. They are not deterred by nay-sayers and not deflected by setbacks. They will not accept defeat. They have the ability not to give in and to inspire others to do the same. "We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender." Winston Churchill, speech to the House of Commons about Dunkirk, June 4, 1940. Lincoln wrote this: "The fight must go on. The cause of liberty must not be surrendered at the end of *one* or even one *hundred* defeats." Letter to Henry Asbury, November 1858.

At the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy's inaugural speech on January 20, 1961 announced the national will: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty." This sense of will was summarized by a speech made by Churchill at his old school: "Never give in—never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy." Winston Churchill at Harrow, October 29 1941

In addition to the demonstration of willpower in speech, we have examples of willpower in leadership in the deeds and conduct of great leaders: General George Washington's leadership of the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, Abraham Lincoln's leadership of the Union during the Civil War, Winston Churchill's leadership of Great Britain in the Second World War, MacArthur's leadership in the battle for the Pacific, Mohandas Gandhi's leadership to end British rule of India, and Martin Luther King's leadership of the civil rights movement.

Courage

All great leaders have great courage, whether moral or physical. They are willing to engage in self-sacrifice. They take risks. They are willing to decide and move on. They face the odds. They are willing to defy convention, to absorb the criticism, and to venture where others will not go.

“Arm yourselves, and be ye men of valour, and be in readiness for the conflict; for it is better for us to perish in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar ” Winston Churchill in a broadcast on May 19 1940, after becoming prime minister.

Some of our great leaders possessed great physical courage in addition to their moral courage. Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Frederick Douglass, and Gandhi are but a few And this is probably the quality of Jesus Christ that is least recognized and discussed.

Integrity

People follow great leaders because they trust them. Great leaders operate from simple principles of right and wrong. They are forthright, honest, and can be relied upon to mean what they say and say what they mean. That is why we know of President Lincoln as “Honest Abe,” why the legends grew up around George Washington, and why Gandhi was the most trusted leader of the post-World War II era.

Great leaders know when to speak the truth in frank and direct terms: “Indeed I do not think we should be justified in using any but the more somber tones and colours while our people, our Empire, and indeed the whole English-speaking world are passing through a dark and deadly valley ” Churchill in the House of Commons, January 22, 1941.

Perspective

Great leaders see the big picture. They have insight. They see how things fit together. They don’t dwell on details. They have a good sense of self and they know their own limitations, as Harry Callahan revealed as a vital necessity in the film *Dirty Harry* Good leaders are realistic, but relentlessly positive. Leaders tend to have a good sense of humor. They also tend to see analogies. Perhaps the greatest strength of President Ronald Reagan was his perspective and ability to see what was truly important. Gandhi had the ability to see all points of view, while retaining his integrity, focus, and will.

Judgment

Great leaders have great judgment. They know when to apply the throttle and when to apply the brakes. They know when to make course corrections, when to back away, and when to attack. They are not only good at making decisions, they also know when not to make decisions. They have good timing. They know what can be done and what cannot be done at any particular point in time. Think of the

timing of President Lincoln with the emancipation of slaves and of his difficulty in dealing with the dilatory General McLellan, when removal of McLellan was warranted in the military context, but not in the political. Consider General Eisenhower's decisions regarding the timing and location of the invasion of Normandy Or President Kennedy's decision to blockade Cuba during the Cuban missile crisis.

Inventiveness

Great leaders are willing to try new things, to create solutions, to find alternatives, to be flexible. They adjust their tactics to fit conditions as they implement the strategy This was perhaps the strongest attribute of Franklin Roosevelt, first in leading the nation out of the depression and then through World War II.

Lincoln recognized the need to be inventive: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise—with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew We must dissent(h)rall ourselves, and then we shall save our country " Message to Congress, December 1, 1962.

Stamina

Great leaders are willing to work hard, pick themselves up and get back in the race, to eschew the short-term gain for the long-term victory They outwork their competitors. This is the mirror image of willpower in many respects. Much of what is said regarding the other attributes could be recast here. Washington and the battle plan for the Revolution (which was also very inventive) epitomize stamina as both a tactic and attribute of leadership. Gandhi's non-violent leadership in India and Martin Luther King's role in the civil rights movement were both founded on the premise of stamina.

Perhaps the greatest speech ever given by a political leader had stamina and willpower as its essence: "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, November 19 1863.

Teamness

This required a new word. I don't mean team play Great leaders are more than just team players, although most were team players before they became leaders. I mean more the sense of team. They know that teams are important and that teams work better than individuals in achieving big things. Yet they know that teams must

have a leader, one who is capable of defining roles, deciding who plays what position, and who sits on the bench.

They can get the most from the players on the team. They tend to see the strengths of people, not the weaknesses, to have high standards and draw others to those standards. Review the speeches I've quoted from and see how much these were designed to rally the members of the team.

Good leaders do not hold grudges, but do not forgive too readily. Leaders are good listeners. They listen and they accept the views of others. But they do so in context and what they accept and use they do because it advances the mission.

"A leader must identify himself with the group, must back up the group, even at the risk of displeasing superiors. He must believe that the group wants from him a sense of approval. If this feeling prevails, production, discipline, morale will be high, and in return, you can demand the cooperation to promote the goals of the company." Coach Vincent Lombardi.

So now apply this list of attributes to the leaders you chose at the outset. Or review historical figures, your own personal heroes, your current and former bosses, or people you know. You've now seen the list of individuals and attributes that I selected. I did the same with others—Presidents Nixon, Clinton, and Carter, for instance. I also tried this out on political leaders like Colin Powell, John McCain, and Margaret Thatcher. Several of Michigan's former governor's, G. Mennen Williams, George Romney, William Milliken, and John Engler, held up quite well when these criteria were applied to them.

One obvious limitation is that we tend to focus on good leaders who won, not those who lost. Being a good leader does not guarantee success. Another problem is that we simply don't know enough about many individual leaders either to analyze their primary attributes or to apply the criteria we select as important to them. My list is simply my personal view of what characterizes good leadership and who the good examples are. Yours will differ.

I suggest that the criteria can be applied to academic leaders, including deans and presidents.