

THREE ROLE MODELS OF LEADERSHIP FOR THE LAW SCHOOL DEAN

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MINE was not the traditional path to a deanship. I had been teaching for five years, and I was enjoying it thoroughly. I had no desire to go to the “dark side” of administration. I was not the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and I had run nothing, except for a small summer-abroad program. I admired good leadership, but I never expected to become a leader.

And then I got the phone call. The provost asked me to meet with him and the president. They wanted me to assume the role of interim dean. In my mind, I immediately responded, “No way.” I already had the perfect job—a flexible schedule, lots of student interaction, and time to write. Why trade it for the relentless demands of administration? But I agreed to serve as interim dean on a short-term basis.

“Short-term” ultimately turned into sixteen years. I served one year as interim dean and another fifteen years as dean before returning to the full-time teaching faculty last year. I eagerly sought guidance about good leadership in my role as dean because I was initially uncertain in assuming the deanship and, in part, because I realized throughout my sixteen years as dean how much I needed to learn. I looked for principles by which to lead and—even more—role models who could show me how to lead.

In this short Essay, I briefly describe three of the role models I admire most and what they taught me about leadership. Each embodies a trait I believe is crucial to great leadership, including decanal leadership.

I. ANWAR SADAT: VISION

My first role model is Anwar Sadat, former president of Egypt. To me, Sadat embodied vision. Vision is the ability to perceive, through sharp foresight, something not visible to most people. Vision is different than sight. We all see what is immediately before us. But it is critical for the leader to look past what is there—to what often seems inevitable—to see new possibilities.

If any problem seemed inevitable in the 1960s and 1970s, it was armed conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, particularly Egypt. Sadat came to power as vice president under President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1964. He became president himself in 1970. During this time, war was a constant reality for Egypt. In 1967 and 1973, Israel and Egypt engaged in armed conflict, and the

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threat of war was always present. In addition, Sadat inherited a country with a deteriorating economy. Tensions were great between rich and poor. Egypt faced riots, strikes, and attacks by one socio-economic class against another.

But Sadat envisioned a different reality, and he knew peace with Israel was critical to bring about that reality. In 1977, he announced that he would go anywhere in the world to negotiate peace with Israel. He would go before Israel's Knesset if that is what it took. Israel responded by inviting Sadat to address the Knesset, and Sadat fulfilled his promise.

Few had Sadat's sense of vision. In fact, almost everyone in the Middle East opposed his visit. Many Israelis saw the visit as a cover to conceal Egypt's true intentions to launch a new war. Many Arabs saw Sadat as a man who was selling out to the infidel in the middle of a war. His life was threatened. Still, he went. Sadat knew he was envisioning something grand and unique. In his Knesset address, Sadat said:

Why don't we stand together with the courage of men and the boldness of heroes who dedicate themselves to a sublime aim? Why don't we stand together with the same courage and daring to erect a huge edifice of peace? An edifice that builds and does not destroy. An edifice that serves as a beacon for generations to come with the human message for construction, development and the dignity of man.¹

The result of Sadat's vision we all know. In 1979, Sadat and Israel Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed an historic peace agreement. The two later received the Nobel Peace Prize. Sadly, the world lost one of its great leaders when Sadat was assassinated in 1981.

Vision is critical for any leader, including a law school dean. It is easy to see present circumstances as inevitable or to plan for routine progress. True success comes by embracing—and communicating—a bigger vision. Vision motivates people to act. It is not position, or authority, or words. It is vision.

A dean's vision can be immensely bolstered from the people around them. At Regent, we had real success at working together as faculty and administration to set a vision for the future. Early during my deanship, we worked together to do meaningful strategic planning. From previous experience, I was skeptical of the whole strategic planning process. I feared consuming countless hours of time to create a document that would never be seen or used again. We did work numerous hours, but the product of that hard work guided our decision making. It set a vision—a high one—that motivated all of us. The goals we set and concrete plans we laid to carry out those goals helped us raise both admission standards and bar passage rates.

The last years of my deanship took place during the recent crisis in legal education. Job placement and law school applications dropped dramatically. Vision was again desperately needed. And again, through a team effort, we devised a plan to improve our J.D. program, to meet the demands of a fast-changing market, and to diversify our program offerings—ultimately broadening

1. President Anwar Sadat, Address to the Israeli Knesset (Nov. 20, 1977), <http://www.ibiblio.org/sullivan/docs/Knesset-speech.html>.

our reach. We brought our training closer to the practice of law, including launching a Center for Ethical Formation and an apprenticeship program. We offered J.D. students flexible and cost-effective options for law school attendance, such as a two-year accelerated program and several part-time options. We also built a highly successful Master of Arts in Law program, taught both on campus and online, that enabled us to reach many more students than we had previously.

Creating a vision is crucial, but communicating that vision—often—is just as important. As dean, I learned that I needed to communicate vision not just to the faculty, but also to students, staff, alumni, and friends. One of the best staff meetings I have ever conducted was one where I laid out in broad strokes what our strategic plan was and how each department's work furthered that plan. I wanted every staff member, no matter their task, to see the tremendous value of the work they did and how it furthered the school's goals.

At first, I didn't recognize how much students needed to hear about the vision. After all, they are concerned about classes, exams, and finding a job. But I came to realize how excited students were to learn about the school's vision—especially about the progress we were making toward reaching our goals on things such as bar passage and equipping students with skills to be more practice-ready. So, I began sharing the school's vision on all kinds of occasions and not just at town meetings or informal meetings with student leaders. I communicated the vision when I taught. Like most deans, I traveled a lot. That meant some cancelled and rescheduled classes, which can be frustrating for students. It helped immensely when I returned to share with my class how the contacts I made and the things I was doing would positively impact them and the future of the school.

In response to my sharing the vision, I found students eager to offer their time and talents to further that vision. And so, I talked about the vision all of the time. I spoke about it with the faculty. But I also shared the vision with students, staff, alumni, friends—anybody who would listen. Developing and sharing the vision with others was one of the most critical—and best—parts of the job.

II. WILLIAM WILBERFORCE: ENDURANCE

Dreaming is fun. But can you maintain a vision when it is slow to achieve or when the vision is under attack? I have concluded that vision must be paired with something else to be successful: Endurance. To endure is to persevere, despite hardship, pain, or fatigue. The embodiment of endurance for me is William Wilberforce. Wilberforce was elected to the British House of Commons in 1780 at age 21. By 1787, he was gripped with a vision that would shape the rest of his life—and ultimately the life of his nation—ending the slave trade.²

Banning the trade of human beings sounds obvious to us today. However, it certainly was not in eighteenth-century Britain when the slave trade was a significant part of the British economy. Fifty thousand slaves were transported

2. JOHN PIPER, *THE ROOTS OF ENDURANCE* 129 (2002).

each year from Africa to the Americas.³ The slave trade was the main link between Britain and its colonial holdings in the West Indies. The Royal Navy protected the slave trade through its control of the oceans.

Year after year, Wilberforce fought for legislation that would ban the slave trade. Year after year, he was rebuffed. He faced serious opposition from people in and out of Parliament who benefited from the slave trade, and they were many and powerful. They accused him of attempting to destroy the British economy. He was told that he cared for the slaves at the expense of the “wage slaves” of his own nation.⁴ Like Anwar Sadat, Wilberforce’s life was threatened many times.⁵

But Wilberforce persevered. After each defeat, he rose to fight once more. He suffered defeat for nineteen years. But finally, in 1807, the twentieth year of his campaign, the British parliament voted to abolish the slave trade. He lived just long enough to see slavery itself abolished throughout the Empire three days before his death in 1833.⁶

Wilberforce was a man with a strong moral vision. He could see beyond the present political and economic realities of his time to a world where all human beings would be treated with dignity. But it took more than having a vision to see it accomplished. It took endurance.

Endurance is vital for any leader today. Of course, deans, aren’t faced with issues in leading their schools as grave as those facing Wilberforce. But they do face obstacles—and at times opposition—to the fulfillment of vision. Some obstacles come from the nature of vision itself. If a vision truly calls for a school to achieve new and lofty goals, its achievement should not come easy. It should command all the energy and talents of the law school faculty, administration, staff, and students.

More difficult is the opposition that comes from others. There may be times when a faculty or staff member has their own agenda that doesn’t fit the vision shared by the dean and faculty as a whole. The challenge is to bring that faculty or staff member along, make sure that he or she is heard, but not let progress become derailed. The dean must stand firm and pursue the school’s vision.

Occasionally, someone from within or without seeks to undermine the dean or the vision. I grew the most as a person and a leader during times of opposition. I have found that sometimes creative leadership and good communication can diffuse a difficult situation. But sometimes it can’t. The dean must not become discouraged or distracted. He or she must stand firm and endure. Even during times of attack or political maneuvering, it is critical to act and speak with integrity—and to simply endure.

3. ERIC METAXAS, AMAZING GRACE 153 (2007).

4. PIPER, *supra* note 2, at 139.

5. METAXAS, *supra* note 3, at 156.

6. *Id.* at 274.

III. JOHN WINTHROP: A HEART TO SERVE

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”⁷ He knew that people seek leadership with many motives. Those motives become apparent when a leader assumes power.

I believe that the appropriate purpose for leadership is not to maintain power or position; it is to serve others. Jesus once noted that leaders are tempted to lord power over others or wield arbitrary authority. But those aren’t true leaders. “[W]hoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁸

John Winthrop is the great model to me of servant leadership. Winthrop was a lawyer who, in 1630, led three thousand Puritans from England to Massachusetts. They sought religious freedom and the opportunity to build a model community displaying Christian love—a “city on a hill,” as he called it.⁹

Winthrop’s group was not the first to arrive in Massachusetts. Almost three hundred others preceded them in the two previous years, but only eighty-five remained when Winthrop and the others arrived. Eighty people died; the rest had gone back to England. The eighty-five left were gaunt, exhausted, and apathetic. Many in Winthrop’s group took a look at the survivors and returned home on the same ships that had brought them.¹⁰

Personal tragedy struck Winthrop almost immediately. Within days of arrival, his son drowned. Despite his pain, Winthrop worked tirelessly to keep the group together. They had arrived too late to plant crops, which made the first winter very difficult. Many did not bring enough provisions. The people suffered malnutrition, freezing temperatures, and scurvy. Food became scarce and prices soared. Yet Winthrop shared what he had. He had given his last bit of meal to a starving neighbor when a relief ship showed up in February.¹¹ Two hundred men and women died that winter. Another two hundred went home that spring. It was Winthrop, giving all that he had, who held the group together.

It wasn’t just that first winter. Winthrop gave personally all of his life to see the colony succeed. In 1634, Winthrop stepped down as governor of the colony. His successor decided to audit the finances to determine whether Winthrop had used colony funds for his own benefit. The audit revealed, instead, that Winthrop had personally subsidized the colony out of his own personal finances.¹² Indeed, for many of the nineteen years as governor, he refused to take

7. Kamri Michael, ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENTIAL LIBR. FOUND., <http://www.alplm.org/272viewessay.aspx?id=775> (last visited Aug. 3, 2016).

8. Mark 10:43-45 (English Standard Version).

9. Jeffrey A. Brauch, *John Winthrop: Lawyer as Model of Christian Charity*, 11 REGENT UNIV. L. REV. 343, 343 (1998).

10. *Id.* at 346.

11. SAMUEL E. MORISON, BUILDERS OF THE BAY COLONY 82 (1958).

12. EDMUND S. MORGAN, THE PURITAN DILEMMA 15-16 (1st ed. 1958).

a salary. He was described as “almost recklessly charitable.”¹³ The first historian of Massachusetts, William Hubbard, said this about Winthrop: “A worthy gentleman, who had done good in Israel, having spent not only his whole estate ... but his bodily strength and life, in the service of the country; not sparing, but always as the burning torch, spending”¹⁴

There are temptations to turn leadership into a vehicle to personally benefit the leader. It is tempting for a dean to protect his or her position at whatever cost. But great deans serve others. They listen to students, faculty, and staff members, putting the needs of others above their own. They make hard, and not simply politically expedient, decisions. They care about people; they do not use them.

One of the most challenging and fun parts of the dean’s job is the number of constituencies with whom he or she must work. Deans relate directly to university administration, law school faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, friends, bar associations, and many others. As dean, I took stock each May of how well I was serving these constituencies. Was I giving my best to the students? Were they getting what we promised in our promotional materials? Was I helping faculty members to best use their talents and reach their potential? It was a challenging review, and a painful one at times, as I realized how far short I fell of my own goals. But it helped keep me accountable to the principle of servant leadership.

I truly believe a servant leader will change a school. A dean can rule by power or fear for a while. But the only leadership with continuity and a basis to last is servant leadership—leadership that trusts others, gives authority to others, and exists for the good of others.

CONCLUSION

When first offered the job as interim dean, I didn’t want it. More than that, I felt ill equipped—a feeling that frequently occurred over the succeeding sixteen years. But I am thankful for good role models within the academy who talked about and demonstrated leadership.¹⁵ I also am thankful for the great men and women, of all kinds, who have modeled great leadership throughout history. They were invaluable to me as I sought to learn and lead myself—and still learn and lead today.

13. MORISON, *supra* note 11, at 101.

14. *Id.* at 104.

15. See, e.g., R. Lawrence Dessem, *Top 10 Reasons to Be a Law School Dean*, 33 U. TOL. L. REV. 19 (2001); Robert H. Jerry II, *Reflections on Leadership*, 38 U. TOL. L. REV. 539 (2007).