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How Can Anyone Lead Others Until They Are Ready to Lead Themselves?

Peter A. Maresco
Sacred Heart University

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Academic Leadership Journal

For the past several years I have taught a graduate level leadership class that has, for the most part, focused on what are considered to be the traditional qualities that go into making or identifying someone as a leader. You know, the typical definitions found in texts such as *Leadership: Research Findings, Practice, and Skills* by Andrew J. DuBryn from the Rochester Institute of Technology and published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Each week the class would cover a specific leadership quality or trait. These would include, charismatic and transformational leadership, attitudes and styles, ethics and social responsibility, influence tactics of leaders, communication and conflict resolution, etc.. The usual list found in any leadership text and/or book. As we would go through these traits and qualities usually associated with leaders one or more students would invariably ask why individuals in their companies didn't seem to exhibit the qualities that were being discussed. As is the case with most companies, there was always an individual that everyone wanted to work for regardless of the department. The person would be described as being patient, understanding, caring, inclusive and most importantly a communicator. Someone who knew themselves and through this understanding knew what was important to those they led.

What I would like to focus on in this essay is the quality of personal leadership. What can each of us do in our personal and professional lives to assume leadership over what we do.

Not simply doing what is right but doing what is right for the right reason. Here's what I'm referring to. For all the years, I have taught leadership I have tried to make my students understand two things; first, not everyone wants to be a leader; I respect them more than anyone, and you cannot come to lead others unless you can take a leadership position over your own life. The question that needs to be addressed is how anyone can assume a leadership position over others when they first of all don't know who they are as a person. I tell my students that they should take the time to conduct a SWAT analysis on themselves. In effect, what are their strengths, weaknesses and what are the opportunities and threats they see to them both personally and professionally? Leaders must know who they are as individuals first, and leaders second.

Looking back on those who I would have considered to be successful leaders in my own life are those who were first and foremost confident in themselves. Not conceited, arrogant, or self-righteous but knew who they were and were able to lead people through an understanding of their own innate leadership qualities and abilities. In effect, led by what they learned through an honest self examination understanding that you can't expect to lead others without first understanding themselves.

So, what do I mean by personal leadership? Well, how about taking a long, hard look at who you are as a person? What makes you tick? What turns you on and what turns you off? What gets you excited and what do you put out off because you hate the thought of doing something? Are you patient? Are you able to transfer these qualities into a business setting. Can you get beyond someone telling you that you can't be compassionate and be respected? You know the drill. I guess it really does come down to

“do unto others as you would others do unto you.” If nothing else, at least in the realm of leadership studies it should give you something to think about.

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