

# THE TRUE FORM OF LEADERSHIP

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*Leadership unlocks hidden potential and motivates the immovable towards an objective. This paper attempts to identify, isolate, and explain the key components of the best style of leadership. Many real-world examples of leadership are described to illustrate this. Leadership in a contemporary setting is discussed, not focused on the ethical aspects of leadership but solely on its quantifiable components and affecting factors. The attributes mentioned will give the reader empirical means to recognize and follow a true leader or become one themselves.*

The events of April 4, 1968 sent shockwaves through the entire world. The reverend Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) lay on the second-floor concrete balcony outside The Lorraine Motel, murdered by James Earl Ray in cold blood (Pepper, 2003). However, Martin Luther King's message did not die with him that day. His consummate leadership propelled his message of civil rights and equality for all far beyond his own life, and is today etched into history as an extraordinary leader.

A true leader is always envisioned at the most basic level as an individual who can inspire others towards an objective or goal. However, there are key, core components of leadership that are as timeless as the skill itself. Much like any other skill, leadership can be attained through consistent practice and can be continuously honed and perfected

through diligent introspection and revision. Leadership should be viewed as a living object that must be paid constant and careful attention. To determine what “true,” meaning most positive and impactful, leadership is, the core components of true leadership must be identified.

To become a noteworthy leader, one must know which direction to head and what steps to take. A simple example of this would be someone standing at the center of an unfamiliar landscape. Whichever direction he or she turns, even down to the very degree they are facing, leads to its own unique path. Without a guide—such as a map and compass—that person can head in one of infinitely many directions. To begin in the precisely correct direction, one must know the exact route to take to arrive at their desired destination. All of this can be a metaphor of the journey to becoming a true leader. Let it be said, however, as the American author Henry Miller (1891-1980) remarked in 1959, “One’s destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things” (p. 360).

### **“TRUE” LEADERSHIP**

There are several different types of leaders and leadership styles. One must only look at history to see the comparisons. Many forms, both negative and positive, can be identified, but true leadership will be designated as the most ideal form. Three attributes true leaders should exemplify are being goal-oriented, exemplary to those they lead, and able to communicate effectively. A true leader will continuously adapt these three principles to changing circumstances and revise his or her own leadership practices accordingly.

#### *Goal-driven*

True leaders motivate people toward a specific, common ambition. This can be the difference between an aimless, disorganized group and an efficient, driven, and purposeful collective to be reckoned with. A true leader is self-aware and knows how to set goals, knowing which objectives to strive for while minimizing excess. He or she possesses vision, and change aspiration into achievement. Goal-driven leadership is what accomplished wonders from the Pyramids of Giza to sequencing the human genome to putting a man on the moon. Unfortunately, many people let laziness and complacency halt their goals and dreams.

Mediocrity has long been one of the greatest downfalls of mankind, so much so it could even be thought to interrupt more goals than many other factors. The human mind always tries to take the path of least resistance, and there is also a certain psychological reprieve that comes from giving in and giving up. The innate human gravitation towards complacency has long been one of mankind's most repressive sedatives, stifling prodigies of science, culture, government, and more that the world will never know. Thus, leadership is a purposeful action of consciousness that is never arrived upon by accident; it is practically the antonym of indolence. Ambition and purpose are the inverses of mediocrity, and a true leader must possess them. However, these are not spontaneous traits.

Equally as important as being determined to complete a goal is knowing when it is advantageous to take a different angle or revise a goal altogether. An example of a true leader being able to wisely readjust their focus to attain new goals is the tech industry prodigy Steve Jobs (1955-2011). Ousted out from the company he co-created, Jobs applied the principle of "failure is feedback," and eventually returned to his previous position when his tech company NeXT was sold to Apple (Sonnenfeld, 2013). He then went on to revolutionize the technological world with his creations of the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. Steve Jobs adjusted his goals and took a different angle to achieve his original goal, regardless of all setbacks. On the other hand, Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) is commonly depicted as a leader that let misguided ambition get in the way of foresight and revision of a goal (Stokker, 1997). Hitler made a crucial mistake with his exaggerated ambitious goal of conquering the USSR in Operation Barbarossa in June 1941. It is theorized that if he had readjusted and focused on conquering the British Isles first, most likely all of Europe would have been conquered and the world as we know it would be much different now (What if Nazi Germany Won, 2015). His blunder revealed a glaring fault in his leadership skill to his countrymen and the world. Dissensions and desires for assassination and revolution increased significantly as his substantial leadership flaws were grossly exposed.

It is also important to remember that an easy mistake for driven-minded leaders is to fixate excessively on their goal and to slowly disregard the people involved. Be it greed or pride, it is a human tendency

to become narrow-minded. In life it is sometimes the journey, not the destination, that is most important. This cannot be truer than when striving towards a goal, as it is very easy for those involved to be swallowed up in the process. True leaders know the balance between concerted effort and excessive obsession towards a goal.

### *Exemplary*

True leaders instill within followers an admiration toward the leader. This adoration compels supporters to aspire to become like their leader. A true leader builds up those they lead and does not leverage their position for personal gain, but rather uses it as a platform to hoist their followers to their own level. In short, true leaders are positive examples that influence others to attain greater heights and achievements.

A true leader brings those with them to the goal, not just themselves, and builds up his or her own people with the foresight that they themselves will become leaders. No leader lasts forever, and if he or she sincerely wants their influence to outlast themselves, they will prepare those who follow them. A model to illustrate this point is Alexander the Great (Freeman, 2011). Alexander was the embodiment of the word prodigy and a savior to a declining Greece. Seemingly out of nowhere, this young war hero reestablished Greece's economic and cultural dominance in the region while conquering vast tracts of Asia and northeast Africa. His kingdom fell victim to his early death when he suddenly became ill with a fever and died roughly fourteen days later. When questioned on his deathbed as to whom would be his massive kingdom's successor, he replied, "tôi krastitsôi"—or, "to the strongest" (Barr, 1966, p.6). With Alexander's kingdom caught off guard by his death, dissention and rivalry segmented the empire. His generals bitterly fought a divisive war to assume power that rent the very seams that held Alexander's kingdom of conquest together.

Alexander's lasting influence and specifically his kingdom, may actually pale in comparison to what it could have been after his death, had he designated and prepared a leader replacement. What could have been a long-lasting and flourishing kingdom with the potential to change the course of history for centuries became naught. A true leader must never be jealous of the progress made by those whom they lead. True

leadership is transformative and shapes its followers, knowing that one day new leaders will eventually emerge and surpass or replace the leader.

### *Communicator*

Action is always the loudest message a leader can send. David Bascom conveyed, “The older I have become, the more I have learned to stop listening to what men say and start watching what they do” (personal communication, December 14, 2013). A true leader’s actions should always communicate leadership. A leader can possess vision, but if they do not communicate it through word and action, then the goal remains as nothing more than a dream. Two forms of communication are fundamental to leadership: action and word. A true leader knows that these are his or her two most powerful forms of communication and that their cause and message either thrives or dies through their communication or lack thereof. Communication in the most primal forms is what first joined mankind to a unified cause. Communication has expansively changed over time, but the fact remains that a message never sent or a message poorly conveyed is a message never received. When face-to-face interaction is not an option, written or other lasting forms of messages are next best. A true leader knows how to use various mediums of communication to ignite interest in his or her followers that motivates them towards the goal.

Mass media communication and the internet have revolutionized and amplified the sphere of influence of leaders. Take for example the first televised presidential debate, which was between John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) and Richard M. Nixon (1913-1994) (Webley, 2010). During the debate, Nixon, “appeared haggard and was sporting a ‘5 o’clock shadow,” while Kennedy, “clearly ‘won’ the debate, a fact attributable to both his superior comfort level with the new communication medium and his ‘telegenic’ good looks” (History.com, 2009, para. 2). A great portion of how people perceive true leadership is what the leader does and how they carry themselves. Therefore, a true leader is always aware of his or her forms of verbal and nonverbal communication. Nowadays, one must both look and act like a leader always.

## **MODELS OF TRUE LEADERSHIP**

Battlefields have been the breeding ground for some of the world’s

most famous leaders. The complex mechanics of war combined with its uncontrolled chaos necessitates that men and women are either polished into exceptional role models of leadership or are replaced or even killed in the process. In the drastic leadership situations of warfare, leadership either kills young men and women or leads them to victory.

General George S. Patton, Jr. (1885-1945), known by many as a wartime hero of the United States during the Second World War, is remembered by history for his exemplary leadership of the Third Army. General Patton is famously quoted as always telling his troops, "Go forward!" (Axelrod, 1993, p. 53), always urging his troops to surge forward with courage and never admit defeat. As Alan Axelrod (1993) interprets it, "To go forward is to make each move, each action, count. To go forward is to give up dwelling on the past" (p. 53). Even when forward movement was stalled or even reversed, what some might consider hopeless, General Patton always remarked, "You are not beaten until you admit it. *Hence DON'T*" (p. 74). While the extremeness of leadership in warfare might not be mirrored exactly in other facets of life, the principles remain the same; true leaders always look with an eye forward to the future, locked onto their next goal, never jumping to the conclusion that a setback is a defeat until all possibilities are exhausted.

Colonel David H. Hackworth (1930-2005) is another wartime hero and a true leader known for his dramatic transformation of the 39th Infantry of the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. He inherited one of the most backward groups of soldiers in the entire war. The 39th consisted primarily of draftees and was incurring a grossly substantial number of casualties than was usual, with as much as 40% resulting without any open contact with the enemy (Hackworth, 2002). Colonel Hackworth ended up polishing this band of misfits into the most feared band of warriors and most effective soldiers in the entire war.

Many looked to Colonel Hackworth as a leader for his direction in how to duplicate his results elsewhere, and he narrowed down his philosophy to six principles: "Fight smart, never be in a hurry, lead from up front, set the example, take care of the troops before you take care of yourself, and keep good commo [communication] going" (Hackworth, 2002, p. 59). This lead from the front and be an example method was

nothing short of opposite to the principles that had preceded him in the 39th Infantry, as the prior commander had employed careless, selfish tactics only to produce satisfactory numbers to those whom he reported. This unnecessarily endangered the lives of every man, and countless lives were needlessly lost or permanently maimed, all resulting from poor leadership that was not focused on a common goal and was anything but exemplary like a true leader should be.

The men of the 39th were badly beaten by the time Colonel Hackworth was assigned to them, and their faith in leadership was almost nonexistent. Colonel Hackworth reversed the improper leadership practices and cultivated a culture of unity and pride, branding them as the “Hardcore Recondos” (Hackworth, 2002, p. 55). Colonel Hackworth instilled in every single man—from the cooks to the medics to the soldiers—that they were the best, and he allowed them to prove it to themselves. Most importantly Colonel Hackworth led by example and inspired every man in his command to achieve excellence. By the acts of true leadership of one single man, hundreds of soldiers, if not thousands, were directly and indirectly affected, and the history of the 39th Infantry was forever memorialized.

Leaders can be seen in many other aspects of history. Intellectual leaders in academia are a vibrant, constant reminder of leadership and ingenuity. In industry, Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) is responsible for revolutionizing the science of electricity and ushering in an unprecedented new era of invention and innovation. Tesla immigrated to the United States in 1884, and shortly after signed a patent for his alternating current method that would eventually be used for the hydro electrical dam at Niagara Falls. A statue of Tesla remains to this day, and his legacy can be seen in many other ways. He is known for his theorizing of radio communication, invention of remote controlled devices, wireless energy transfer, and most famously for alternating current (Carlson, 2013).

Not only were the devices and theories that Tesla created forerunners (Carlson, 2013), but he himself was an example of persistence and ingenuity, typifying an unwavering goal-driven attitude that every true leader has. He was doubted, mocked, and scorned repeatedly through his life, constantly being scoffed at for his revolutionary ideas and being

labeled as a fool and a madman. Tesla's perseverance is exemplary of a true leader in the face of immigration, mockery, failed experimentation, retreating investors, bankruptcy, and skepticism. Through it all, he never gave up hope in himself or in the belief that technological breakthrough and advancement of humanity were just around the corner. Tesla (1934) is noted as saying, "The scientific man does not aim at an immediate result. He does not expect that his advanced ideas will be readily taken up. His work is like that of the planter—for the future. His duty is to lay the foundation for those who are to come, and point the way" (p. 119). Nikola Tesla is the personification of selfless perseverance and true leadership for a better collective future.

### LEADERSHIP TODAY

Leadership today takes on a new appearance. Most of today's leadership positions are found in workplaces and government bureaucracies. In the modern context of leadership, managerial tasks must not be confused with the growth of people. It is important to note that people often confuse filling a managerial position overseeing routine operations with leadership. Any person can complete checklists and order others to accomplish workplace tasks, but a true leader motivates, not demands, this to happen and improves everyone in the process. Bennis and Nanus (1985) brilliantly clarified that, "Managers are people who *do things right* and leaders are people who *do the right thing*" (p. 21). A true leader develops a devotion to each of the people under his or her stewardship and never acts without consideration toward the deeper mental and emotional impacts of their decisions.

If there is a vacuum of interpersonal communication in leadership, miscommunication and resentment can take its place. Patterson et al. (1996) claimed that the world is fraught with the inability to correctly influence others, and shared, "U.S. divorce rate is over 50 percent; child, spousal, and most forms of interpersonal abuse are on the rise; and close to two-thirds of inmates in prison for a capital offense are first-time offenders" (p. 144). Put simply, in today's age people do not know how to properly communicate with others. Resentment is the opposite of respect and a dangerous cancer to leadership that must be healed before it becomes more deeply rooted. A true leader earns the respect of

those who follow them by example and undermines communicational maladies prematurely.

In today's world, one can be a true leader by simply being a positive, sincere, and determined person. Even in minor and seemingly insignificant ways, we can begin to develop what can be called a "leadership reflex." This means taking small steps toward a goal of being a true leader, so that when the bigger decisions arise all choices seem almost second-nature. The significance of leadership in a modern business setting is perfectly epitomized in these words: "A business short on capital can borrow money, and one with a poor location can move. But a business short on leadership has little chance for survival" (Bennis, Nanus, 1985, p. 20).

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, leadership is one of the oldest practices in human history, but even so has taken on many changes. Even while outlying components are subject to change, certain components of leadership are intrinsic and unchanging. This paper serves as a template to both become and/or discern a true leader. A true leader is goal-driven or committed to a unifying cause, exemplary to those who follow them, and effectively communicates their message through action and word. Leaders have long been the largest factor of the rise and fall of civilizations, and today hold the power to affect millions and even billions. Never has the true form of leadership been more imperative. In an age where so many never climb to their utmost capabilities because of indolence or other excuses, those who do rise above the rest stand out even more so as limitless, *true* leaders.

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