



Leadership Styles

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Increasingly, scholarship on leadership is focussing on varying leadership styles and their appropriateness to the situation of the moment and the constituency being led. My introduction to this theme of the varying attributes of leadership occurred when I attended a Kellogg Foundation seminar on the topic of leadership, a seminar that featured three keynote speakers of national prominence. One was a woman, the Ambassador, who served President Carter as emissary to a Latin American country; the second was a General who had served in Vietnam and who currently was the president of the National War College; the third was a activist, The Priest, with a national reputation for work in the civil rights movement and currently director of a model community project in a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. Nothing that any of these leaders said about leadership had anywhere as near the impact as the style each exuded.

The Ambassador manifested visibly the leadership style one might call **the consensus style**, a style now popular in leadership studies as emergent in the corporate world as a by-product both of studying the Japanese management team approach and of studying women's social structures and leadership proclivities. The Ambassador immediately connected with her audience, since her style was personal and personable. One felt that one had known her all one's life because she was folksy, open, spontaneous, friendly. She described the technique she had used to disarm her adversaries in court and to court those she had been sent to engage. Clearly, if building trust and empowering others are the essence of one's preferences in a leader, one would choose to follow the ambassador. That being said, what was the downside of the ambassador's leadership style? From her own admission, it emerged that she had had to compromise many of the tasks and goals she and the President had set in order to cement the bonds and secure the trust in the relationships, so that she never was completely satisfied that she had actually achieved any of the specific goals identified, but in her opinion, her work had set the course for her successors to do so.

A starker contrast could hardly be imagined than that between the Ambassador and **the General**, whose persona perfectly illustrated the **CEO/goal orientation style** of leadership. The General immediately impressed us all by the sheer organizational command of his presentation. He dazzled us with flow charts, overhead projections, and pithy anecdotes. The General's style one might label the corporate manager, a style that is characterized by hierarchy and delegation. Much of the stereotypical expectations one might have about a general were quickly dispelled by the General's presentation: clearly, he was as informed or better informed than most about leadership issues, as creative or more creative than most about strategies for effective leadership. One felt reassured by

the General: It was clear what he expected from his subordinates, and he was clear in setting the goals. It was also clear that he would differ with the Ambassador when it came to compromising; for the General, the task was all-important, and relationships only secondary. That being said, what was the downside to the General's leadership style? If anything were to be sacrificed in order to be successful in the task, it was the relationship, not the goal.

The Priest represented a third leadership approach, that of the **visionary and charismatic** style. The Priest was riveting as a speaker on his topic (civil rights), impassioned, engaging, dramatic. One could easily argue that the Priest lacked coherence in his presentation: his policy recommendations, his historical referencing, his speech itself were all rather chaotic in presentation. What he lacked in terms of the Ambassador's tact and the General's efficiency, however, he more than compensated for in terms of pure power of delivery and the vision of a better society. In fact, a dispassionate observer might have had some trouble in drawing the line between charisma and demagoguery, for the Priest crossed that line on more than one occasion. Nonetheless, clearly here was leadership that was inspiring and compelling: Of the three leaders on that day, he was the only one who provoked a spontaneous standing ovation. That being said, what was the downside of the Priest's leadership style? After the applause ended and we began to assess the effectiveness of each leader's style and presentation, we realized in the case of the Priest, although we had been *inspired*, we had not a clue what we were *supposed to do*: i.e., typical of charismatic leaders, the Priest had presented a visionary destination but no road map of how to get there.

Embedded in this assessment of leadership styles is the question of assumptions about leaders. We must guard against is the mythology that is emerging about paradigms of leadership. The mythology has four components to it:

1. The myth that masculine (the General) and feminine (the Ambassador) leadership styles are exclusive to their respective genders. *Au contraire*: It is untrue to assume that on the one hand all men are autocratic and hierarchical in leadership preferences and style and that all women, on the other hand, prefer consensus-builders when followers and function as consensus-seekers as leaders. No one ever accused Margaret Thatcher, Indira Ghandi, or Golda Meier of having a "feminine" leadership style.

2. The myth that daily management of institutions (or of one's personal life, for that matter) calls for one style exclusively. Rather, the best administrators and leaders know *which* situations demand autocratic decisiveness (the general) and which recommend democratic cooperativeness (the ambassador) and which recommend visionary "suspension of disbelief" (the priest). We know from experience that it is best to form a planning committee involving the people who will be affected when we are trying to design a library; we would never convoke a commission or form a committee, however, to decide on the exit route if a fire were to break out in the library. Day in and day out, brushfires break out in institutions, emergency actions are required, and we welcome general-like leadership. At the same time, we need priest-like vision and inspiration if our

institutions are to aspire to greatness and ambassador-like people skills of the followers are to be empowered and mobilized to achieve it.

3. The myth that institutions demand a single leadership style, now and forever.

"It ain't necessarily so": Institutions undergo a life cycle not unlike that of humans, and they need different direction depending upon their particular point of growth. Just as the child needs to be guarded and nurtured, the adolescent to be guided and launched, and the adult supported and reassured, so too with institutions at differing stages in their histories. To shift metaphors, one might say that the sinking ship needs an autocratic Ahab, whereas the last thing a mutinying ship needs is another Captain Bligh.

4. The myth that we are supposed to admire and adulate our leaders while they are conducting the messy job of leading. I would observe that corrupt and closed totalitarian cultures lionize leaders, until they die: then they are demonized. Free and open democratic cultures demonize leaders, until they die; then they are lionized. Just as "no good deed ever goes unpunished," effective leadership, especially transformational leadership, seldom goes unscathed by brutal criticism.

Finally, then, what is it we should look for in our leadership for the future? Need we be bound by stereotypes of gender and style? What we should embrace in our own leadership activities and celebrate in those leaders whom we choose to follow is the ability and flexibility to adapt the leadership style to the situation at hand. We need to be the Ambassador at some points, the General at others, and the Priest at other points still. That combination may be well beyond the grasp of most of us, yet surely it should not be beyond our reach.

It is conceivable that a single leader combines all three faces of leadership, the Ambassador, the General, and the Priest? Unlikely (since in some ways they are mutually exclusive). Can a leader combine two of the three, balancing the dominant with the secondary style and supplementing with strong co-leaders who present the third style? Possibly.

So which of these leadership styles is most appropriate for today's institutions in today's world? Well, it depends....

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