

Leadership into the Future

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Having an Impact

The future has always seemed like some distant fixation, but it is a reference to which we contemplate everyday. Now with the majority of my adolescence behind me, I find myself even more perplexed. Who and where do I want to be in the future? The future is the time that will come. It is irrefutable, but it can be manipulated. If there is one thing I hope to take from this course, it is inspiration; inspiration from the great people that lived before me. Since arriving at St. Lawrence University and enrolling in Having an Impact, I have read and learned more things about leadership than I had ever expected.

Leadership: What defines good leadership? Are you born with it? Can it be developed? As seen in chapter eight of *The Leader's Companion*, the greatest philosophers of all time are incapable of generalizing leadership in one definition. At first, I was perplexed on how these great minds could not collaborate to define this one word. But after thinking about it, leadership is far too complicated. It is unique to the individual. Every individual has their own opinion because every individual has the capability to be their own leader. I believe everyone should approach every situation with this mentality. With a broad spectrum of individuals contributing a broad spectrum of solutions, change is inevitable, and with change, comes growth and open-mindedness.

Granted, there are certain individuals with the natural ability to lead, but I do believe leadership qualities can be developed, generally in extreme situations. We should use past leaders, both positive and negative, for insight. The past must be the stepping stones into the future.

Richard L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon R. Curphy referred to the amazing survival story of the Uruguayan Rugby team in chapter eight of *the Leader's Companion*. "In the spring of 1942, an airplane flew across the Andes mountains carrying

its crew and forty passengers. Most of these passengers were members of an amateur Uruguayan Rugby team en route to a game in Chile. The plane never arrived. It crashed in snow-covered mountains, breaking into several pieces upon impact.”(39). Of the forty passengers who embarked on the flight, only sixteen survived the two month ordeal in the Andes, even resorting to cannibalism of the deceased passengers.

I had some knowledge of this unbelievable survival story prior to reading the Wren anthology. I have always thought of this group as simply amazing. They overcame insurmountable odds through extreme perseverance, but I have never taken the time to consider the individuals, specifically Parrado. Here is this boy, considered awkward and shy amongst his teammates, that is forced into this unbelievable situation, but yet he prospers. “During the difficult discussions preceding the decision to survive on the flesh of fallen passengers, Parrado made his reasoning clear: ‘I know that if my dead body could help you stay alive, then I would want you to use it. In fact, if I do die and you don’t eat me, then I’ll come back from wherever I am and give you a good a good kick in the ass,”(41) After hiking for ten days through some of the most rugged terrain in the world, he stumbled upon a group of Chilean peasants tending cattle.(Hughes, 40). His strength and motivation provided the will for others to survive.

This incredible story is an astonishing source of inspiration for everyone to explore their individual capabilities. I know that any time in my life when I am feeling overwhelmed, I can turn to the readings from *Having an Impact* and regain perspective. Abraham Lincoln could teach himself to read. African Americans and whites could go to school together peacefully. Nelson Mandela could spend twenty-seven years of his life in

prison and still become the President of South Africa. There is no task that is insurmountable.

This semester the readings have all been interesting, but Mandela's *Secrets of Leadership* particularly resonated with me. Richard Stengel, the writer of the article in *Time Magazine*, not only explored what Nelson Mandela did, but the way he did it. As Stengel said, "Mandela liberated a country from a system of violent prejudice and helped unite white and black, oppressor and oppressed" (43). Nelson Mandela, in my eyes, is one of the greatest leaders of all time. He persevered through discrimination, harassment, even imprisonment and came out even stronger. He was both a citizen leader and servant leader. He served the people of South Africa his entire life. Despite being offered freedom twice during his twenty-seven year imprisonment, he refused to abandon his beliefs. This strength inspired South Africa and the entire world. His service as a simple citizen led to a life that does and will continue to inspire millions of leaders well into the future.

It is an ambitious endeavor for one to emulate Mandela's leadership qualities, but I do hope to utilize some of his attributes when the situation arises. His eight lessons of leadership seem so simple, but he was able to "overthrow an apartheid and create a nonracial democratic South Africa by knowing precisely when and how to transition between his roles as warrior, martyr, diplomat, and statesman" (Stengel, 44). This multifaceted individual changed the fate of millions. I only hope to obtain a fraction of his influence. Each of his eight lessons correlates to other readings throughout the semester and these lessons will influence the way I lead in the future.

Mandela's first lesson of leadership is "courage is not the absence of fear- it's inspiring others to move beyond it" (Stengel, 44). Mandela exemplified this lesson during

his flight on a small propeller plane. One of its engines failed, and the only thing that calmed the rest of the passengers was Mandela's calm exterior. When the plane eventually landed, Mandela admitted he was scared. (Stengel, 44). It is ignorant to say that we do not all have fear. I believe fear is important. It keeps us sane. An individual that lives without fear has nothing to live for. Mandela recognized that he was a model for others, and it was his obligation to instill a sense of security.

Similarly, this occurred in the *Call of Service* by Robert Coles. His mission in writing this book, as he explains in the introduction is "to explore the 'service' we offer to others and, not incidentally, to ourselves. I am hoping to document the subjectivity, the phenomenology of service: the many ways such activity is rendered; the many rationales, impulses, and values served in the implementation of a particular effort; the achievements that take place, along with the missteps and failures; the personal opportunities and hazards; and the consequences — how this kind of work fits into a life." Coles began his book with the story of Tessie, a young black girl who was not welcome in the McDonogh School because of the black and white segregation. With the additional motivation of her grandmother, Tessie proudly entered the McDonogh School through a cluster of protestors with her head held high. She did not let fear limit her pursuit of equality. It was her perseverance that motivated one female protestor to empathy. "They're just trying to do what they think is right, what they've been told is right -trying to be of help to their people. I suppose they've done something for us. We had our fight, and we've lost it, and now we've got to put it all behind and try to get an education for our kids." (Coles, 6). Years later, this woman talked about the situation with much embarrassment. Tessie did answer her call for service. She opened doors for African American's. She opened the

eyes of those that were ignorant, and she showed them the light. As a leader, I hope to recognize the big picture and persevere with courage.

Mandela's second and third lessons are vital for success. "Lead from the front- but don't leave your base behind. Also lead from the back- and let others believe they are in front." (Stengel, 44). As a leader, it is important to understand the people you work with. If you are constantly exerting your authority, your influence will slowly diminish. A leader can not lead without the "consent of its followers" (Phillips, 48). John Gardner researched this relationship even further in chapter twenty-nine of the Wren anthology. A person can be given a subordinate, but they cannot be given a following. A following must be earned (Gardner, 186).

Abraham Lincoln visited his generals at the battle sites. He was not a far away symbol of authority simply commanding others. He established relationships with the people of the nation. Any successful leader needs to be personable. They need to earn their following. As seen in the Lincoln letter to General Hooker during the Civil War, Lincoln writes to his general as if they were friends. He offers both support and comfort, but also makes suggestions for alternate combat strategies. This is important in leadership. When a leader relates to his or her people, they will be far more successful. Lincoln established this bond with the general public during his presidency. There was a sense of trust that made this chaotic time of succession endurable. This trust gave people the confidence to remain in the Union and unite this country.

Mandela's fourth and fifth lessons on leadership stress the importance of knowing your enemy. Mandela studied the language of the white South Africans. "He wanted to understand the Afrikaner's worldview; he knew that one day he would be fighting them

or negotiating with them, and either way, his destiny was tied to theirs.” (Stengel, 45). Certainly not as important as the battle for racial equality in South Africa, but here at St. Lawrence, we spend a considerable amount of time studying teams that we will play during the soccer season. Coach Durocher composes a scouting report before each game. The entire team gathers in the locker room after practice, and we look over the scouting report. We learn the strengths and weaknesses of our opponents. We create different strategies that will compliment our strengths and pick on their weaknesses. Coach is able to learn all of this information through the relationships he has established during his tenure as head coach. He has gained the trust of many coaches. Therefore, they are willing to help him by giving insight on other teams. Coach has utilized Mandela’s strategy of “keeping your friends close, and your enemies even closer” (Stengel, 45).

Emotions play a considerable part in leadership. Mandela understood its importance; he even included it in his eight lessons of leadership- “Appearances matter, and remember to smile”(Stengel,47). Mandela’s iconic smile was a symbol of triumph for the black voters and symbolized a lack of bitterness to the white South Africans. Either way, they smiled back. His personality and optimism impacted those around him. Stengel reflected on Mandela’s influence: “I worked with Mandela for nearly two years on his autobiography. After all that time spent in his company, I felt a terrible sense of withdrawal when the book was done; it was like the sun going out of one’s life.”(44). Here at St. Lawrence and beyond, I hope to impact people’s lives for the better just as Mandela did for Richard Stengel and countless South Africans.

Primal Leadership by Daniel Goleman further emphasizes the importance of emotions. A leader can do everything else right, but if he fails in driving emotions, he will

not be successful. As a leader here at St. Lawrence, I plan to be an emotional leader for everyone. A smile can brighten up a room. For a group of soldiers in Iraq, a smile was enough to prevent a riot, which would have resulted in the death of many citizens perhaps even some soldiers.

The decisions we make influence how we are viewed as leaders. Mandela approached every decision with the mentality “nothing is black or white and quitting is leading too.”(Stengel, 48). He understood that life is never either/or. Decisions are complex, and there are always competing factors. A leader must evaluate all possibilities and act accordingly. A person will be ridiculed for making a bad decision, but will be praised for making the right decision. Darwin E. Smith, CEO of Kimberly Clark, exemplified positive decision making when he chose to sell the mills. He was not necessarily quitting, but he was cutting his losses and pushing forward with even more strength. All of Mandela’s eight lessons of leadership will influence my leadership skills. Anytime in the future when I am contemplating what a great leader would do under a certain predicament, I will turn to these simple lessons. These lessons were sufficient for one of the greatest leaders of all time, and they were present in the majority of our reading throughout the semester.

In the next few years at St. Lawrence, I plan to be a leader to my classmates. Whether they are struggling in or out of the classroom, I hope to be someone people are comfortable to turn to in times of trouble. Academically, I anticipate becoming a QRC tutor. Math has always been a subject that has come rather naturally for me, and as I become more involved in the university, I would like to help struggling underclassmen. Additionally, I would like to talk to admissions about becoming a campus tour guide.

Personally, my tour guide was an influential part in my decision making process. They are the students that encompass all the university has to offer. They are involved in clubs, play sports, and receive good grades. I hope to emulate these qualities.

On the soccer field, I plan to grow as a leader. This past year, there has been a lot that has occurred which I wish I could have spoken up over, but I felt it was not my place as a freshman. As an upperclassman, I will lead through my actions. I may not ever be the captain of the team, but I promise to exert the effort that any individual on the team would look up to.

Humor will impact the way I lead the future teams at St. Lawrence. When we were on our season winning streak, spirits were high and everyone was getting along great. When we began to lose, spirits were down and confrontations were rising between players. Our level of play was dramatically suffering. Our response was to train harder which was good, but no one was enjoying themselves. “When people feel good, they work at their best.”(Goleman, 14). As a leader on the team, I plan to make every drill fun. I want to incorporate competition in a fun and productive manner. I know that having fun and working hard at practice will carry over to the game. I will try to use the same optimism to console players after Coach delivers one of his negative speeches. “The ability of a leader to pitch a group into an enthusiastic, cooperative mood can determine its success.”(Goleman,15) Coach tends to get frustrated when players make mistakes during practice. As a leader on and off the field, I will look out for the players that do not respond as well to this form of criticism. Hopefully, some of the other members of Having an Impact and I can use our leadership skills to bring the soccer team and the

university back some of the glory from the 1999 undefeated Men's Soccer National Champions.

After college, we face the real world. We have to get jobs and develop a healthy, sustainable lifestyle. I do not know what I want to do with my life, but I do know it must be something I will enjoy. My work will reflect the type of mood that I am in, and I refuse to dedicate my life to something that I am not passionate about. Regardless of my profession, my leadership style will not change. Lynn MacFarlund insists on redefining leadership for the next century. The concept of the successful, often forceful leader is in the past. I plan to be charismatic and express my opinion. I have no intention of exerting my dominance. I hope to earn it through my work ethic. As a leader in a company, you must recognize the difference between leading and managing. "The classic business school of definition of management was planning, organizing, and controlling."

(MacFarland,461). Leading is handling change. Change is inevitable. A leader is tested in his ability to compensate for change and excel. A leader does not have to force his point on others. Macfarlund insists a strong leader empowers and brings out the best of all of his followers (462). I strive to do the same in my profession as well as my community. A leader must embrace his spiritual side and approach obstacles sensitively. In the long run, it will be beneficial to all parties.

Having an Impact is a course focused on leadership, teamwork, and motivation. I have learned an immense amount about all of these qualities. They are vital for mental, physical, and spiritual success. In the future, I know I will turn to the Wren anthology and Mandela's eight lessons on leadership. As I said, the past must be the stepping stones for

the future. The most influential people of all time are encompassed through out these readings. And I will continue to read them for knowledge and inspiration.

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