

Professional Responsibility Report



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Leaders are Born ... and Made

By Lazar Emanuel

I have been reading Bill George's *True North*, a book based on interviews with 125 "authentic leaders." My object was to find a common thread which would tie all the leaders together. I did come away with one conclusion – a leader's effectiveness cannot be measured without reference to the context in which it is being tested. In other words, whether a person is truly a leader can be demonstrated best by her response to an immediate problem or crisis, or by whether she can construct and manage a plan that succeeds over time, or whether she is able to inspire others to plan and build. In all these circumstances, context is controlling.

One story in *True North* involves John Whitehead, former Chairman of Goldman Sachs and of the Board of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. On D-Day in 1944, Ensign Whitehead commanded a flotilla of six boats with strict orders to land at a designated point on the Normandy shore. Advancing toward the shore, he met with a stiff artillery barrage and a barrier that no one had warned him about – a system of metal bars embedded in the ocean floor that prevented him from moving forward. Undeterred, and ignoring his orders, Whitehead steered his boats to another part of the beach and landed successfully. As he reported in *True North*, he had exactly ten seconds to make his decision to reject his orders and avoid the barrier.

Would you have made the same decision? Or would you have hesitated till one of your crew made the decision for you? Or would you have followed your orders and floundered on the bars? Or would you have become too rattled to make any decision at all?

Tested Under Pressure

Obviously, you can *guess* what you *might* have done, but you can't *know* what you *would* have done. Whitehead's leadership was tested by its context – a historic day, history's greatest battle, an unforeseen obstacle, an improbable assignment, responsibility for the safety of others, the vision of success, a fortuitous solution, the need for impossibly quick reaction – all these at the same time and in ten seconds.

How many leadership challenges can you cite in which context mattered? Can you measure the leadership of George W. Bush without reference to Katrina and New Orleans, or to the treatment of war casualties at Walter Reed? Or the leadership of Rudy Giuliani without reference to 9/11? Or the leadership of Warren Buffet in building a world empire from an office in Omaha, Nebraska.

Can you test the leadership at the Ford Motor Company without reference to its decline in the face of mounting competition? Or the leadership at major drug companies which resulted in the recall of drugs whose risk the leaders knew or suspected?

Leadership is manifested best when it is tested in the crucible of pressure and challenge – when things heat up. The most effective leaders prepare for these challenges by studying and understanding themselves. In this process, they need to learn what factors they were born with, how their families influenced them, their interest in leading others, how they relate to others, and the extent to which they are controlled by their interests, goals and values.

All the Things that Matter

Over the years, commentators have debated whether the qualities of leadership are inherent or learned. I have never understood why it was necessary to pursue the answer to that question so ardently. Isn't it better to assume that both matter to some incalculable degree and to study HOW they matter? If we assume, for example, that leadership requires a reasoned adjustment to the people one leads, shouldn't we consider both how one is hard-wired to react to people and what one needs to learn to become more effective with people.

It seems intuitive, for example, to conclude that extroverts are more comfortable reacting to other people than introverts are. Does it follow that they would also be more inclined to assume the mantle of leadership? Or that introverts have to work harder to learn the techniques of leadership? If these issues matter, then doesn't it help to know whether you're an extrovert or an introvert? And, having learned that answer, doesn't it help to know what steps will enable you to utilize your strengths and overcome your weaknesses?

We know that leaders are confronted constantly with new crises, some of their own making, but the majority forced upon them by intervening circumstances. If it can be measured, wouldn't you like to know how you were born to respond to challenges? And, once you know that, how you can add your knowledge to your other resources to achieve the best solutions in your power?

We know also that people learn in different ways – some by reading, some by listening, some through physical movement, some through charts, tables and graphics, and some by associating facts with numbers. Again, if we can measure how you are wired to learn best, won't that also help you to learn more, and to motivate others to learn more? Similarly, we know that a strong vocabulary is often the key to success in leadership. Wouldn't it

help you to know the level and scope of your vocabulary and to determine whether you can communicate effectively with your staff and with the outside world?

Self-Awareness as Foundation

In the final analysis, a solid foundation built on self-awareness is the base which supports the confidence and the instinct to lead. Self-awareness requires more than knowledge of your hard-wired abilities. Extremely important to your self-knowledge is an analysis of your childhood and the influences of your family. Many of the stories in *True North* confirm the relationship between family and leadership. Howard Schultz, founder of Starbucks, attributes his drive to success to memories of his father's setbacks. "My inspiration comes from seeing my father broken from the thirty terrible blue-collar jobs he had over his life, where an uneducated person just did not have a shot." Reatha Clark King, member of the Boards of ExxonMobil and Wells Fargo Bank, daughter of a maid and a neglectful father, found her strength in her church and in recognition of her talents by older churchwomen and her teachers.

My own belief is that the activities an individual volunteers for in his high school and college years are important indicators of his capacity for leadership. Show me a school newspaper or yearbook editor, a class officer, the leader of a club or committee, the captain of a team, and I'll show you a potential leader. It's not easy for a student 14-22 to expose himself to comment, criticism or ridicule. Those that do develop the qualities to assume leadership roles in business and the professions.

Importance of Values

No one can succeed as a leader without building and following a set of sound and reasonable personal and social values. Ultimately, society – and your staff – must agree that your values are responsible and worthy. If they don't, they will reject them and force you either to reset them or to resign. Values change with time. You must study and remain aware of current business and social values and respect them. In my judgment, the key current values are: 1) honesty and integrity; 2) concern for the general good, not your own self-promotion and interest; 3) openness and sincerity; 4) a willingness to recognize and resolve disagreements; 5) a true sense of self; and 6) a commitment to understand and foster communication with others (to avoid confrontation and disagreement).

A leader's values, of course, define her goals. If her goals are not consistent with her values, or her values do not correspond to her goals, she will find that failure as a leader is inevitable. Depending upon the scope of her influence, the people around her will sense the disparities between her values and goals and see her as ineffective or even irrelevant. For this reason, it's critical for a leader to define and state her values and her goals clearly and simply. Her statement should be addressed to the people and the issues she's able to influence or control. The CEO of a company should state her attitude towards health care as it affects her own company, not as it affects general business practice or governmental policy. She will earn the respect of her workers if she does the one and risk the impact of criticism by the public if she does the other. A Statement of Values, Principles and Goals should be among the first things a new CEO distributes.

To develop a complete Guide to an individual's leadership capacity, we need to consider two or three other factors than innate abilities, family, school enterprise, values and goals. Among these are the leader's skills, his experience, his age, and his present work role and environment. If a leader has developed into a good writer or communicator, for example, he should make use of his skill in staff memos and directives. If a leader's

experiences have included graphics and design, he should take active part in the preparation and design of company literature and advertising. If a leader is young and inexperienced, he should seek the help of an older person as mentor and guide. If a leader is close to retirement, he should volunteer to act as mentor to younger executives. And if a leader is presently supervising the accounting staff, he may want to extend his control to the purchasing department to achieve greater balance between the two.

It takes many steps to know a person's Leadership potential. Only after an entire picture of the individual emerges can we know what strengths that individual brings to the process, and what steps he needs to take to maximize his effectiveness. ■