

Three Wellsprings of Leadership

by

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A Brief, But Necessary Introduction

This is not a traditional “how to be a great leader in thirty easy steps” book. There is a superabundance of such books in the marketplace. Rather, I have identified the Wellsprings of Character, Hope, and Imagination as sources for the emanation of those aspects of artful Leadership which are appropriate for the presenting challenge or opportunity. I do not offer a smorgasbord of Leadership theories, principles, strategies, anecdotes, and approaches, or a list of allegedly indispensable character traits.

Instead, I will give my readers confidence that once they understand the nature and power of the three Wellsprings, and their constant availability and reliability, they will display those aspects of artful Leadership that are relevant to the attendant circumstances.

In terms of being keenly perceptive and skillful Leaders, my readers will be able to leave this book knowing that they can rely on their individual strengths and talents, without having to try to assimilate the precepts of the most recent leadership craze.

When I started this project, I had intended to write a book for the benefit of people either in, or aspiring to, positions of Leadership in the private sector and the Executive Branch of government - the places from which I have had opportunities to observe, reflect upon, and practice Leadership. However, partway through my book, it occurred to me that the information, ideas, and approaches that I have described might be useful for numerous people, not just business executives. For example, the director of a motion picture production or

a lieutenant in the Armed Forces might benefit from understanding the nature, availability, reliability, and power of the Wellsprings of Character (as opposed to character traits), Hope (the ability to make people hopeful), and Imagination.¹

The successful use of the information and ideas set forth in this book is based upon the assumptions that the reader has:

- (1) A thorough understanding of the mission, business, and administration of the organization for which he or she works;
- (2) A strong grasp of managerial skills (which, of course, are different from Leadership skills); and
- (3) Learned how to engage in honest relationships in all walks of life.

This book is about “Leadership,” not “Management.” Warren Bennis, a leading scholar in both areas, is reputed to have said that:

There is a profound difference between management and leadership, and both are important. To manage means to bring about, to accomplish, to have charge of or responsibility for, to conduct. Leading is influencing, guiding in a direction. . . . The distinction is crucial.

Since it has been established that our working memories are able to easily recall only a limited number of items, it was necessary for me to identify and analyze what I thought might be a number of potential Wellsprings, rank them in an admittedly subjective

(but hopefully sensible) fashion, reject some of them, and simplify the remaining in order to arrive at three Wellsprings.

My themes, motivation, goals, and methodology are explained in Chapter One, which also sets forth some preliminary remarks about Character (as opposed to “character traits”).

Chapters Two, Three, and Four describe the Wellsprings of Character, Hope, and Imagination.

Chapter Five offers a few final thoughts, including brief reflections about the responsibilities of those who anticipate Leadership, and the danger of the “addiction to action.”

Shortly before sending the final draft of my book to the printer, I read the article *Creating Leaders: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model*, which appears in *The Handbook for Teaching Leadership*.² I decided that it could be instructive to briefly examine the “ontological model of leader and leadership” that is described in the article. For that reason, I added Chapter Six. While the approach described in the article is somewhat abstract, it lends academic support to my thesis that the three Wellsprings exist as seminal sources of those aspects of Leadership that are appropriate for the presenting opportunity or challenge.

The Appendix presents a diversion related to the sport of golf. Many of the instructional aspects of golf highlight one of my themes; namely, some books in the field of leadership present us with information and advice which oftentimes is not understandable, not easily remembered, and not based on underlying seminal concepts. I take a look at how advice from

some golf professionals related to an effective golf swing has been presented in ways which are sometimes confusing, difficult to recall, and not linked to any macro concepts. I know that my Appendix is unusual for a book of this nature, but I want to present my readers with an aid that will memorialize this theme, no matter what discipline is under consideration. Identifying the underlying sources from which techniques, ideas, and insights flow is necessary for the successful and creative application of that discipline.

¹ "Wellspring." Def. 1. "a source of continual supply or emanation." Def. 2. "Fountainhead." *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. Springfield, Massachusetts, USA. Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993.

² *Creating Leaders: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model*, Erhard, Werner H., Jensen, Michael C., and Granger, Kari L, published in *The Handbook for Teaching Leadership*, Snook, Scott, Nohria, Nitin, and Khurana, Rakesh. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012. Print.

CHAPTER ONE

**Themes, Motivation,
Goals, and Methodology**

Themes

The principal theme is that “Leadership” is an art, in that it encompasses a bundle of potentially available and continuously evolving skills, approaches, insights, instincts, and intuitions.¹ The artful Leader leads from spontaneity and grace, informed and inspired by the Wellsprings of Character (as opposed to “character traits”), Hope (the ability to make people hopeful), and Imagination. The three Wellsprings are seminal, synergistic sources from which flow (i) those aspects of Leadership relevant for the presenting opportunity or challenge, and (ii) a newly informed sense of the usefulness of the ideas and approaches recommended by other writers in the field of Leadership.

The second theme is that many valuable insights and answers have been given to us in earlier times, but which we tend to ignore. I have approached my discussions about the three Wellsprings from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Rather than attempt to paraphrase earlier authorities in various fields of scholarship, I believe that it is important to let my readers hear from them in their own words and style.

The third theme is related to the fact that we are able to remember only a limited number of things. In an article entitled *Mind’s Limit Found: 4 Things at Once* (Clara Moskowitz, Live Science Staff Writer, April 2008), the author informed us that “Researchers have often debated the maximum amount of items we can store in our conscious mind, in what’s called our working memory, and a new study puts the limit

at three or four.” Knowing this important information about the effective storage capacity of our conscious minds, I worked to identify three Wellsprings of relevant aspects of Leadership: Character, Hope, and Imagination. I do not recommend approaches to learning about Leadership that depend upon trying to recall a myriad of theories, principles, traits, qualities, guidelines, anecdotes, and strategies that are not easily remembered or linked to underlying, fundamental sources. Rather, I advocate a steadfast reliance on three seminal sources for the emanation of those aspects of Leadership necessary for the diverse circumstances which we encounter on the front lines of Leadership on a day-to-day basis.

The Appendix - which discusses advice from golf professionals which is not tied to any underlying macro concepts - will surely give my readers an amusing aid to memorialize my third theme.

Motivation

My primary motivation in writing this book is to offer my readers insights about the nature, availability, reliability, and power of Character, Hope, and Imagination. From these seminal sources flow those aspects of Leadership that are relevant to the presenting opportunity or challenge.

My second motivation is to suggest that some of the advice given by some authors in the Leadership field is not always completely understandable or sufficiently targeted toward effective and artful Leadership. For example, and without belaboring the point, one author has stated that:

*You become more effective, day by day, when you think and act on the basis of the key qualities of effective leaders throughout the ages. You program these qualities into your personality and behavior by dwelling on them continuously.*²

Well, this advice appears to be somewhat cumbersome and amorphous. First of all, you have to identify an unspecified number of “effective leaders throughout the ages” (should we start with Julius Caesar?); then identify their “key qualities”; then “program” those key qualities into your personality and behavior (how is such “programming” accomplished?); and finally, “continuously dwell” on those key qualities. If one were to try to follow this advice, such an undertaking would amount to a significant, long-term, and time-consuming historical research, meditation, and programming project.

The same author also stated that:

*More than 50 qualities have been identified that are important to leadership. But there are seven qualities that seem to stand out as being more important than the others. The good news is that each of these qualities can be learned, and they must be learned by practice and repetition.*³

However, the author does not appear to give any substantive advice as to how long and to what extent one should dwell upon the forty-three “important” qualities that did not make the short list of seven “more important” qualities (namely, vision, courage, integrity, humility, foresight, focus, and cooperation). And, what is meant by learning the seven most im-

portant qualities by “practice and repetition”? For example, how, when, and where does one practice and repeat the more important qualities of “vision” and “foresight”?

My third motivation is to complement the thoughtful and effective advice presented in many books in the Leadership field. This complementary interaction will occur because the ideas and approaches recommended by many authors will acquire a newly informed sense of value, as a result of understanding the underlying, progenitive significance of the Wellsprings of Character, Hope, and Imagination.

Goals

One of my goals is to convince my readers that the authentic Leader leads from spontaneity and grace (words used in one of the definitions of “poetry”), informed and inspired by the Wellsprings of Character, Hope, and Imagination. I like the idea expressed by T.S. Eliot that, “Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.” Authentic Leaders communicate with their colleagues even before all of their words and actions are completely understood. The authentic Leader is an artist who transforms what are oftentimes incorrect, sometimes misunderstood, and sometimes disjointed perceptions and ideas into a unity of purpose, hopefulness, enthusiasm, and imaginative action. Authentic Leaders trust in their unique strengths and talents, without having to depend upon ever-changing (yet, oftentimes fundamentally similar) leadership theories and approaches.

Another goal is to examine the phenomenon of “Character” and distinguish it from “character traits” (or “qualities”). With respect to this goal, I believe that I am breaking new ground in the Leadership field. And, that is why the chapter on Character is longer than the chapters on Hope and Imagination. Much of the literature in the field of Leadership has focused on the importance of lists that set forth the allegedly necessary qualities of a Leader. The quality of “character” is usually included in these lists, and the discussions of Character generally focus on “character traits.” Character is much more than a one-dimensional manifold that periodically emits traits. Character traits are impersonations of Character, in that they are merely manifestations of Character. Character traits and Character are vastly different ideas.

Methodology

Sir William of Ockham (c. 1285 – c. 1349) was an English philosopher, theologian, logician, and Franciscan monk. In the analysis and explanation of his political and academic interests, he employed a methodological principle of parsimony (sometimes referred to as “economy of explanation”), which has come to be known as “Ockham’s Razor.” The principle states essentially that the simplest of several explanations is always the best explanation. Ockham’s Razor can be thought of as a reductionist principle akin to “peeling the onion” or “keeping things simple” in order to develop or explain a theory. (I use the preceding analogical phrases without any intent to offend the spirit of Sir William of Ockham, his descendants, or any professors of Medieval Philosophy.)

I needed to identify a minimum number of easily remembered, seminal sources - which I refer to as “Wellsprings” - that can be relied upon to engender those aspects of Leadership that are appropriate for the presenting challenge or opportunity (the relevant aspects of leadership).

Using the reductionist principle of Ockham’s Razor, I identified three seminal sources, and concluded that it was not necessary to rely upon the existence of other possible sources. The Wellsprings of Character (not character traits), Hope and Imagination are easily remembered, readily available, reliable, and synergistic.

After evaluation, I eliminated the following as possible Wellsprings: mind (too complex and perplexing); knowledge (too intimately related to the “mind”); soul (not a sufficiently defined phenomenon, and generally perceived as being in juxtaposition to the created world); spirit (generally associated with the “soul” and/or the “mind”); and experience (an ineffective individual may have had leadership experiences, but they would not necessarily make that individual an authentic and artful leader).⁴

¹ “Insight,” “instinct,” and “intuition” are defined as follows:

- Insight: Def. 1. the ability to see and understand clearly the inner nature of things.
- Instinct: Def. 1. (an) inborn tendency to behave in a way characteristic of the species; natural, unacquired mode of response to stimuli: as, suckling is an instinct in mammals.
- Intuition: Def. 1. the immediate knowing or learning of something without the conscious use of reasoning; instantaneous apprehension.

Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language. College Edition. 1960.

² *How The Best Leaders Lead*. Tracy, Brian. AMACOM, a Division of the American Management Association. New York, NY. 2010. (pg. 14)

³ *Ibid.* (pg. 15)

⁴ I did not include “personality” in the foregoing list. The issue of personality is addressed briefly in the Chapter on Character. Does one “derive rules of conduct” (part of Immanuel Kant’s definition of Character) from personality? Or, as I believe to be more likely, is the idea of personality encompassed in the display of habitual patterns of behavior? If my view is correct, personality could not constitute a Wellspring of Leadership.