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## **Twenty Years in Leadership Development: Rumination with a View**

My first exposure to leadership development came in 1980 as a participant in a leadership development program in Mexico City. I was 38 years old and the mother of two young children and had never worked in business so I was quite anxious about even participating, but the opportunity was too good to pass up. The entire staff and program were coming from the United States to check out the potential market for this five-day training program in a non-U.S. environment, and I was offered a scholarship (for gender balance, primarily). It was heavy on psychological assessment and staff attention and with a development focus which was all quite cutting-edge at the time, even in the United States! It was very innovative to consider the results of psychological instruments to be the property of the person taking the test and to use those results for the very development and learning of the participant. (Even in countries very psychologically and therapeutically savvy like Argentina, the idea of taking a test to help you know yourself and others – assessment for development – was still quite unheard of even in the early '90s.) This leadership development program continues to be quite successful and is run all over the world even today.

What I learned about myself, my potential, my strengths and my impact led directly from that first week-long adventure to my participation on the staff the next year, and from there to a graduate degree in psychology and in short order to the demanding “road warrior” life of a leadership trainer. It was the first clear vision and focus that I had found for my desire to know and to help and to influence and still fill my thirst for adventure -- and a very satisfying ride it has been!

Ultimately, I spent those first 12 years traveling around Latin America and training in Spanish, which wasn't even on my radar in '80 but was already a reality by '83! Over the next 22 years I helped build that consulting business in Mexico, managed the same program for 10 years in Texas, continued training at the senior executive level in the States, ultimately helped adapt that program for Europe, and am currently on a team to develop and train an Asian/Polynesian/Western leadership program in Hawaii. That one adventure into the unknown that cost me so much sleep in fear and anticipation was the window of opportunity into my life's mission. (I still struggle with an appropriate vision for my own possibilities; the potentialities for others seem so much clearer, somehow!)

It is from this perspective that I decided to summarize what I've learned and lived in the evolution of leadership theory and practice and where I think the learning is pointing at this very precarious moment in history, when the need for enlightened leadership has never been greater.

This isn't an academic treatise or survey of the literature or an objective analysis. It is intended to be more of a personal view that comes from working

on the edge between theory and reality; between ideas and implementation; between talk and action – a Midwestern American perspective that ultimately became more global over time. One of the advantages of being in the classroom continually with leaders from a variety of organizations and industries and cultures is that the theory butts up against practice and reality all day, every day.

I'll talk briefly about the larger question of how leadership is different from management, then address the individual leader, leading others and leading in different contexts.

### Setting the Stage: Are Leaders Born or Made?

In the early '80s, when introducing the topic of leadership to a new group of, usually, middle-level managers, we could always plan on at least an hour of heated discussion of the differences between leadership and management and whether leaders were “born” or “made.” The leadership/management discussion continues to evolve to this day, but the issue of whether leadership is inherited or developed has become moot; it is, yes, either one. (Leadership, Burns '78)\* However in those years in Latin America, the issue of your family name, your university, your connections, your color and your wealth were extremely important in determining your expectations in life; position power was the influence of choice, and still is in some parts of the world.

Consequently, I've been particularly intrigued by the rise of Alejandro “El Cholo” Toledo in Peru in recent years (and currently president). The former shoeshine boy and first Amerindian president ran for office saying the president should “look like they do,” referring to the general population. However, if you look deeper, he rose from poverty to study economic development at Stanford, got a Ph.D. at Harvard, and was a World Bank official; married a French-born Jewish woman he met at Stanford who is an expert in indigenous culture and speaks even better Quechua than he does! Here is the perfect combination of someone with the image of being “self made” but with the credentials that usually accompany wealth and privilege. Unfortunately, his struggle to stabilize his country has been no less difficult than for his predecessors.

I remember calling a Hispanic businessman in Texas (the owner of a local car dealership) to offer him a scholarship for a leadership program. He assumed I was calling him to ask him to *teach* the program. The attitude at times was “Why would I want to learn that? I am one!” [The unexpressed thought that went with that was, “Why would I want to empower and develop people who work for me?"] But historically, the assumption that position or lineage makes you a leader was the most common. In Asia it was referred to as “divine birth” or “the Mandate of Heaven.”

\* For more information on all references, go to <http://www.google.com> and put the word plus the name, i.e. *Leadership + Burns* or *On Leadership + Bennis*

But after World War II, once research began delving into the traits or characteristics of leaders (who they are) and what leaders “do,” it became clear that many of our traits and behaviors can be developed and learned. (On Leadership, Bennis, '89; Learning as a Way of Being, Vaill, '96; Lessons of Experience, McCall, '88; Learning to Lead, Conger, '92)

Setting the stage: What is the difference between leadership and management?

**“Management is prose, leadership is poetry.”**

Richard Nixon

**“Leadership is the inability to stand there and watch things go to hell!”**

Anonymous

The leadership and management question has evolved a bit differently. At one point it was understood that to “lead” came from the Greek word for foot and to “manage” came from the word for hand – hence the difference between stepping out in front to lead and hands-on management. Later, we referred to management as being a more technical, present-focused and structured activity and leadership being more intuitive, future-focused and big-picture.

The increasingly chaotic world we live and work in has led to another definition, by Kotter ('02), of leading being coping with change and managing as coping with complexity. This seems to be the most current perspective, but those of us in the field generally agree that, as the song goes, “you can’t have one without the other.” You could even say that one problem Ken Lay had at Enron was that he left the complexity to the CFO and didn’t understand what was going on at that level in the organization while he led the big-systems change process. ***The ability to shift perspectives and roles surfaces as a critical ability of effective leaders.*** What tends to happen is that at different levels of responsibility, the two roles ebb and flow. The inability to make that shift is a critical factor in derailment – lacking vision or micromanaging, for example, can be fatal to a career at higher levels.

One thing we can say in summary: whether we are talking about leading, managing, being born or made, the context of leadership in the early '80s was most commonly assumed to be business, adult and male. We will see how this changes as the Third Millennium approaches.

## The Individual Leader

### Personality traits, characteristics, styles and types of leaders

**“A quiet, reticent, neat-appearing officer. Industrious, tenacious, diffident, careful, and neat. I do not wish to have this officer as a member of my command at any time.”**

U.S. Army, Officer Efficiency Reports

Over the last 40 years or so there have been many profiles developed for a successful leader:

The Charismatic Leader (Tucker '68, Conger '88)  
Transactional and Transformational Leader (Bass '85)  
Visionary Leader (Sashkin '88, Nanus '92)  
Narcissistic Leader (Maccoby '01)  
Heroic Leader or Chiefly Leader (Polynesia), etc.

(One of my personal favorites that I've never forgotten and still run into occasionally is Hogan's "high likeability floater." High on charm and low on results! On the news this evening [7/24/02] there was actually a discussion about how large companies tended to hire "charismatic" stars for their CEOs in the '90s and that they might be part of the ethics problems and corporate scandals that companies are facing today.)

R. M. Stogdill ('48) was really the grandfather of leadership trait research. He concluded that measures of dominance, extraversion, sociability, ambition or achievement, responsibility, integrity, self-confidence, mood and emotional control, diplomacy, and cooperativeness were positively related to what he called emergent leadership. (These easily cluster into the big-five personality dimensions that were mapped in the late '80s by modern personality psychologists.)

The GLOBE Research, Wharton '99, studied the desirability of transformational leadership traits in 65 different cultures: *Universally positive traits* across cultures were trustworthy, honest, encouraging, positive, intelligent, communicative, dynamic, etc. *Universally negative traits* across cultures were: loner, irritable, ruthless, dictatorial, asocial. *Culturally contingent traits* were things like: ambitious, domineering, formal, intuitive, logical, risk taker, etc. In other words, no matter where you are, the people who work with you will probably not like an isolated and autocratic style. The research doesn't address, however, whether such a style might get good results anyway.

But the striking thing is that the longest list was of the traits that are perceived differently across cultures. Working globally requires a lot of flexibility if you are to be successful in a variety of cultures!

Intelligence was another characteristic of leadership that was the object of much research. One conclusion was that it paid to be bright, but not so bright that it could impede communication or lead to arrogance. (I seem to remember

that 120 used to be considered a reasonable standard, with 100 being “average.”) Sternberg and Gardner ('93) started talking about multiple intelligences being a better descriptor of what really was required, and by '95 Goleman published his work on Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Today that has become a critical focus of leadership competencies for both individuals and groups (Primal Leadership, '02). This capacity can be learned as well and is a primary, intangible asset in a world where relationships count more than ever and teamwork is the key to getting results in a flat, democratic system.

EQ consists primarily of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, intuition and social skills. Optimism is also mentioned as an important characteristic of EQ, and Goleman proposes that leadership sends emotion through an organization like “electricity through a wire,” and consequently optimism is what leaders need to be plugged into.

We also know from research that the higher one goes in an organization, the happier people report themselves to be! I guess the larger question is: Do happy people get promoted more often, or are you happier if you get promoted? The challenge for those “happy” leaders is to bring an optimistic attitude with them to work without becoming Pollyannas in denial of the very real daily challenges that organizations and workers face. Otherwise, every concern that an employee might express begins to look like whining and complaining.

### Can leadership traits be learned?

During the '80s, besides identifying and measuring traits or preferences of leaders, we began to realize that the behavior manifested by these preferences could be learned to a certain degree, if it wasn't already present. As Senge began to talk about the need for learning organizations and open systems (The Fifth Dimension, '90), there was an awareness of just how much *everyone* needs to be open to learning and growing in order to work together better and adapt to the rapidly changing world. That learning could be through experience, training, coaching, challenging assignments, honest feedback, etc. (This is the time when the “new” coaching field came into being; organizations were “downsizing,” workers were feeling isolated and responsible for their own careers, the emphasis was on continual learning to stay marketable, and the downsized were looking for ways to use their skills, so many of them became coaches.) Also, the leadership context by the '90s, with the emphasis on relationships and emotional intelligence, began to focus more on feminine styles of leadership or working with diverse groups. But regardless of how we were “born,” we all needed to be building character and skills for leadership. It seems the list of desired characteristics is almost never-ending! But ***the inability to adapt one's behavior to changing circumstances by using different aspects of one's personality turns out to be a primary derailment factor in leadership.*** (Self Leadership, Leider '96)

## Changing perspectives on strengths and weaknesses

One note on strengths and weaknesses: There has been an evolution in the last few years from “*identify the weakness and fix it*” to “*identify your strengths and build on them!*” (From Deficit-oriented Psychology to Positive Psychology, Arthur Freedman) Another aspect of building on strengths, however, is that a common way of derailing from leadership responsibilities is to *overdo* strengths, i.e., being independent and a self-starter got you promoted for years but now you can’t work on a team or collaborate when you need to. So how does one build on strengths, which is so compelling, without overdoing those strengths? Having a clear sense of self and the impact you’re having on others can answer that question, and that requires getting a lot of feedback from the people around you. But one assumption that I’ve made over the years is that very few traits or behaviors are always negative. Even abrasiveness and dictatorial behavior have their place, alongside emotional sensitivity. The real question is, do you use them at the right time and right place with the right person and for the common good?

Another challenge is to also be aware of the “shadow side” of our personalities, or blind spots, and manage those as well. Succumbing to the arrogance, greed or self-interest that at times accompanies the acquisition of power simply shows that the leader hasn’t really done the personal work that is necessary to avoid those traps. Integrity and credibility are very precious commodities in any leader as we can see in this time of corporate scandals. “Infectious greed” is bound to be an occupational hazard in a capitalistic economy based on self-interest, competition and short-term results.

A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being – conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what’s going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.<sup>2</sup>

Parker J. Palmer  
Leading From Within, '90

As we wrap up the complex list of human abilities that have a role in effective leadership it becomes very clear that a leader’s first responsibility is to develop him/herself in character and ability over time and then learn to manage all of those “many selves” to bring the most appropriate and effective self to bear on any given situation at any time. (Leading Consciously, Chatterjee '98) *Increase your bandwidth and stay in a liquid state* as we used to say in the heyday of the dot-coms! So, as a leader, who am I?

**I am Lancelot  
In search of the Holy Grail  
And finding myself**

My personal metaphor for effective self-leadership is the GAP metaphor. Between an action and a reaction is a gap. It is precisely in that gap that we have a conscious opportunity to determine our response from the many that are available – and the more developed and mature we are, the more options we have and the more appropriately we can act for the task at hand. But this takes a certain “inner” balance and awareness and willingness to suspend the habitual, default reaction. (Leadership From the Inside Out, Cashman '98) For example, I might be leading a meeting of peers when a colleague brusquely disagrees with something I say. I can respond automatically, possibly making a snide remark or aggressive joke, or I can pause and explore what is behind the disagreement, or I might ignore it and choose to discuss it with the person privately and give him/her feedback on the impact the remark had on me. In another culture it might be more appropriate to ignore the remark and ask a peer or colleague of the person what was behind the remark, etc. But that decision is a conscious one, appropriate to the person and the situation/context, and usually has to be made in the moment.

It is my belief that this flexibility and awareness can and should be cultivated in our children. Learning about self and managing self within a group is appropriate to all ages – it’s just the level of complexity and depth of the conversation that changes over time. Our struggle is ageless.

Mature leaders and change agents become more effective to the extent that they become more stably aware of all relevant factors and dimensions at play in the complex challenges they face (and as they develop the skills and tools needed to coherently address these multiple realities).

Global Integral Research, '02

When Fortune Magazine asked people in the “Top 100 Companies to Work For” ('01), what they valued most, it was inspiring leadership; second was a sense of meaning and purpose at work. Now that the new Millennium has arrived, the whole context of leadership has changed; no longer do we think only of adult, business or male models. When we talk of leading and leadership we are referring to any age, any group of people, any gender or culture. Everyone longs for more inspired leadership and more meaning and purpose in their lives.