

Leadership

Nigel Atkin



Leadership: Some Other Parts of the Equation

In history a leader has been a person who rules, guides, or inspires others. Leadership then is judged on outcomes, by those who write history by looking at the intentions of the leader.

Leadership in its traditional base form “influences the behaviour of another person” and leaders “generally require followers.”

Leadership often falls into individual subjective values, such as who is a “good” leader. What gifts, attributes, and capacities make a person a good leader? This question is similar to a question posed in ethics class: whose ethics are we talking about? Whose values are we talking about?

Some publishing houses today are making good returns from this discussion. Books abound. Whose leadership do we admire? Whose leadership do we want to follow? Who weathered disaster, stepped to the plate, did his or her job, and was summarily and universally praised?

There are universities educating and training people in leadership and offering credentials in it. Can leadership be certified? Will people prefer to follow a leader who has been certified?

I recall in history, a number of bright, good-hearted young men who

trained to be leaders and who went to Vietnam as university-educated second lieutenants. Rumour has it that for various reasons, on average, they lasted less than 20 seconds in actual combat. It was not uncommon in Vietnam, and in previous wars, for followers to remove their leaders for incompetence.

Some leaders are born to leadership, others are forged by the forces that engulf their society.

In more recent history, mayors in two great North American cities have faced crisis, in global transparency, with good intentions. History will judge the mayor from New York City (Twin Towers) in a different light than the mayor from Toronto (SARS).

In most cultures, leaders are leaders because they know what they’re doing. And when their gifts are required, they have done their part. The former Mayor of New York, now a hero, was nurtured in the everyday crisis of leading New York and when a bigger crisis, the attack, came, he handled it well, was at the right places, said the right things, and the world watched him do his job.

The Mayor of Toronto, on the other hand, is suffering from international glare and is, unfortunately, the brunt of ridicule for not knowing the global government structure for disease control. WHO? he asked? He might have the position of Mayor, but not the competence required for a “world class” city.

Leaders do what they do best. Some are called, some aren’t. Some leaders are born to leadership, others are forged by the forces that engulf their society. We have seen the sinking fortunes of a New York Mayor reverse in the crisis of events. We saw it in Churchill and others in history, as well.

In some aboriginal societies, leaders were raised from birth to be Chief, the one who looks after the best interests of the community. From earliest input and training, that person was destined to lead, as others were chosen and trained to carry out other functions such as speaker, fireman, protector. In each capacity, that person was a leader, but the Chief was Chief.

As well, looking at who was raised to be a king or a political, corporate, or religious leader, you can also identify some individuals marked from birth for leadership. In the acting profession, in some corporations, in royal families, and in government, you can also see leaders being groomed generation to generation.

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What's in a Name?

“A professional penman, a copyist, a scribe . . . a Notary.” Thus the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes a Scrivener, the craftsman charged with ensuring that the written affairs of others flow smoothly, seamlessly, and accurately. Where a Scrivener must record the files accurately, it's the Notary whose Seal is bond.

Thus we chose *The Scrivener* as the name of our magazine: to celebrate the Notary's role in drafting, communicating, authenticating, and getting the facts straight. We strive to publish articles about points of law and the Notary profession for the education and enjoyment of our members, allied professionals, and the public.

Soccer or American Football

Another way to view leadership today is to look at games.

In soccer, whoever has the ball is the leader. Compare this approach to the game of American football, where the quarterback, usually following orders from the coach, directs his choreographed team through commanding game plays. Everyone on the team is ideally a leader in the function each performs, but when the game comes down, every player obeys the quarterback.

In soccer, transparency is always evident. You can see individuals and judge their abilities. In American football, the strategy, the thinking behind the action, remains hidden to the majority of viewers.

These different game styles can be applied in leadership, depending on the nature of the challenge. In global, diverse economic and cultural operating environments, fuelled by chaos, other games to consider are chess and snakes and ladders. The intellectual strategy required by chess masters—with the pattern language of moves, versus the random zap of snakes and ladders that require us to operate in the unforeseen and equally unfair rush of success and failure—requires perseverance, and another roll of the dice.

Which games accurately reflect the times in which we live? Which games do you teach your children? Chess and football, or soccer and snakes and ladders?

I say: learn to play all of them. Leadership requires flexibility, and many sets of assumptions, many models and tools to call upon. With a chaotic future confirmed by science, know yourself and embrace lifelong learning and random zaps.

Evil Doers

Leadership is a very important topic. In history, there have been countless villains who have influenced and manipulated the behaviour of others. Whole nations have been ruined by them. Countless “good” leaders with “bad” intentions

have had their followers do their bidding. Who were those leaders? Name them from your perspective.

Recently, and closer to home in the corporate world, we have witnessed unscrupulous leaders—specifically in Enron and Worldcom and their ilk. So many economic followers were hurt by these leaders—so much ruin in the retirement plans of millions. In the heyday, they looked like leaders, they talked like leaders, but their leadership was corrupt and widespread. I ask: where were credible conspiracy theorists when investors needed them? Where was leadership in journalism, for that matter? Was ethical leadership missing on other regulatory and professional accounting fronts, also?

Dissent, which some people have forgotten is a hallmark of democracy, requires leadership.

What tests must we apply today to our leaders, and to our leaders of tomorrow? The stakes are too high in medicine, war, and economies for yet another “oops, sorry.” What rigours of accountability need apply?

Doing Good Work

The things you do well, combined with vision, are essential elements of leadership. What makes or breaks a leader is also the values and ethics the leaders follow. Again, in this, communications is key.

It is difficult to talk about leadership without addressing values. Discussing leadership requires discussing values, societal vision, national and international goals.

Looking at the wide discussion of leadership today, I am reminded of the famous Coke commercial where the product was promoted as “Coke is it.” The concept allows any individual to inject his or her own values in to the concept of “it,” thereby furthering Coke's

universal appeal. Who couldn't agree? The concept of "leadership" is somewhat like that, and many have injected their own values in to it. But leadership is more than a Coke commercial.

Interaction is Communications

So, we come back to "whose values." All leadership must involve interaction with followers. And, interaction implies communication. What is it a leader must communicate? It is essential that the leader communicates content, and that content must include that leader's gifts, attributes, and capacities. Those things add to the credibility of leadership.

Discussing leadership requires understanding specific context and the scale of issues involved. Effective leadership has consequences; good leaders understand those consequences and communicate them effectively to their followers. Are we jumping off yet another bridge, they might ask? and they must be told the truth. Remember, "excusez-moi, excusez-moi," says the only sheep making its way away back from the cliff edge through the doomed flock? Who's the leader now?

Admittedly leadership is harder than it used to be. Followers are getting smarter and, more often than not, they have at their disposal similar information from which to form their own opinions and, in growing cases, their own course of action. This ups the ante where true leadership is concerned.

Living with Paradox

In a pluralistic democratic society, dialogue and consensus-building takes time.

Dissent, which some people have forgotten is a hallmark of democracy, requires leadership. And leadership is also, paradoxically, used in the suppression of dissent. There's indeed a balance in all things so let us not forget that without intelligent, relentless questioning, democratic leadership is blind. Without reasonable questioning, our leaders are ill served. Good leaders surround themselves with diversity of thought, building the questioning process into the team.

Today, in paradox, you can find examples of leaders both "empowering their followers" and of "going it alone" against the wishes of the majority of their followers. You can find national and local leaders who are "continual learners" and at the same time, leaders who have had enough learning and who say "it's time to act."

Leaders can appear inclusive leading up to their decisions, but often their decisions for the good of society appear exclusive. Leaders make hard decisions. Again, however, good leaders communicate and work toward the followers' comprehension; they weather the questions, and move us all forward.

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In today's complexity, where there are virtually no black and white issues, leadership operates in the gray zone. Leadership must consider both following the market forces and the democratic institutions that regulate the market for the good of the people, the good of the environment, and more and more, for the good of the world.

In a pluralistic society, leadership requires all of this flexibility—the skills of ethical decision-making and choosing the "best" decision based on available information. With all variables weighed, the moral fitness of a decision is the goal, and over time, is clearly seen.

All of these things, and more, are part of the leadership equation—knowing yourself; your gift, attributes, and capacities; your ethics and values; and especially how well you communicate them. ▲

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Corrections & Comments

Dr. Bernard Hoeter's article on Mentoring and Coaching in the Spring 2003 *Scrivener* generated spirited response.

1. Dr. Hoeter points out that two significant typos must be corrected. His text should read as follows.
 - The word "mentor" originates from Greek methodology. Goddess Athena spoke through Mentor, a respected **Ithacan** [not Italian] nobleman, to give advice to young Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope, whose father was roaming the Aegean seas in search of his homeland.
 - Coach emanates from Mediaeval student **slang** [not slag].
2. Dr. Hoeter notes that Ithaca is one of the Ionian Islands west of the coast of the Mainland of Greece; in ancient times, it was said to be the Kingdom of Odysseus.
3. A female Notary questioned Dr. Hoeter's use of the name Odysseus instead of Ulysses. He clarified for her that Odysseus is the Latin version of the Greek name Ulysses, and is generally accepted as the name of the husband of Penelope.
4. This note was sent to Dr. Hoeter by a Notary who reads *The Scrivener* regularly.

...a "coach" in England is often called a "crammer"—a person who prepares students for their entrance examinations at Public Schools...Public Schools in England are usually Private Schools. ▲