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About Being a Leader

THE NEED for leadership in all walks of life is greater today than ever before. Every aspect of living demands guiding hands: government, business, the professions, the fine arts and the mechanic arts.

Leadership does not mean domination. The world is always well supplied with people who want to be dictators. The leader is of a different sort. He seeks effective activity with a beneficent purpose.

A glance through history shows that the story of nations and of industries is told in terms of the exploits of individuals. In every significant event there has been a bold leader, an object or purpose, and an adversary. Durant makes one of his characters say in *The Mansions of Philosophy*: "The masses do not accomplish much . . . they follow the lead of exceptional men."

A healthy society is one in which opportunities are given for leaders to emerge from all ranks in the population. The mechanic who has a helper assigned to him is a leader. The office worker with a secretary is a leader. Within their spheres these leaders have the same responsibilities, the same opportunities for showing ability, and the same potential satisfactions as has the leader of a government.

In a country like Canada the genius of leadership seems as likely to sprout in some humble home as in a mansion of the wealthy. To be educated in a country school, or in a city public school where little luxury is enjoyed, is not a handicap to the attainment of leadership. What marks the leader is individual craftsmanship; sensibility and insight; initiative and energy.

No sluggard need aspire to leadership. There are passive persons who are content to go through life getting lifts from people; who wait until action is forced upon them. They are not of leadership material.

Leaders have standards

How do men get out in front and stay there? They raise the standards by which they judge themselves — and by which they are willing to be judged. They raise

their aim, both for themselves and for the group they lead. They develop with energy their own knowledge and skill so as to reach the standards they have set.

This acceptance of higher standards of judgment is the basis of all human progress. A love of high quality is essential in a leader. He is, as Dr. Wilder Penfield said of Sir William Osler in his address at the medical convention, Queen's University, in May: "concerned with the quality of workmanship, like a cabinet maker who runs his finger over smooth surface and secret joint, reconsidering the work of his hands."

The leader, whether in business or government, carries with him this sense of idealism, a vision of what might be. He acts well because he has a clear idea of the part he is going to play and the results he seeks.

Dependability is another quality of the leader. He keeps all promises. He is, as a traveller said of his companion, "the kind of man to go tiger hunting with in the dark, because you can always reach out and be sure he is there."

Being dependable means accepting responsibility. The leader will take counsel from his people, but he will act on what his mind tells him is right. To live in that responsible way requires a good stock of self-confidence. It demands that the leader shall have trained himself out of the fear of making mistakes. He has long since outgrown dependence upon his parents, teachers, foremen, and all others who played dominant roles in supplying his wants, quieting his fears and answering his questions as he grew up.

To embark successfully on a career involving leadership demands courage. Once a person has decided upon the part he wishes to play in life, and is assured that he is doing the work for which he is best endowed; and is satisfied that he is filling a vital need, then he needs the courage to tackle the problems he must solve.

With faith in himself, he will be brave enough to act on probabilities instead of certainties, and put his

whole energy into making them come true. One mark of a great leader is that he feels sufficiently secure to devote his thought to the well-being of his subordinates and the perfection of his job instead of constantly looking up the line to make sure that he is being approved.

Self-discipline

The man who would be leader must pay the disciplinary cost involved. This does not mean that he must withdraw from the world, but it does entail restraint, control and moderation wherever these are necessary to achieve the ends he seeks.

Leaders need to submit themselves to a stricter discipline than is expected of others. Those who are first in place must be first in merit.

In view of this, it is not surprising to find that the great number of persons who have been acknowledged as leaders were people who themselves learned the art of obeying. The man who has not learned to render prompt and willing service to others will find it difficult to win and keep control of his followers.

Young people who aspire to reach positions of leadership would be doing themselves a favour if they were to drill themselves in facing disagreeable things. A philosopher advises all of us to do something occasionally for no other reason than that we would rather not do it.

Besides doing well what he has to do, the leader has initiative, which is the ability to think and to do new things. He is shooting at a moving target.

It is essential in leadership to stay ahead. The leader cannot set up a procedure and then linger lazily watching it work. He cannot be content merely to see new trends and take advantage of them. He must, rather, keep his imagination vividly alive, so as to originate ideas and start trends.

Many a sad story is written in the annals of business every year by leaders who are falling into the routine of being managers. When they start to coast they have reached the end of the line of their own development and their contribution to the growth of their business.

Leaders are so eager about their work that they can hardly wait for morning to get started at it. But they are not impetuous. They keep a balance between emotional drive and sound thinking. Their excess of effort testifies to their belief that unless a man undertakes more than he possibly can do he will never do all that he can do. Their enthusiasm stimulates their energy.

That is why business leaders are found so universally in the forefront of social endeavour. Leadership is essential in all social life and in every form of social organization, and because of their experience and their

flair the corporation head, the plant executive and the shop foreman are pressed into service to lead community or national campaigns for improvement of services and the raising of money.

Choosing assistants

Diverse though the areas of leadership may be, there are nevertheless certain basic principles generally agreed upon as being necessary. The leader must be sincere in his beliefs about his business and his place in it, and he must have the force of character necessary to inspire others to follow him with confidence.

Thoughtful men choose persons to work with them, and particularly men who will be close to them, for special qualities. Their assistants should be different from them, capable of doing things the leader cannot do for himself. No leader in government, business or any other sphere of activity will surround himself with rubber stamps if he wishes to be relieved of some of today's work, to be given time to plan for tomorrow and the more distant future, and to be able to step out for a few days or a few weeks in the certain knowledge that his assistants will handle the business efficiently.

The leader's job is to get work done by other people, and the good that they do is reflected upon him. He senses the readiness of an assistant for further development, and sets the stage so that efforts of his subordinates are used to the full in pursuance of his purpose.

Herein lies the most subtle challenge to the man in authority over others. He must steer a wary course between keeping his finger in every pie, dictating in detail what is to be done by whom, and on the other hand slackening the rein so that his assistants learn by experience, even at the risk of making mistakes.

Having delegated work, the leader must trust his assistants. His action implies the courage and readiness to back up a subordinate to the full.

The more dynamic the leader is, the more he needs to control the irritability that arises in him when projects are delayed, thrown off the track, or botched. He needs to seek patiently for the reason and to be receptive to ideas for improvement. As key man in the organization he must be a creative listener, smothering ruthlessly all empty excuses and brushing off all merely time-wasting talk, but getting at the meat of what his people have to say.

Dealing with workers

The leader has come to his position by one of several ways: he may have graduated through the factory, where he was working with things; he may have come up through the office, where he dealt with figures and charts; or he may have been educated at one of the

special schools, where he learned out of books. Now he must deal with people.

No matter what point we start from in a discussion of leadership we inevitably reach the conclusion that the art of being a leader is the art of developing people. At its highest peak, leadership consists in getting people to work for you when they are under no obligation to do so.

Throughout his active life the leader finds himself surrounded by duties to his business, his community, and himself. None is more important than his duty toward his workers. It is a maxim that whoever is under a man's power is under his protection.

A foreman or manager who is tyrannical thereby pronounces himself inefficient. He enforces severe discipline "according to the book" merely because he knows no other way. He refuses to hear his subordinates' side of questions because he is afraid they may prove to be right and thus cause him to "lose face." His imperious manner provokes dissention and betrays his firm.

Much more successful is the leader who approaches his job in the spirit of being a coach. He will kindle interest, teach, aid, correct and inspire. He will seek the special talent every worker has. His people will co-operate with him in maintaining discipline for the good of the team. He will suppress his own ego and encourage the progress of those whom he leads. He will create in his group a sense of mutual effort, directed toward a specific goal.

Policies and information

A leader in any activity will find it an advantage beyond price to have clear-cut policies written down. They keep his mind in consistent paths, they help him to clarify to his assistants the purposes toward which their work is directed. When he has his policies well shaped, then he may move on with sureness to proper means and methods.

Not that he will himself worship, or demand that his workers worship, a set of rules. Every rule, policy and plan is only a guide for the run of cases and for usual circumstances. The leader, while taking advantage of the benefits of written policies, will be alert for uncommon cases and for circumstances that do not belong under the rule. That is his function as leader.

Policies and plans are more or less useless unless they are known to all who may be concerned with them. Let everyone know where he stands and what is expected of him. Assistants should have a clear notion of what is to be done, as well as what their particular part of the task is. Lord Montgomery, as Commander of the Eighth Army, made it a rule that the plan of campaign should be made known to every soldier.

One business executive arrives at his office every morning with a pocket stuffed with scribbled notes. His first task is to sort them into categories, then he calls his secretary and dictates memos, or summonses to his office the group of assistants concerned and communicates his thoughts.

Meeting problems

The capable leader does not flounder around in confusion when he meets a problem, because he has learned certain general procedures which enable him to face a crisis without panic.

Simplicity marks this process as it does all effective work in any field. Grasp the problem; whip it into organized shape at once; seek the information that is necessary to its solution; do what is necessary, according to the size and complexity of the problem, to analyse the elements of it; and then proceed to shape and to test in your mind the various answers and plans.

Any leader interested in expanding his capability in this area will enjoy reading *The Bismarck Episode*, by Captain Russell Grenfell (Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1948). This is a factual, minute-by-minute account of the most noted sea chase of all time, told from the bridges of the ships engaged. Every ship's chief officer followed, roughly, this procedure: analyse the situation as it is and the way in which it developed; visualize all the possibilities; assess them to determine probabilities; estimate the strength of the forces opposed and of our resources; decide upon a general plan; communicate it to those who should know; move to carry out the plan with economy of effort and material; be sure to calculate the chances of prolongation of action; and, most important, shoot at the proper target.

To tackle problems in a masterly way the leader must see things whole as well as in separate parts. Unwise accent on some section is one of the most ruinous practices in government or business leadership. The company that emphasizes production and neglects merchandising finds its stockpile high and its sales profits low. The factory that concentrates on sales and neglects production finds itself losing friends because it cannot give expected service. In both production and distribution the leader must balance quality and cost.

The leader is leader of the whole enterprise, requiring the largeness of view that sees things in their true perspective and relations. The higher up in leadership a man goes, the broader his life and his vision should become. He must not gear his brain to details, going around scratching the bark of trees and never coming out to look at the woods as a whole. His pet aversions and loves must have a strict eye kept on them.

It goes without saying that in dealing with both detail and the business broadly, the leader will depend for his appraisal upon facts truly stated. He will demand analysis, not generalization; actualities instead of opinions. He will sense what is significant and brush aside the trivial, reducing the most complex problem to its simplest terms. This ability to scrape off the barnacles and get at the true values is a vital quality in the leader.

Making decisions

Administration is a process composed of making decisions after analyzing problems. Every decision carries with it the element of risk. The leader must venture to run the hazard of his own judgment.

He will often find that getting things started is more important than making sure that they will turn out perfectly right. He will find, too, that many of his decisions will have to be made with incomplete data. Having done what he can to build the necessary fact-providing organization, and having used it to the greatest possible extent, he must nevertheless shoulder the burden of making decisions, pushing out upon an uncharted course where his sense of direction is given him by his judgment founded upon experience.

The leader must originate. He must be an innovator. But he needs to do more: he must push plans through to successful execution, coping with the unexpected and the unpredictable through originality and ingenuity applied with courage.

A sense of time is essential. The difference between a good leader and a poor one may be merely that the poor leader does a thing at the wrong time, sometimes too early but more often too late.

Among the most poignant tragedies of history, says Sidney Hook in *The Hero in History* (Beacon Press, 1943) are those in which men have cried "impossible" too soon, and for want of vision have summoned up energies sufficient to win the day—too late.

Summing up

It will be evident from what has been said that there is need for caution in the study of leadership as measured by mechanical analysis or the "yes — no" type of questionnaire.

No bare enumeration of traits can do justice to the power of insight which flashes to the surface of a great leader's mind in the face of problems, dangers and conflict of ideals.

The young man starting out in his active life with the idea of becoming a leader in whatever profession or business he espouses will find much to guide him in a widely recognized business classic, *Business and the Man*, first of the Alexander Hamilton Institute modern business texts.

In the boyhood days of men who are now top leaders in all walks of life the Horatio Alger stories of ragged boys who attained success were highly popular. Today's sophistication may have outdated Alger, but the principles by which his boys became leaders are still the stuff of which leaders are made.

There is no power on earth, in school, university or anywhere else, that can take a clerk from his desk or a mechanic from his bench and mould him into an executive. Self-advancement is powered by one's own initiative and perseverance. A man still has to do his own growing, though in these days he finds many helps that his grandfather and his father did not have.

The price that's paid

No one should embark upon a course leading to leadership without totting up the cost. Being a leader has many compensations — it is an imperative for some men — but it is a hard job and often a lonely job.

A visit to a leader's office on a working day, whether he be a business, political, educational or church leader, will disabuse anyone of the delusion that leadership means ease and comfort. The top man does not feel that he is sacrificing himself if he works sixteen or eighteen hours a day. He chose this rather than some other way of spending his time.

Like a mountain peak, the leader rises above others and dwells apart. It is one of the perils of leadership that unless they are very careful leaders may become so isolated that they lose the benefit of rubbing shoulders with subordinates and competitors.

The assaults that are made upon a leader, in business or in politics or in social life, are as old as human nature. They arise in spiteful little voices out of fear, envy, ambition and selfishness. The only way to avoid them is to be obscure.

The leader has to have the courage and fortitude to keep a clear eye on the competitive picture and a steady hand on the organizational wheel when the going is rugged and success is doubtful. Being licked is part of the game, if it is counted as useful training. A philosopher put it neatly when he said the most important thing in life is not to capitalize on our gains. Any fool can do that. The really important thing is to profit from our losses.

In the last analysis it is up to every person, young and old, to decide whether he wishes to be a leader. A slave in Rome, who became one of the great Stoic teachers and a leader among philosophers, said this: "It is you who must introduce the consideration into the inquiry, not I; for it is you who know yourself, how much you are worth to yourself, at what price you sell yourself; for men sell themselves at various prices."