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Leadership and the University

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Dr. Cowan

Leadership and the University

1972

Early in the history of this institution a subtitle was chosen for a name: The University of Dallas: A School for Leaders. The choice was more than a pious hope; it announced a serious intention to provide the kind of education which would develop qualities of leadership in each student. It also served as a warning to prospects that learning is a serious business on this campus, and the warnings have been repeated frequently: do not come here if you do not intend to be somebody important. But how serious are we about this warning? What do we really mean by it? Some students, looking at their peers, question the reality of our ambitions. But I suspect we professors are more likely to see your long-range potential than you can see in each other.

What is this business of leadership? I explained to some of you a couple of years ago the levels of command that exist in the country. According to a classic theory, one man tends to command eight others, and each of these eight others. The tree-shaped levels in the country therefore look like this:

1	0	
8	1	
6 4	2	0.02%
5 1 2	3	
4 0 9 6	4	
3 2 7 6 8	5	
<hr/>		
2 6 2 1 4 4	6	1%
---2 0 9 7 1 5 2	7	
<hr/>		
1 6 7 7 7 2 1 6	8	9%
1 3 4 2 1 7 7 2 8	9	90%

Every one in America your age and up is in the tree. There are only nine levels all together. Where do you stand? Now, remember this tree is symbolic, descriptive of a strict authoritarian system; where would the poets fit--the artists--the revolutionists? But I propose to you that the gradations on any system of evaluation probably run about the same. Let me call them "Levels of significance" and we can interpret them however we will.

You will notice that 90% of all people are in the bottom layer, 9% are in the next one up. Remember that about 20% of your generation will get a college degree; less than half of these will make it as high as level eight. Now I suspect that your having chosen the University of Dallas more or less guarantees you a position in place eight, but that is not really what we are talking about in our school for leaders statement. The next two levels up--six and seven--contain 1% of the population. These are the people who make the country run, who accept responsibility and make operating decisions. Industry calls it middle management. To call it "middle significance" would be to underplay it because it involves real qualities of leadership--only one in a hundred make it. It will be eight to ten years after you get out of school before you are "elected," so to say, to this level. But we do expect you to get there. In the region of Dallas-Fort Worth, about twenty thousand people have attained this status, but since they occupy it for, say, twenty five years, less than a thousand a year fill the vacancies. I suspect in time University of

Dallas graduates will fill a large percentage of the total. And that, I think, is why we can justify the title "A School for Leaders."

At least in part. But what about those upper five levels? What about that 0.02% of the population that industry would call Top Management or we would call highly significant--as critics, philosophers, scientists, businessmen, whatever they might be? In this region maybe twenty a year reach level 5--maybe 2,000 in the country. Are we schooling our students for these posts--positions or honors or whatever you call them--they will attain thirty or forty years after they graduate? A realization of this time gap between schooling and position makes the scheme of education pursued here much more meaningful. Obviously what must be done is to plant the seeds which, once rooted, will grow over a long period of time. What our program of education is designed to do is to transform the person rather than train him. We could no more teach a person all he needs to know to reach the top than we could build a skyscraper to the moon. If we are to send a person to the moon we can only start him in the right direction and turn him loose. But more than that, the persons who reach the rarefied levels of upper significance are different in kind from those who do not. They were not born different; somewhere along they have been transformed. Oh, I will not say that genes do not enter the picture, that native intelligence is not of some consequence, but I say it is not controlling and that, in any sense, all of you are above the threshold of inheritance and into the region

of will. The shape you give your lives now and the limitations you accept are matters of choice.

What are the choices and how does the will operate in driving a person toward leadership. Can one, by sheer grit and determination, penetrate through to the upper levels? I do not doubt that one can set goals and develop personality and Dale Carnegie it through to level seven--into middle management. That is no mean accomplishment and admirable in the untransformed person. But the qualities of leadership are far more complex, the process of transformation far more subtle than can be accomplished by any direct attack.

There are two countervailing movements to the process of transformation to significance. The first I would label the realization of the self. The significant person is unique and is conscious of his uniqueness. He has a job to do that has never been done before. He takes on a task because he knows that in the scheme of things he is the one who is supposed to do it. He knows that in the major drama of his life he is the hero. Admitting this, how does one get this self realization? What studies does one make, what exercises does he do?

The variety is infinite, ranging through physical awareness to spiritual ecstasy. Playing football provides great opportunity for the unification of body and mind, as do all sports to varying degrees. So does dancing. A person can attain a sense of being wholly himself through play, through becoming alert to the elaborate

sensory and communication system within him which allows him to respond as a unit to phenomena and to exercise some control in the response. He discovers the interface of himself with the outside world and recognizes the realm of his withinness. What I am saying is that play is not a trivial thing, not something to be discarded early in life. It is one of the avenues to self realization.

But there are many others. The first two years of the curriculum at the University of Dallas are largely devoted to accomplishing this realization of the self. The development of the tools of communication--primarily writing--as highly individualized instruments of expression, as unique to the person as his fingerprints, is essential to this accomplishment; this university has the reputation of turning out students who write well; it is one of our successes in our program of leadership. There are other tools and skills which become unified in the person, but, more than that, the first two years of college are intended to place the individual in the environment of history, to make him aware again of the interface that delimits him and the necessity to communicate across it. I think you can see why we would introduce the Rome program as part of this scheme, where the student would have opportunity to become keenly aware of his aloneness and yet face the absolute necessity of communicating with the society around him. We speak of the European jaunt as maturing a person; probably it is more that it accomplishes his self realization. It provides him with many occasions of triumph, of being able to cope. This confidence is essential to the

healthy ego. The curriculum on this home campus is expected to provide other occasions of triumph. One of our bright students, in dropping the computer course recently, said with engaging frankness, "It's damaging my ego." He may have been right to drop it at his stage of development, or the fact that he was that much aware of his self may have indicated he was ready for the next stage of his development.

Because there is another stage. Not only is there a realization of the self as a unit, a discovery of the ego, for the person of significance, but there is a submergence of the self, a loss of ego, in experience. This stage is more difficult; fewer people accomplish it. But it is essential to greatness. We mean for this stage to dominate the last two years of college. These are the years of submission to a discipline. The transition from an ambition for mastery to a willingness--even a desire--for submission is the great step toward significance. I suppose I could call it "from lust to love," and certainly it is in the guise of love that a discipline comes to a person. In our scheme of education we identify the disciplines with the majors. One chooses a major and comes in time to submit to its discipline. Some people never do but go on thinking of a major as an accomplishment, a trophy to hang on their belts, and seek to collect several as a display of their many talents. Such people are still in stage one, still in the development of the ego, and for them we realize our plan for leadership has not yet blossomed.

How does one recognize this transition? I have said that the

around it. There is joy in it and, like love, much agony. It is something for which one is willing like Ferdinand to hew wood and draw water. This is not a romantic notion I am presenting you; it really does occur. Many of you here have already experienced it. It ought to occur about the middle of your junior year. When we were interviewing seniors, one of the professors on the panel pointed out to one student that physicists were out of jobs. "I may have to make my living in a filling station," he replied, "but my life will be in physics."

The choice of a discipline is tremendously important. It is not, however, the disciplines which concern me tonight but the act of submission. My division of the ~~first~~^{first} two years as the realization of the self and the second two as the submergence of the self is by no means strict. Just as the acts of realization go on throughout life, the acts of submission begin early. One understands a poem or a work of art only through an act of submission, through a taking in and a being taken in by the thing in all its wholeness. So, too, by philosophic or mathematical ideals, although the process is more difficult when the rational element seems to dominate. One discovers a habit of soul that seeks not to master but to submit to all experience, to know it for what it is and to become part of it.

These two countervailing notions, realization and submergence, go on simultaneously in a person, forming a kind of plasma of being. A person of a religious bent, incidentally, has an advantage in awareness