

Personal Perspectives on the Subject of Leadership

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Introduction

What is leadership? Northouse tells us “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (2016, p. 6). Of course this definition does not distinguish between good and bad leadership and neither intentional nor unintentional, but only that leadership is influencing a group towards a common goal.

Who are leaders? One often associates the concept of leader to famous corporate CEOs such as Steve Jobs (Miller, 2012) and Jamie Dimon (Sonnenfeld & Ward, 2007), and great military leaders and statesman such as Dwight Eisenhower (Yarnell, 2012) and Colin Powell (McAleer, 2003). Bass and Bass (2008) discuss leaders as one side of a coin with followers existing on the other side of the coin, thus one can infer leaders and followers do not exist without the other and both serve the same means in the end.

Who are our first leaders? Who imparts leadership upon us daily? Who are among our best examples of what leadership is? Hansbrough (2012) tells us parents serve as the primary example of leadership during ones childhood. After parents, teachers and coaches join the ranks of leaders teaching not only knowledge and how to play a sport, but also showing leadership in life lessons (Lumpkin, 2010). Additionally, Arthur-Banning articulates that youth sports are paramount in promoting leadership development, facilitate character building needed to adapt to and manage change, and enable improvement in cognitive, physical, and interpersonal skills (as cited in Williams, Roberts, & Bosselman, 2011).

This paper provides insights around a personal perspective on the subject of leadership founded on the reflections from three key men impacting a youth, and one occasion of that youth as a middle-aged adult witnessing a demonstration of leadership by someone much younger

further providing insights on leadership and leadership styles. Bass and Bass (2008) discuss leadership styles as the myriad of ways that leaders approach their collaborative behaviors with those who a leader inspires. All leaders discussed in this writing find their way to leverage their emotional intelligence along with the shared behaviors to utilize the cornerstones of success pulling on trust, credibility, and respect (DuPuy, 2015) to demonstrate their leadership, perhaps instinctively by innate traits or leadership styles learned (Northouse, 2016), but leadership nonetheless. This paper explores whether this group of leaders exercised intentional leadership, i.e. knowing the desired result with the aspiration to reproduce the desired result (Kubicek, 2012), or simply leadership by position or role, or otherwise leadership by default, without any real thought or intention to provide leadership, and the implications thereof.

Compassionate Leadership from an Old Woman

Do you want to go with me to Slim's the father asked? Slim was an old man, always wore blue jean overalls, tall, and like his name, slim with a deep full voice the son found often associated with men of African descent. The father told stories of being a young boy with Slim knocking on the bedroom window at night to get the father out of bed to go raccoon hunting. Now the father a man, when the family killed a hog, or slaughtered a beef, the father typically took some portion to Slim, as well as another family, and sometimes the father just took food and other items for no particular reason. This day, one of the son's earliest memories, would be his first of many trips that followed to Slim's house. Slim lived off the main highway, a mile or more after the dirt road came to an end, down a tractor path through the woods on the edge of an overgrown pasture with no yard really distinguishable, and no vehicles in site. The son recalls he and the father in the 1965 Ford short bed pickup truck pulling up to the old, small, wood-frame house, paint years faded away, wintertime where a coal-fired stove in the kitchen served both as

the source of heat and the cooking platform. Slim's wife excitedly welcoming them inside saying *come over here young man so I can see you*. The father the first time having to encourage the son to walk over, the young boy would stand beside her so she could gently and compassionately run her old hands over his entire body, and in particular his face, so the old blind woman could *see* him. Her gentleness and compassion demonstrating a form of leadership (Melwani, Mueller, & Overbeck, 2012) not recognized by the young boy as leadership at the time, but nevertheless leadership. A leadership encompassing awareness of her impact (Northouse, 2016) on the young boy towards his initial discomfort, and furthermore how to ease that discomfort to where the young boy could then be more receptive of what followed. Likewise, without conscious intention to do so as leadership, an example of servant and ethical leadership stemming from the service to and the caring of others (Van Dierendonck, 2011) demonstrated by the father each time they visited Slim's, as well as others with the same, similar challenges.

“In real life, leaders do not use systems of rules to reach moral decisions. Rather, their moral deliberations are personal and contextual” (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 216). The father, though an intelligent man, like all in the father's family before, was raised on a farm where formal training in leadership did not exist. Even the concept of leadership training was absent. The father's youth included highlights of the Great Depression and World War II followed by a tour in war ravaged Korea for the US Army. The father returned home to work in various areas of construction until forming his own company that grew from an initial rubber-tire backhoe and a flatbed dump truck. Having been raised, and at the time living, a little more than 20 miles from the city, the late 1960's and early 1970's found the city dealing with school busing and

integration. The surrounding rural areas were living in two different worlds at the same time, pre and post segregation.

The interactions with Slim and Slim's wife demonstrated socioemotional and interpersonal competence with the father's empathy, insight, and enlighten awareness enabling the father's ability to leverage emotional intelligence "to facilitate thinking, to understand and reason with emotions" (Northouse, 2016, p. 28). Though the father's action imparted upon the son a lesson of servant and ethical leadership, this was more leadership by default where the father did not seize upon the opportunity of intentional leadership to stress the importance of what they were doing, and an act to be repeated wherever need was found. Yes, the father knew a good deed was done, and yes, the son realized a good deed was done. Even though, this good deed was for Slim and Slim's wife, and perhaps good deeds towards others the father specifically knew. However, the opportunity for intentional leadership was not exercised stressing a responsibility to serve our fellow persons whether we know them personally or not. In this case, though a wonderful example set, unintentional leadership, or leadership by default with no assurance the act would be repeated for the many opportunities that would follow, thus an intentional leadership opportunity lost.

Character-Based Moral Reasoning and the Interview

Fast forward some years later and the son would hear one summer morning *I don't care if he is black. Every man deserves the benefit of the doubt.* The father felt the necessity to voice the comment perhaps out of an intrinsic leadership requisite to simply make things better (Summerfield, 2014). The time was the mid-1970's, the son was perhaps 10 years old, and the two were at the farm mulling around next to the silos. At times the two could be found leaning against the father's pickup truck, boots sliding back and forth making marks in the North

Carolina red clay dirt, waiting for the arrival of a man who was to interview for an equipment operator job for the father's company. This interview allowed the man not just the opportunity to talk about what he could do, but the opportunity to show exactly what he could do with the piece of equipment, the final yes/no determination, without regard to the color of the man's skin. Or, was the color of the man's skin the reason why the interview was granted?

The son had observed previously that the father typically knew the essence about an interviewee before one was invited to show what they could do with a piece of equipment. Though the man talked convincingly, the son observed that the man was absent of effective knowledge or ability to operate the piece of equipment. The father appropriated that realization in stride with the father's characteristic empathy and understanding. With the interview eventually completed, the father did not pursue the social performance (Northouse, 2016) to elaborate to his son about the events of the morning, and the son had not attained the awareness to ask. This was simply the compassion the son had observed previously in other situations stemming from the father's sensitivity to the ethical issues of the day dealing with race, his ability to reason ethically, and his ability, if not a compulsion given the tenets of the father's upbringing. Even though, the society around the father had a similar upbringing, and yet complexly struggled with the social change of the day. All the same, this upbringing led the father to conduct himself ethically while appreciating and empathizing with others, and in this particular case the interviewee's blessing/curse of being born black in America during the early 20th century.

With the comment the father made to the son before the arrival of the interviewee, the father demonstrated three of Paine's four points on character-based moral reasoning: ethically sensitive, reason ethically, and conduct oneself ethically while having empathy (as cited in Bass

& Bass, 2008). Paine's fourth point addressing the comprehension of ethical leadership and how organizational factors affect the individual was not part of the father's reasoning that day.

Rather, the simple ethical and moral act of giving one's fellow man the benefit of the doubt without other nonessential considerations being a negative factor were the key components in motion. And yes, the father made the comment, but however the opportunity for intentional leadership was missed by the fact the father did not take the opportunity for a further discussion with the son about the issues of the day regarding biases other than to remark that "every man deserves the benefit of the doubt". A 10-year boy cannot be expected to give the concept deep consideration without intentional leadership to take one through the exploration of the subject. Thus here again the father provided leadership, and in this particular case ethical leadership and character-based moral reasoning, and the son received leadership. However, because the father was not intentional in the leadership provided, unintentional leadership by default was the outcome. Furthermore, the opportunity of the dominate interaction and influence of a father (Alegre, 2011) was lost to increase the son's emotional intelligence and impart a deeper intellect of leadership and social responsibility upon the son.

Resonant Leadership and the Coach

A young football player finds himself in his 9th-grade year playing junior high school football. The player was one of the three team captains who were *veterans* as a result of playing for the school their previous 8th-grade year, a rarity for the area as the local optimist league competed for players up through the 8th-grade. A couple of games into the season with the team deep into a scoreless game against one of the powerhouses in the league, a devastating hit applied to the other team's running back had the game in an injury timeout. The young player was one of an array of players who had put the hit on the injured player. The young player's

intensity level was high partially due to how he played the game, and additionally that day the young player perceived the refs were calling the game unfairly tight against his team. A ref paused before the young player to make what was meant to be, and otherwise would have been received as, a complimentary comment.

The coach had developed this team veteran to be a leader. The coach had furthermore leveraged the sport to promote character building necessitating the players to utilize their skills to manage change, challenges, and opportunities. However, the young player's youth, coupled with an intense game with perceived unfair refs, found the young player replying to the ref in a disrespectful manner. The ref's lighthearted demeanor changed to authoritatively serious with an ejection warning for the disrespectful comment. The coach, noticing the exchange, called the young player to the sideline. With the young player having taken his place beside the coach, shoulders only inches apart, both looking towards the events on the field dealing with the injured player, the coach inquired as to the matter. The young player gave a short, fairly blunt one sentence *man-to-man* reply. The coach and the young player, both looking straight ahead, said nothing further, equally being resonant and transcending to another plane where spoken words were not required to be in sync with each other (Boyatzis, Smith, Van Oosten, & Woolford, 2013).

When play resumed the coach sent the young player back onto the field empathizing with the young player's intensity but insisting on respect and fair play. Hankey (2014, p. 88) tells us "an exceptional coach exemplifies integrity, empathy, and fair play through (his) actions at all times." The coach expressed not only empathy for the young player by simply listening, and furthermore not taking the opportunity to criticize the young player for walking to the edge of a

potential game deciding ejection and penalty, but also reinforced the integrity of respect and fair play for the way the game was to be played.

For a youth and their sport experience, a coach is of the utmost influence (Erickson & Côté, 2016). The coach, by inviting the young player to the sideline to talk, though limited in actual words, understood the leadership shown leaving a lasting influential positive developmental experience (Erickson & Côté, 2016) on the young player. Furthermore, the sideline moment is an example of authenticity and trust as discussed by Bass and Bass (2008) between coach and player where the young player, the subordinate, felt comfortable to have an open and direct conversation with the coach, the superior. Moreover, the empathic leadership elements Bass and Bass (2008) commented on were on display. The young player sensed the coach could walk in his shoes understanding what he felt. Additionally the social-psychological aspects were in motion facilitating the young player's perception that when he talked, the coach indeed listened.

The coach's resonant leadership skills (Boyatzis, Smith, Van Oosten, & Woolford, 2013) and the coach's leverage of emotional intelligence to know what and how much leadership to apply, in this case the simple act of listening, gave the young player time to settle down and prevented any further disrespectful comments to the ref. Additionally, where "good leaders give respect and trust to others and expect to receive the same" (DuPuy, 2015, p. 7), the coach's transformational leadership empowered the young player to align his actions with his goals, the coach's goals, and the team's goals (Hickman, 2016). Likewise this allowed the young player to demonstrate to the coach that the coach was correct in allowing the young player to remain in the game, and gave the young player the opportunity to reciprocate the trust and respect good leaders deserve (DuPuy, 2015) by not further causing a reason for ejection. However, the coach missed

the opportunity after the game to impart added intentional leadership to elaborate on a more appropriate manner to address the perception of unfair refereeing, and in general to leverage intentional leadership to develop a better person in the young player.

Transformational Leadership and the Coach

The football player finds his junior and senior years in high school playing football as an offensive lineman, the position the player had consistently played during the previous six seasons, but for other coaches. The player's upbringing had him respecting the coach simply because the coach was the player's elder. However simple respect could not drive the player to work as hard as he did, to give his all each and every day at practice, and to find more to give during the Friday night games. The Friday night games in particular found the player barely being able to get out of bed on Saturday mornings due to the exhaustion and soreness from the performance the night before. Rather, as Bass discusses, the coach's transformational leadership generating trust and admiration leading to loyalty and further respect (as cited in Hampson & Jowett, 2014) provided the drive to work harder for the coach. Additionally, that ultimate respect also stemmed from a deed the coach performed each time the player and his teammates put points on the board - a handshake - an act of profound significance for the player, a simple boy from the country.

The coach was too an offensive lineman in his day, and the player felt the coach understood the "no-glory" the typical offensive lineman received. The coach's simple act of stepping out onto the field to offer his linemen a handshake, in front of the rest of the team, for the entire stadium to see, was another anchor in the transformational leadership (Hickman, 2016) that drove the player to give his all for the man. Leadership that relied heavily on trust, credibility, and respect, the linchpins of success, as well as the coach's emotional intelligence

and character (DuPuy, 2015) that understood how to leverage this leadership for the player's, and the team's success.

The coach had credibility due to playing at the higher levels of the game in college as well as having been drafted by the NFL's New York Jets. The coach had trust because the coach was a convincingly trustworthy man. The credibility and trust were further bolstered during the week with pep talks from the coach, and especially the pre-game speech on game night. The coach would give rousing pep talks with the team encircled around him. These talks pulled on every teammates' positive emotional attractor giving undoubting hope, convincing of the possibilities to come, and reaching deep to find the player's individual, and the team's collective strengths to move all toward the desired end state (Boyatzis, Smith, Van Oosten, & Woolford, 2013) – the desired end state to win regardless of how much the odds indicated otherwise. The coach knew where he wanted to take the team and sought to reproduce the successful practices during the Friday night games. However, though the coach applied leadership, and much of the leadership intentional, while some was toward character, most of the intentional leadership provided was for football. Thus, the coach missed many opportunities to provide intentional leadership for life beyond the football field.

Intentional Leadership by Default

Decades after the high school experience there is the opportunity for the son, the former football player, and now businessman, to attend a white coat ceremony for a destined doctor of physical therapy. The businessman was invited by the future doctor's brother, a rising sophomore at another institution of higher learning who considered the businessman a mentor. After the ceremony, the family and guest arrive at a nearby restaurant to celebrate over dinner. An extended family member who apparently had involvement in making the arrangements is in a

discussion with the restaurant manager regarding the seating. The discussion centered on seating at a table that could seat the entire group, or in a booth section that could only seat six to a booth. The area with the large table is taken leaving the booth section, but the family member indicates the booth section was not the agreed upon seating arrangement. The discussion teeters on the verge of becoming heated.

With the parents of the future doctor and the future doctor herself having yet to arrive, the brother, the rising sophomore, the youngest of all who are present, politely interjects himself into the conversation. The brother expresses his profound gratitude to the manager for all she had done, and graciously accepts the booth seating arrangement as working perfectly for the group. With this act of leadership, the crisis immediately dissipates with the young man's display of sociability and diplomacy (Bass & Bass, 2008) in leadership. The businessman, old enough to be the rising sophomore's father, is in pleasant awe of the leadership displayed. The author posits this was a display of leadership by default, though as a result of intentional leadership previously received. Since the age of 16, the rising sophomore had been involved with a leadership organization (YBLA – Young Black Leadership Alliance) with a mission to create a new reality for young black men, and to build leaders. This organization focuses on leadership development. The author postulates the actions of the brother was a direct result of the leadership learned, intentional leadership, and when the moment called for leadership, became leadership by default, but the leadership desired for all.

Discussion

Leadership is all around us. Stogdill found while reviewing leadership research that we essentially have as many different definitions of leadership as we have people who have tried to define leadership (as cited in Northouse, 2016). Bass and Bass (2008) write “the definition of

leadership should depend on the purposes to be served” (p. 25). With the statement of Bass in mind, the author theorizes that leadership can be two opposite states at the same time.

Acknowledging positive and negative perceptions for the purposes to be served are subjective to one’s perspective, the author finds the theory valid. Thus, while the first thought of leadership may be an action that leads us to think of good, positive outcomes, we also must remember the pseudotransformational leadership (Bass as cited in Northouse, 2016) of Hitler, Jim Jones the cult leader, and other similar leaders who had followers. We must remember the leaders that history shows in a terribly malevolent dark light as being “self-consumed, exploitive, power oriented, with warped moral values” (Bass & Riggio as cited in Northouse 2016).

One can advance that these pseudotransformational individuals named were leaders by the definition Northouse (2016) gives. Of course history does not recount these leaders’ stories with the lasting positive legacy desired in our leaders by society. Thus, with the concept of pseudotransformational leaders in mind, society must strive to develop individuals and provide leadership that history will receive favorably. Society must furthermore invalidate the theory that leadership can be two opposite states at the same time, i.e. both good and bad, positive and negative, and only remain in the good, positive state. With this thought in mind, we must seek to learn from the various leadership concepts applied by the father towards the son and the two coaches towards the football player.

The three adults discussed in this paper, though prodigious men with pronounced examples of what we want in our fathers and our coaches, these three adults missed on the many opportunities available to provide intentional leadership to better develop a young man for society. The author advances these men were not thinking in terms of intentional leadership. The author posits the men were thinking mostly in terms of how to make financial ends meet, the

demands of their jobs, the demands of family, and the other immediate, everyday demands.

Though these men sought to have a positive influence and result, they otherwise did not consider the intentional leadership opportunities available to have a more profound impact on the youth.

Conversely, the other young man in this story, the sophomore brother, was the one individual who provided intentional leadership, and the leadership had become so learned, so natural, that this young man provided the intentional leadership by default, as his norm.

Conclusion

We as a society must achieve to be intentional with leadership to the extent intentional leadership becomes society's default, society's norm. Researchers must strive to understand further the dark side of leadership to better facilitate society's ability to reject the acrimonious divisive undertakings of pseudotransformational individuals. Reject the undertakings of those who demonstrate "a lack of integrity, insatiable ambition, arrogance, and reckless disregard for their actions" (Northouse, 2016). Reject those who demonstrate the least of our character, and in particular those of this group with political ambitions, as the toxic destructive individuals they are. Society must be intentional with leadership. With these thoughts and concepts in mind, the author defines intentional leadership, if not leadership itself, as consciously influencing one or more individuals to provide boundless leadership by default - leadership that society at the time, as well as history in hindsight, will speak of in the most auspicious of terms.

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