

WHAT WORKS - A RESOURCE

THE TASKS OF LEADERSHIP

Examination of the tasks performed by leaders will take us to the heart of some of the most interesting questions concerning leadership. It will also help to distinguish among the many kinds of leader. Leaders differ strikingly in how well they perform the various functions.

I shall deal with nine tasks: envisioning goals, affirming values, motivating, managing, achieving a workable level of unity, explaining, serving as a symbol, representing the group externally, and renewing. This is not intended as a definitive list. These seem to me to be the most significant functions of leadership, but I encourage readers to add to the list or to describe the tasks in other ways. Leadership activities that are implicit in all the tasks (e.g., communicating, relating effectively with people) are not dealt with separately.

It is convenient to use as examples men and women whose names are known to everyone, and such people are generally leaders at a fairly lofty level. But the leadership tasks in question are performed at many levels. Every thoughtful parent, teacher, foreman and county supervisor understands that.

I. Envisioning goals

The two tasks at the heart of the popular notion of leadership are goal-setting and motivating. If one asks people what leaders do, the answers tend to focus on these two functions. As a high school senior put it, "Leaders point us in the right direction and tell us to get moving." We shall have to take a more complicated view of the tasks of leadership, but it is appropriate that we begin with the envisioning of goals. Albert Einstein said, "Perfection of means and confusion of ends seems to characterize our age."

Leaders perform the function of goal-setting in diverse ways. Some assert a vision of what the best group (organization, community, nation) can be at its best. For Americans, one of the earliest such assertions was John Winthrop's "We shall be as a city on the hill, the eyes of all people upon us." Other leaders point us toward solutions to our problems. Still others, presiding over internally divided groups, are able to define overarching goals that unify constituencies and focus energies. In today's complex world the setting of goals may have to be preceded by extensive research and problem-solving.

Obviously, a constituency is not a blank slate for the leader to write on. Any collection of people sufficiently related to be called a community has many shared goals, some explicit, some unexpressed (perhaps even unconscious), as basic as better prices for their crops, as intangible as a better future for their children. In defining objectives the leader must take such shared goals into account.

The relative roles of leader and followers in determining goals varies from group to group. The teacher of first grade children and the sergeant training recruits do not do extensive consulting as to goals; Congressional candidates do a great deal. In the case of many leaders, goals are handed to them by higher authority. The factory manager and the combat commander may be ►

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KEY ISSUES

John Gardner defines nine main tasks of leadership:

- ◆ envisioning goals
- ◆ affirming values
- ◆ motivating
- ◆ managing
- ◆ achieving a workable level of unity
- ◆ explaining
- ◆ serving as a symbol
- ◆ representing the group externally
- ◆ renewing.

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superb leaders but many of their goals will have been set at higher levels.

In short, goals emerge from many sources. The culture itself specifies certain goals; constituents have their concerns; higher authority makes its wishes known. Out of the welter, leaders accept some goals as given, make their own contribution, select and reformulate a set of objectives. It may sound as though leaders have only marginal freedom, but in fact there is usually considerable opportunity, even for lower-level leaders, to put their personal emphasis and interpretation on the setting of goals.

There is inevitable tension between long- and short-term goals. Constituents are not really comfortable with the jerkiness of short-term goal-seeking, and they value the stability that comes with a vision of far horizons. But leaders who hold to long-term goals must ask constituents to defer immediate gratification on at least some fronts—and that does not build popularity. When citizens enter the voting booth, they are apt to remember the deferral of gratification more vividly than they remember the reason for it.

II. Affirming values

A great civilization is a drama lived in the minds of a people. It is a shared vision; it is shared norms, expectations and purposes. When one thinks of the world's great civilizations, the most vivid images that crowd in on us are of the monuments left behind—the Pyramids, the Parthenon, the Mayan temples. But in truth all the physical splendor was the merest byproduct. The civilizations themselves, from beginning to end, existed in the minds of men and women.

If we look at ordinary human communities, we see the same reality: a community lives in the minds of its members—in shared assumptions, beliefs, customs, ideas that give meaning, ideas that motivate. And among the ideas are “norms” or “values.” In any healthy and reasonably coherent community, people come to have shared views concerning right and wrong, better and worse—in personal conduct, in governing, in art, whatever. They decide for their time and place what things they will define as legal or illegal, virtuous or vicious, good taste or bad. They have little or no impulse to be neutral about such matters. Every society is, as Philip Rieff puts it, “a system of moralizing demands” [1].

The values are embodied in the society's religious beliefs and its secular philosophy. Over the past century, many intellectuals have looked down on the celebration of

society's values as an unsophisticated and often hypocritical activity. But every healthy society celebrates its values. They are expressed in art, in song, in ritual. They are stated explicitly in historic documents, in ceremonial speeches, in textbooks. They are reflected in stories told around the campfire, in the legends kept alive by old folks, in the fables told to children.

However expressed, they carry the message of shared purposes, shared standards, shared conceptions of what is worth living for and striving for. And they have immense motivating power. People will accept pain and frustration, and will strive mightily to meet required standards—all on the condition that the denials and exertions exist within a framework of shared meaning. Of course, as humans they will have a broad range of motivations, some sanctioned by the culture and some not. And given human weakness, even those with acceptable motivations will often fail to meet their own standards. But for most there will be a strong impulse to live up to the best that their culture represents.

In a pluralistic community there will be, within the broad consensus that enables the community to function, many and vigorous conflicts over specific values. At best that is a sign of vitality, at worst it is the price of pluralism. But conflict is one thing; disintegration is something else.



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When the community's broad consensus disintegrates or loses its force, the society sickens. People no longer find meaning in their lives. Nothing holds together. It was in describing such disintegration in Athens after the Peloponnesian Wars that Gilbert Murray introduced his great phrase, "the failure of nerve" [2].

Our society has not come to that pass, but signs of disintegration are not hard to discern. In a recent study, a full-time high school drug counselor, asked if she directly approached students she knew to be drug users, said, "It's not a problem if there is no effect on the kid's performance. I mean, who are we to say what's right or wrong?" [3].

Before we draw excessively pessimistic conclusions from that and similar examples, it may be useful to reflect on the processes of decay and renewal.

The regeneration of values

One of the milder pleasures of maturity is bemoaning the decay of once strongly-held values. Values always decay over time. Societies that keep their values alive do so *not* by escaping the processes of decay but by powerful processes of regeneration. There must be perpetual rebuilding. Each generation must rediscover the living elements in its own tradition and adapt them to present realities. To assist in that rediscovery is one of the tasks of leadership.

The leaders whom we admire the most help to revitalize our shared beliefs and values. They have always spent a portion of their time teaching the value-framework. It didn't stop with Moses. Jefferson was at it constantly. So were Lincoln, Gandhi, Martin Luther King. In the gaseous atmosphere of politics, it is sometimes overdone. Thomas B. Reed, Speaker of the House in the last years of the 19th century, once said to Theodore Roosevelt, "Theodore, if there's one thing more than another for which I admire you it is your original discovery of the Ten Commandments."

Not only leaders of the society at large but leaders of organizations and groups must concern themselves with the affirmation of values. They do so not only in verbal pronouncements but in the policy decisions they make, the kinds of people they surround themselves with and the way they conduct themselves. The role of exemplary persons in preserving group values has been amply demonstrated.

Sometimes the leader's affirmation of values challenges entrenched hypocrisy or conflicts with the values held by a segment of the constituency. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 19th century women's rights leader, speaking for now-accepted values, was regarded as a thoroughgoing radical in her day [4]. Jesus not only comforted the afflicted but afflicted the comfortable. Values decay "out there" – in the marketplace, the law office, the press – and they must be regenerated out there. They must be reflected in actual behavior, embedded in our laws and institutions. People who remind us of that are rarely popular.

III. Motivating

Leaders do not normally create motivation out of thin air. They unlock or channel existing motives. To accomplish that they must understand the hopes and fears of their constituents: the bread-and-butter needs (jobs, housing, health care) and the need for security in a broader sense – confidence in the ability of the community to solve its problems. They must comprehend their constituents' longing for a good future – or improvement of their own lot and a better life for their children – for improvement of their own lot and a better life for their children – as well as the fear of catastrophic events and of the many forms of social disintegration. It is through understanding these things that leaders stir us to appropriate action.

Any group has a great tangle of motives. Effective leaders tap those motives that serve the purposes of collective action in pursuit of significant shared goals. They accomplish the alignment of individual and group goals. They deal with the circumstances that often lead group members to withhold their best efforts. They call for the kind of effort and restraint, drive and discipline that make for great performance. They create a climate in which there is pride in making significant contributions to shared goals.



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Positive attitudes toward the future

At the heart of sustained morale and motivation lie two ingredients that appear somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, positive attitudes toward the future and toward what one can accomplish through one's own intentional acts, and on the other hand, recognition that life is not easy and that nothing is ever finally safe.

Students of the American westward movement are familiar with the powerful sense of the future that characterized so many of the pioneers, the belief that they were part of an immensely exciting drama just begun. A friend of mine living in Japan when that nation was still getting used to the rewards of its industrial rise said in a letter written in 1971, "They feel that they are riding the wave of the future and it is unbelievably exhilarating." One has seen the same thing in political movements— liberal movements in the 1930s and 1960s, conservative movements in the 1970s and 1980s. The sense of having the *Zeitgeist* on one's side is an intoxicating thing. Energy is released by self-images of growth and forward movement.

Somewhat more complex than simple attitudes toward the future are the attitudes individuals have toward their own capacity to affect that future. Psychologists have ways of measuring the extent to which people believe they control (or can influence) the circumstances of their lives and the world around them. Some feel utterly powerless, victims of fate, leaves in the wind. Others have varying degrees of conviction

that they do indeed have some capacity to control their own lives and influence the world around them. This confidence greatly increases the likelihood of sustained, highly motivated effort. Teachers instructing small children in a new task know they will divide their time between teaching the youngsters *how* to do it and convincing them that they are *able* to do it.

Perhaps the greatest of our leaders in the "you can do it" mode was Theodore Roosevelt, one of the most genuinely popular presidents this nation has ever had. He spoke often of his sickly childhood and of the path that the puny, asthmatic youth had to travel to emerge as the Dakota cowboy, the Rough Rider, the big game hunter. It was a story that early 20th century Americans found wonderfully bracing. What one must have, he said over and over, is grit, pluck, determination, willpower [5]!

Loss of confidence

The opposite of positive attitudes is not adequately captured by the word pessimism. Loss of confidence brings images of defeat and failure, helplessness, even self-contempt. Among the direct consequences are an incapacity to summon energy in behalf of purposeful effort, an unwillingness to take risks, and a fatal timidity when the moment of opportunity breaks. The effect on an organization can be devastating. As negative attitudes rise, bureaucratic defensiveness rises along with them and the whole system rigidifies.

Those who have worked with populations living in deep poverty in the less developed nations of the world know the fatalism and deadening passivity that exist when people do not believe they can affect their future in any significant way. Some years ago I was visiting an experimental farm in Venezuela and fell into conversation with one of the field hands. I asked him whether good results would come of the experimental project, and he said "It may benefit someone, but it won't benefit my people." Then he added, "Nothing ever does." He didn't say it angrily or bitterly— he just seemed to be stating a fact of life. Malnutrition, debilitating diseases and other factors are implicated in the passivity of people living in deep poverty, but lack of hope ranks as a major ingredient.

I mention the extreme example of people in deep poverty because it makes the point vividly. But the principles involved affect purposeful effort at all income levels. They affect all employee morale, all learning, all effective performance. Creativity within an organization is to be found among men and women who are considerably removed from the fatalistic end of the scale. People have to believe in their capacity to act and bring about a good result. Leaders must help them keep that enlivening belief. Loss of it is one of the most poignant contemporary problems. There are innumerable factors in contemporary life that leave people with a sense of puzzlement and impotence about



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their relationship to the whole. Leaders must help us believe that we can be effective, that we can achieve a better future by our own efforts.

Leaders must not only help their followers take a positive view of the future, they must seek to correct the objective circumstances that are producing negative attitudes. In dealing with children in poverty, for example, society must not only help the children to believe in themselves, but must break the web of imprisoning circumstances that engender defeatism. It isn't enough for corporate managers to advocate positive attitudes; they must remove the bureaucratic obstacles that leave workers feeling hopelessly frustrated.

It is hard to have a sense of responsibility if one feels wholly powerless and unconnected to events. That is why many corporations today are striving to give workers down the line a feeling of involvement in decisions—“a sense of ownership” of the problems. And that is why many of us who worry about the continued volatility of our political system seek to increase citizen involvement in public life.

Optimism and realism

Positive views of the future must be tempered by a measure of tough-minded realism. High hopes that are dashed by the first failure are precisely what we do not need. We need to believe in ourselves and our future but not to believe that life is easy. Life is painful and rain falls on the just, and Mr. Churchill was not being a pessimist when he said, “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.” He had a great deal

more to offer, but as an able leader he was saying it was not going to be easy. Leaders must help us see failure and frustration not as reason to doubt ourselves but as reason to strengthen resolve.

Note that in the tasks of leadership described so far— as well as in some tasks yet to be described— the transactions between leaders and constituents go beyond the rational level to the non-rational and unconscious levels of human functioning. Young potential leaders who have been schooled to believe that all elements of a problem are rational and technical, reducible to words and numbers and solvable by computers, are ill-equipped to move into an area where intuition and empathy are powerful aids to problem-solving.

IV. Managing

In an earlier paper the similarities and differences between managers and leaders were discussed. Most managers exhibit some leadership skills, and most leaders on occasion find themselves managing. Leadership and management are not the same thing, but they overlap. It makes sense to include managing in the list of tasks leaders perform.

In the paragraphs that follow I shall try to focus on those aspects of leadership that one might describe as managing without slipping into a conventional description of managing as such, and to find terminology and phrasing broad enough to cover the diverse contexts in which leadership occurs— in corporations, unions, municipalities, political movements and so on.

1) Planning and priority-setting. Assuming that broad goals have been set, someone has to plan, fix priorities, choose means, formulate policy. These are functions often performed by leaders. When Lyndon B. Johnson said, early in his presidency, that education was the nation's number one priority, he galvanized the nation's educational leaders and released constructive energies far beyond any governmental action that had yet been taken.

2) Organizing and institution-building. We have all seen leaders enjoy their brilliant moment and then disappear without a trace because they had no gift for building their purposes into institutions. In the ranks of leaders, Alfred Sloan was at the other extreme. Though he sold a lot of automobiles, he was not primarily a salesman; he was an institution-builder. His understanding of organization was intuitive and profound.

Someone has to design the structures and processes through which substantial endeavors get accomplished over time. Many who have written on leadership have noted that, ideally, leaders should not regard themselves as indispensable but should enable the group to carry on. Institutions are a means to that end. Jean Monnet said, “Nothing is possible without men; nothing is lasting without institutions” [6].



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3) **Keeping the system functioning.**

Presiding over the arrangements through which individual energies are coordinated to achieve shared goals sounds like a quintessential management task. But it is clear that most leaders find themselves occasionally performing one or another of the essential chores: mobilizing and allocating resources, ensuring the continuing vitality of the team, creating and maintaining appropriate procedures, delegating and coordinating, providing a system of incentives, supervising, evaluating, holding accountable.

4) **Agenda-setting and decision-making.**

The goals may be clear, the organization well set up and smoothly operating, but there remain agenda-setting and decision-making functions that must be dealt-with. Eric Ashby says indecisiveness is contagious. The announcement of goals without a proposed program for meeting them is a familiar enough political phenomenon— but not one that builds credibility. There are leaders who can motivate and inspire but who cannot conceptualize a course of action, cannot visualize the path to a goal in terms of practical, feasible steps. Leaders who lack that skill must bring onto their team people who have it.

One of the purest examples of the leader as agenda-setter was Florence Nightingale [7]. Her public image was and is that of the lady of mercy, but under her gentle, soft-spoken

manner, she was a rugged spirit, a fighter, a tough-minded system changer. In mid-19th century England a woman had no place in public life, least of all in the fiercely masculine world of the military Establishment. But she took on the Establishment and revolutionized health care in the British military services. Yet she never made public appearances or speeches, and except for her two years in the Crimea, held no public position. She was a formidable authority on the evils to be remedied, she knew exactly what to do about them, and she used public opinion to goad top officials to adopt her agenda.

5) **Exercising political judgment.**

In our pluralistic society, persons directing substantial enterprises find that they are presiding over many constituencies within their organization and contending with many outside. Each has its needs and claims. One of the tasks of the leader/manager is to make the political judgments necessary to prevent secondary conflicts of purpose from blocking progress toward primary goals. Sometimes the literature on administration and management treats politics as an alien and disruptive force. But Aaron Wildavsky, in his brilliant book *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader*, makes the point that leaders are inevitably political [8].

V. Achieving workable unity

A pluralistic society is, by definition, one in which there are many different groups, each with its own purposes. Collisions are inevitable and often healthy— as in commercial competition, in the settlement of civil suits, and in efforts to redress grievances through the political process. Conflict is necessary in the case of oppressed groups that must fight for the justice that is due them. All our elective officials know the intense conflict of the political campaign. Indeed one could argue that willingness to engage in battle when necessary is a *sine qua non* of leadership.

But most leaders most of the time are striving to diminish conflict rather than increase it. Some measure of cohesion and mutual tolerance is an absolute requirement of social functioning.

Leaders must deal with both external and internal conflict. The time is past— if it ever existed— when leaders could confine their attention to the system over which they have jurisdiction. Today they live in a world of interacting, colliding systems. Leaders of any particular system have no choice but to take into account the need for mutually workable arrangements with systems external to their own. Leaders unwilling to do so are not serving the long-term interests of their own constituents.



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As for disputes within the leader's own jurisdiction, resolving them is a perennial task. Sometimes the problem is not outright conflict but an unwillingness to cooperate. One of the gravest problems George Washington faced as a general was that the former colonies, though they had no doubt they were all on the same side, were not always sure they wanted to cooperate. As late as 1818, John Randolph declared, "When I speak of my country, I mean the Commonwealth of Virginia" [9].

Leaders in this country today must cope with the fragmentation of the society into groups that have great difficulty in understanding one another or agreeing on common goals. It is a fragmentation rooted in the pluralism of our society, in the obsessive specialization of modern life, in the multiple, interlocking systems through which we conduct our affairs, and in the skill with which groups in the society organize to advance their concerns.

Under the circumstances, all our leaders must spend part of their time building community, dealing with polarization, creating loyalty to the larger venture. There is a false notion that this is a more bland, less rigorous task than leadership of one of the combative segments. In fact, the leader willing to tackle polarization is the braver person, and is generally under fire from both sides. I would suggest that Jean Monnet, the father of the European Common Market, is a more useful model of future leadership than his great countryman Charles DeGaulle.

Where there were conflicting purposes Monnet saw the possibility of shared goals, and he knew how to move his contemporaries toward those shared goals.

Conflict resolution

Leaders must be concerned with conflict resolution and, in pursuing that concern, must develop some of the skills of politicians. One knows all the pejorative overtones of that comparison, but politicians are the brokers and coalition builders whom we employ to keep our tumultuous and argumentative society going. Our Founding Fathers were skilled in mediating among conflicting views. They knew all about faction, and they worked hard and successfully to move the new nation away from divisiveness toward a vision of the common good.

Leaders who are skilled in the arts of resolving conflict are prepared to de-escalate the rhetoric and posturing on both sides of the dispute, and substitute a search for solutions that give each side the opportunity to compromise without losing face. Such leaders go to the root of the communication breakdown, whether it is anger, fear, mistrust or different assumptions and definitions. They create many kinds of interchange, letting each side speak and requiring that each side listen. They press each side to understand the way the other perceives the problem, recognizing that how adversaries perceive the problem generally *is* the problem. They generate alternative solutions, seeking among the many interests held by adversaries those interests that constitute common ground [10].

Trust

Much depends on the general level of trust in the organization or society. The infinitely varied and complex doings of the society— any society— would come to a halt if people didn't trust each other people *most of the time*— trust them to observe custom, follow the rules and behave with some predictability. Countless circumstances operate to diminish that trust, but one may be sure that if the society is functioning at all *some* level of elementary trust survives.

If the level of trust is high, divisiveness and conflict are easier to heal; as it diminishes, the healing of rifts becomes difficult. Leaders can do much to preserve the necessary level of trust. And the first requirement, of course, is that they have the capacity to inspire trust in themselves. In 16th century Italy where relations among the warring kingdoms were an unending alley fight, Machiavelli's chilling advice to the Prince— "It is necessary...to be a feigner and a dissembler," or, as another translation renders the same passage, "You must be a great liar and hypocrite" [11]— may have been warranted. And, under conditions of iron rule, Hitler and Stalin were able to live by betrayals of trust. But in our society, leaders must work to raise the level of trust.



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VI. Explaining

“Explaining” sounds too pedestrian to belong on a list of the tasks of leadership, but every leader will recognize it. People want to know what the problem is, why they were being asked to do certain things, how they related to the larger picture. Thurman Arnold said, “Unhappy is a people that has run out of words to describe what is happening to them” [12]. Leaders find the words. A corporate chief executive officer says, “If you judge by the time I spend on it, this is the most important task of all. I do an awful lot of explaining.”

To be heard above the hubbub in the public forum today, explaining generally requires more than clarity and eloquence. It requires effective access to the media of communication or broad alliances among those segments of the population that keep ideas in circulation— editors, writers, intellectuals, association leaders, advocacy groups, chief executive officers and the like.

The task of explaining is so important that some who do it exceptionally well play a leadership role even though they are not leaders in the conventional sense. When the American colonies were struggling for independence, Thomas Paine was a memorable explainer. In the powerful environmentalist surge of the 1960s and 70s, no activist leader had as pervasive an influence on the movement as did Rachel Carson, whose book *Silent Spring* [13] burst on the scene in 1963. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* [14] played a

similar role for the women’s movement.

Leaders teach. Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address provided an extraordinary example of the leader as teacher. Teaching and leading and distinguishable occupations, but every great leader is clearly teaching— and every great teacher is leading.

VII. Serving as a symbol

The leader is inevitably a symbol. The worker singled out to be foreman discovers with some discomfort that he is set apart from his old comrades in subtle ways. He tries to keep the old camaraderie but things have changed. He is now a symbol of management. The sergeant symbolized the chain of command. The parish religious leader symbolizes the church.

I recall a visit with a young college president who had just come into the job fresh from a professorship, with no prior administrative experience. He confided that he was deeply irked by an incident that had occurred the preceding day. In his first speech before faculty, students, trustees, and alumni, he had simply been himself— a man of independent mind full of lively opinions. Many of his listeners were nonplussed and irritated. They weren’t interested in a display of idiosyncratic views. They had expected him to speak as their new leader, their symbol of institutional continuity, their ceremonial collective voice. I told him gently that they had expected him to be their spokesman and symbol, and this simply angered him further. “I’ll resign,” he said, “if I can’t be myself!”

Over time, he learned that leaders can rarely afford the luxury of speaking for themselves alone.

In a group threatened with internal strife the leader may be a crucial symbol of unity. In a minority group’s struggle to find its place, combative leaders— troublesome to others— may be to their own people the perfect symbol of their anger and their struggle.

The top leader of a community or nation symbolizes the group’s collective identity and continuity. It is for this reason that the death of a president produces a special reaction of grief and loss. Americans who were beyond childhood when John F. Kennedy was assassinated remember, despite the passage of decades, precisely where they were and what they were doing when the news reached them. Even for many who did not admire him, the news had the impact of a blow to the solar plexus. And those old enough to remember Franklin D. Roosevelt’s death recognize the reaction.

For late 18th century Americans, George Washington was the symbol of all that they had been through together, the symbol of nationhood. Thomas Jefferson became such a powerful symbol of our democratic aspirations that for generations politicians fought over his memory. Those who favored Hamiltonian views sought bitterly and unsuccessfully to shatter the Jefferson image. As Merrill Peterson has cogently argued, the man himself lost reality and the symbol took over



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[15]. In the dark days of the Great Depression, the American impulse to face events in a positive spirit found its symbol in the ebullient F.D.R.

Most leaders become quite aware of the symbolic aspects of their role and make effective use of them. One of the 20th century leaders who did so most skillfully was Gandhi [16]. In his campaigns, in the jail terms and the fasting, in his manner of dress, he symbolized his people, their desperate need and their struggle against oppression.

VIII. Representing the group

In quieter times (we love to imagine that there were quieter times) leaders could perhaps concentrate on their own followers. Today, representing the group in its dealings with others is a substantial leadership task.

It is a truism that all of the human systems (organizations, groups, communities) that make up the society (and the world) are increasingly interdependent. The corporate CEO is constantly coping with external groups: all levels of government, competitors, the investment community, the media, consumers' advocacy groups, environmental groups, foreign governments and so on. A member of the President's Cabinet must deal not only with the White House, the numerous congressional committees and the press, but with the General Accounting Office, an ever more powerful Office of Management and Budget, an increasingly intrusive Office of Personnel Management, and innumerable politically powerful lobbies. It goes without saying that

people who have spent their careers in the world of the specialist or within the boundaries of a narrow community (their firm, their profession) are ill-equipped for such leadership tasks. The young potential leader must learn early to cross boundaries and to know many worlds.

Given those realities it is not easy to hold fast to the traditional idea of a leader with a clearly defined constituency. Those who exercise leadership in dealing with systems external to their own are doing so without a grant of authority over those external groups. The attributes that enable them to reach and lead their own constituencies may be wholly ineffective in external dealings. The military leader who is revered by his troops may be offensive to civilian groups. The business leader who is effective within the business culture may be lost in dealing with politicians and the media. A distinctive characteristic of the ablest leaders is that they do not shrink from external representation. They see the long-term needs and goals of their constituency in the broadest context, and they act accordingly. The most capable mayors think not just of the city but the metropolitan area and the region. Able business leaders are alert to the political climate and to world economic trends.

The most remarkable modern example of a leader carrying out the representative function is Charles DeGaulle. DeGaulle has his detractors, but none can fail to marvel at his performance in successfully representing the once and future France-as-a-great-power at a time when the nation itself was a defeated, demoralized, enemy-occupied land.

IX. Renewing

Leaders need not be renewers. They can lead people down old paths, using old slogans, toward old objectives. Sometimes that is appropriate. But the world changes with disconcerting swiftness. Too often the old paths are blocked and the old solutions no longer solve anything. It is that reality that stirs James MacGregor Burns to call for "transformational leadership" [17]. DeGaulle, writing of France's appalling unpreparedness for World War II, said:

The Army became stuck in a set of ideas which had had their heyday before the end of the First World War. It was all the more inclined that way because its leaders were growing old at their posts, wedded to errors that had once constituted their glory [18].

Change is not to be sought for its own sake. The consequences of change may be very good, very bad, or something in between. All renewal is a blend of continuity and change. Our problem is that to forgo change is not an option today. We are buffeted by events over which we have no control, and change will occur. The question is, Will it be the kind of change that will preserve our deepest values, enhance the vitality of the system and ensure its future? All intelligent efforts to accomplish renewal are attempts to bring about those consequences.



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Organizations are created by their founders to serve vibrant, living purposes. But all too often the founding purposes fade and what finally gets served are the purposes of institutional self-enhancement. It happens in hospitals to the detriment of patients, in schools to the detriment of students, in business to the detriment of shareholders and customers, and in government to the detriment of taxpayers. It is rarely the result of evil intent: it happens because means tend to triumph over ends, form triumphs over spirit, and the turf syndrome conquers all.

All effective performance depends on the refinement of methods for reaching whatever goals are sought. But when new realities call for new methods, it turns out that the old ways of doing things have hardened into inviolable routines. Innovation is blocked by a thicket of fixed attitudes, habits, perceptions, assumptions, and unwritten rules. "That's our way of doing it. That's what made us great!" says the defender of outworn ways in the aging organization. The consequence is that although renewal seems like a motherhood issue— who could oppose it in principle?— it is rarely popular in practice. It threatens settled ways of thinking and acting. And it seems to undermine established interests— though in fact it may be the only way to save such interests.

The trance of non-renewal

The problem is systemic. It is not a question of healthy systems whose leaders happen to lack creativity. If we could pump creativity into the leaders, they would still be faced with the reality of systemic stagnation. Organizational arrangements and strategies designed to deal with old realities must be redesigned to cope with new challenges. Individuals who are functioning far below their potential must be awakened.

In some systems that have gone too long without renewal people understand that change is needed and are restless. This was spectacularly true of Turkey when Kemal Ataturk, one of the great leaders/renewers of modern times, was a young officer. Long before World War I he had joined the Young Turks who sought a constitutional government for the decaying 600-year-old Ottoman Empire. After the war he drove out the various foreign powers threatening Turkey's autonomy, created the Turkish Republic, and then, as President, launched an extraordinary series of reforms. He disestablished Islam as the state religion; abolished old codes subordinating women; substituted the Roman alphabet for the Arabic; instituted a new civil and penal code; abolished the traditional— mainly religious— educational system, and established secular schools.

Such far-reaching changes would have been quite impossible had there not been an influential body of Turks who were ready for change. Humiliated by defeat in the war,

alienated by the decay of the sultanate and acutely conscious of their country's backwardness, they were eager to put the past behind them.

But such readiness for change is not a common circumstance. In most systems (societies, corporations, whatever) needing renewal, people are satisfied with things as they are, and the leaders are satisfied too. It is as though the system were asleep under a magic spell. But the spell can be broken. Disaster is a spellbreaker. (Of course, the disaster is often brought on by the non-adaptive ways of the system.) Competition from rival systems may break the spell. Cold reality can be a spellbreaker, and leaders can help by cutting through all the organizational filters and getting back in touch with what actually goes on. That is why generals should visit the front lines, business executives should mingle with customers, Washington bureaucrats should get out to the grassroots. The mythical giant Antaeus, son of the Earth Goddess Gaea, couldn't be defeated in wrestling as long as he kept one foot on mother earth.

A strategy for avoiding the trance of non-renewal is to keep a measure of diversity and dissent in the system. Dissent isn't comfortable, but generally it is simply the proposing of alternatives— and a system that isn't continuously examining alternatives is not likely to evolve creatively. Plenty of diversity exists in the outer world so the organization concerned for renewal will keep the doors and windows open and the two-way flow



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of information moving. Recruitment from outside into the middle and upper ranks of the system will increase the impact of the external world.

A feature of the trance of non-renewal is that individuals can look straight at a flaw in the system and not recognize it as a flaw. The organization that is gravely in need of renewal shows plenty of signs of its threatened condition, but the signs can't be seen by those who are "under the spell." The future generally announces itself from afar. But most people are not listening. Others are listening but cannot bestir themselves to act. Leaders who can listen and bestir themselves will be credited with an uncanny gift for prophecy.

Role of the leader

It is difficult for any society to preserve a measure of creativity in the young people who will eventually perform leadership functions. All too often on the long road up young leaders become "servants of what is" rather than "shapers of what might be." In the long process of learning how the system works, they are rewarded for playing within the intricate structure of existing rules, and by the time they reach the top are likely to be trained prisoners of the structure. This is not all bad; every vital system reaffirms itself. But no system can stay vital for long unless some of its leaders remain sufficiently independent to help it change and grow.

An example of the leader/renewer is Charles Bannerman, who is one of the nation's most successful practitioners of community development. He heads a nonprofit, membership-based community development corporation, Mississippi Action for Community Education, whose activities cover the 14 counties in the Delta, one of the most impoverished rural areas in the nation. Presiding over housing projects, public health activities, citizenship education programs and a variety of commercial ventures (including a number of factories), Bannerman and his associates work continuously to break the old patterns of entrenched poverty and put in place institutions that will bring about social renewal.

One of the great historical examples of the leader/renewer is John XXIII, who was elected Pope at the age of 76. In his long years of rising through the ranks of the church hierarchy, the spark of imagination and creativity remained undimmed, and when he reached the top he became the greatest force for renewal the Church has known in this century.

So much for the tasks of leadership. Any attempt to describe a social process as complex as leadership inevitably makes it seem more orderly than it is. Leadership is not tidy. Decisions are made and then revised or reversed. Misunderstandings are frequent, inconsistency inevitable. Achieving a goal may simply make the next goal more urgent: inside every solution are the needs of new problems. And as Donald Michael has pointed out, most of the time most things are out of hand. No leader enjoys that reality, but every leader knows it [19]. ■

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