

Citation: Kendrick, Michael "Personal leadership and Its Contribution To Service To Others", Proceedings: Sharing The Road Conference, 2001, Brisbane, Australia, 2001

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Title: Personal Leadership And Its Contribution To Service To Others

June 25, 2001

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The Possibility Of Individual Initiative In Achieving Quality

While it is often noted that organizations are expected to be responsible for, as well as held accountable for quality of service, it remains that they are usually quite unsuccessful in achieving it if they do not have the right people. After all, it is people who make the difference, no matter what systems or techniques are handed to them to use. In this way people, and what is or is not happening within them, will predict what they and the organization are able to achieve. This is why it is always dangerous when quality is treated as being something that exists outside and apart from people i.e. something organisational. Such a dehumanisation of quality, while attractive to people who prefer not to have to contend with human nature, is ultimately a chimera that will disappoint those who place their faith in solutions that are contrary to human character.

The crucial reality to recognize is that quality in service to others is a human product, and it flows quite naturally from people who embody it, and is unlikely to be present in people who have not cultivated it in themselves. Like all human achievements, it requires of the aspirant that they excel. If the will to excel is lacking, it matters little that the person has great talents for service to others, as these will go unused. In this way, quality is an outpouring from people of capacities that exist initially within them, and which can respond to cultivation. The ethic that the practitioner has internalised regarding quality will either lead them closer to its essence or further away from it. This is because quality normally asks something of the person by way of effort, application, sacrifice and even devotion. Their ethic of quality will manifest itself in their willingness to pay the inevitable price that all gains require.

In all of this, there is always a link between the personal vision, values and principles of people, and the kinds of directions their efforts take. If their notions of quality of service to others are flawed, then what they will be able to create, based on these, will also be flawed. Quality does not appear just because it is needed, nor does it automatically emerge even from those sincere people who seek it. It is the nature of achievement that significant results are obtained. If the person struggles valiantly, but still cannot make the circumstances better, then many aspects of quality, as it relates to outcomes for people, will still be lacking. Nevertheless, it would be fair to recognize that the quality of the effort and intent was superior even if it were not rewarded with fruitful results or outcomes. Sincere and passionate novices cannot make up for their inexperience with additional passion, at some point they need to get better at what they do so that their passion is linked to competence.

By recognizing that quality of service is as multi-dimensional as is human need, it then becomes possible for individuals to make progress in whatever aspects of quality in which they possess some strength. However, they must still take the decision to use these strengths and persevere until good results are realized. This is personal commitment, and it is the foundation of achievement. It might be considered a maxim that if one persists in strengthening a good, then that good will likely be enlarged and enriched in direct proportion to the virtue of the investments made in this process of nurturance. Therefore what is good may be made “better” and what is “not good” might possibly be diminished or transformed.

Positive leadership arises from a person whenever they decide to act as a catalyst for something to develop. There are as many leadership styles as there are people, just as there are as many directions for leadership to take, as there are human needs. Leadership in the service of people revolves around whether those taking leadership authentically address the human needs at issue. This reality permits those who see a need to take whatever action might relieve that need. From this basis arises the possibility of personal leadership making a difference. If people’s lives can be affected in a positive way through the initiative and efforts of a single human being, it opens the world to various courses of action simply because that person is who they are.

Leadership in the interests of service to our fellow human beings is no less leadership simply because the aims are oriented to the needs of others. It requires of those involved that they mobilize themselves and others towards beneficial ends. Often as not, in the smallness of our lives, such leadership is invisible, as it commonly occurs at the edges of the lives of people who may be of little prominence or interest to their community. Nonetheless, such obscurity may simply be covering over acts and careers of leadership and service that, in their own unique way, are as dramatic and riveting in their relevance, as those of the grandest of historical figures.

It may simply be a matter of how such leadership is evaluated that illuminates its significance. Certainly, for those who have benefited from these commitments of support and assistance, such initiative may well lead to a profound lightening of the load of human travail and suffering, and a freeing of people from the bonds and hardships that

degrade and demoralize their victims. The grandeur of acts of servant leadership on behalf of others is in their morality of asserting the value of all people, especially the lowly, obscure and devalued. Perhaps, as they say, all of heaven rejoices in the small acts of justice, mercy and respect that humankind barely notices. It is not the scale of human action that speaks to its leadership quality, but rather that someone has freely chosen to stand with people, and in the course of events has changed the outcomes in people's lives.

Leaders it seems, even those whose stage is the rarely visited lives of the humble and forgotten, are people whose contribution arises from who they are and their vision of a world that they hope will be better through their personal efforts. They have no assurance of this end, and may well risk the tragedy of making things worse. Without guarantees, and often without the legitimising approval of the authorities, they decide to act knowing full well the fragility of their contribution and the often immensity of what is needed. In the end, personal leadership of this kind is only understandable by granting to it its deeply personal origins. Rarely is such personal leadership the act of saintly figures, though such figures do exist more commonly than is thought. More typically, it is seen in a life lived with a sense of obligation to others, that could never be sufficiently explained by a job description or a formal role. It is only understandable by knowing the person themselves, and the complex ingredients of their lives, that enable them to be useful and present to others in whatever large or small ways they can muster given their personal gifts and limitations.

The Many Faces Of Personal Leadership In The Service Of Others

- Taking The Personal Decision To Make A Difference

It is quite misleading to link people's formal human service roles to personal leadership, as these are assignments from the system to that person. A duty, as it were, from without. Personal leadership is quite a different matter, as it is the duty one chooses for oneself, and may well take place without any of the authorizing embellishments of bureaucracies or professions. The domain of the genuinely personal contribution is really much more an ongoing dialogue of the person with themselves, and the world they find around them. It is often a constant struggle to know what to do that might help others in the midst of so many things that stand in the way. It is in the nature of leadership that a person seeks to find a way forward, and compels themselves and others to act to do so in whatever ways they can discover. From this decision to remake, even a tiny part of the world, comes much good that would be very hard to predict from the vantage point of where one begins the process. It is only time that reveals the fruits of these consequential commitments of individuals taking leadership in regards to service to others.

- The Power Of Ideas

Sometimes, it may be as simple as knowing that a better idea is needed. It may stem not just from having such an idea, but from knowing that if a good one isn't found, that people will pay a price. So much of what people may need is simple enough, but

without the ideas and concepts that would give the answers some form people might languish for years. Thus, we are often indebted to people who engage the harmful ideologies of our culture and help create a sense of what would be better. It may not be all that hard to find a home for someone who needs one, but it may be revolutionary to actually do so. Overcoming the complacency that nothing can be done may itself be the better idea that makes the difference.

- **Acting Alone If Need Be And In New Ways**

It is hard not to notice the people, whose leadership it is to be the first to act, whether others act with them or not. Their willingness to act alone may often be courageous, ill advised and ineffectual. Nevertheless, it is often the corner that once turned, begins the slow process of change for the better. These are often the unwitting pioneers and frontrunners, yet this is not their aim. It may just be the consequence of recognizing that something ought to be done that is not now happening. They do not take their bearings from what is now being done but instead begin to face the question of *what ought to be done*. This may often be a lonely road at the margins of value, however, it may still be what people need, and thus must be walked. It is the guidance of the real needs of people that provides the anchor and illumination for this kind of personal leadership and thus makes it possible to be of authentic service.

- **Standing With People**

Others may feel that they are called to stand with people against the people, systems and powers that afflict them. They may not be obliged in any way to act with solidarity, but may choose the role of defender and ally simply because that is what is needed. In some cases the defender is punished and attacked for doing so, and must resolve to bear this offence repeatedly. The petty tyrannies of our world exact a demoralizing price, as they kill the spirit and will of people. Preserving within people the hope and faith to resist and survive the persecutions they endure, may often be possible when someone is in their corner. The voluntary nature of acts and lives of personal alliance constitute leadership, as they always offer a direction to events that indicates a more just and liberating way forward even if this direction is ignored and defeated. Bearing witness to a greater truth as to how people ought to be treated is at the heart of solidarity. It is rarely undertaken without some sort of personal cost, as it often challenges the reigning orders and powers of the world.

- **Mustering Creativity And Innovation**

It is very easy to see that much suffering is caused in life by the preferences people have to follow the well tread path of standardized solutions and non-controversial convention. Yet these may not be what many people ultimately need. The matter would stand there, stagnant and unproductive, were it not for the kind of people who recognize that some fresh thinking, analysis or improvisation might well be what would do the most good. The tentative answers that arise at these points of exploration may themselves be as limited as those at hand, but their exploration may eventually yield the insights that we

end up labelling as innovative. It may seem odd, but innovation may often be as simple as starting with how people see things rather than how we presently do them. Innovation is impossible if we are not willing to do things in a different way.

- **Being Present To People**

It is often our inclination to think that service to others must always mean that their difficulties are eventually lessened. Nothing could be more natural than to want this for people. Sometimes this may not be at all possible, and the leadership that may be required may be to simply affirm people and to be with them. It is not always clear to people, that what may serve to help and heal, may be relationship itself, particularly when that relationship is valuing and uplifting. It is worth noting that in our highly bureaucratized service systems, the people served are, curiously enough, surrounded by people, even as they lack meaningful relationships with them. This paradox points to the need for people to be acknowledged in their humanity and personhood. In a “right relationship” hungry world, there is clearly a kind of personal leadership needed that leaves people connected and nourished by human relationship and community.

- **Inspiring Others**

It is surprising how capable people are of great things once they are inspired, and how weak their contribution may be when they lack this. It is easy to see the value of inspiration and the costs of its absence. What may be less clear, is the sheer necessity for there to be people present, whose gift is to be a source of spiritual strengthening for those whose hardships in life have diminished them. This contribution need not be made in an ostentatious way so much as that people be reached and encouraged. It is actually quite possible to give people heart, just as it is easy enough to break their hearts and spirits. People can be strengthened by an infusion of spirit, often to the point of improbability in terms of what they can eventually achieve. Providing leadership so that this might occur is a service to others. It is rightly said that people do not survive on bread alone but also on the nourishment of their spirits.

- **Creating An Openness To Learning And Change**

It may, at first glance, be odd to consider that helping people to be open to learning and change is actually leadership. Nevertheless, it is always true that long before change is materialized, the receptivity to it may need to have been cultivated. Such a function of readying people to continue with learning, rather than to wall themselves off, is a key catalyst in enabling people to make progress. Fear, insecurity, comfort with the known and many other inhibitions often stand in the way of what is possible and needed. Those that help to dissolve these, so that the potential within is better realized, inevitably must work to help people learn and grow, and even to acknowledge that these are needed and can occur. We may be more indebted to these facilitators than we are aware, as much of what they do is so unobtrusive and developmental, that we ease rather more readily

into avenues that we would not normally have followed were it not for the quiet assistance we get to remain open and educable.

- **Picking Up The Pieces; Again And Again**

Anyone who has taken on big challenges quickly becomes accustomed to failure and setbacks. Many of these can be devastating and leave us shattered and defeated. Often enough, we can stay in such a state, nursing our wounds and finding solace in all manner of distractions that do little to move things ahead. It is at time like these that we have probably witnessed the constructive work of those people who awaken us from our torpor and negativity and get us moving forward again. Whether we realize it at the time, we have been mobilized by the leadership of these people into a path that is usually more helpful than not. Rarely are we coerced into trying yet again, as what is awakened inside us, bit by bit, is the desire *from within us* to move towards a more positive pattern. Keeping people going is as important, in its way, as is the direction they are taking.

- **Strengthening Direction, Purpose And Resolve**

People constantly lose their bearings and need to find their way back to their goals and purposes. Often this loss of direction can result in a sense of drift and meaninglessness. During such periods people may not be nearly as productive as when the way forward, and the reasons for it, stand out with great clarity. Equally, many people may never have reached the kind of clarity that they seek and would benefit from. This is where the leadership offered by people who encourage us in these directions emerges as important. Even when the direction is clear, there are times when what we need is some support to make the hard decisions that would permit us to act with decisiveness. Often, there may be no obvious direction or decision, and the work of that day may simply be to see that this is the case and to recognize that a further search for these is necessary. Finding our way, on our own terms, to purposes that speak to our deepest personal and collective longings is no minor accomplishment, and we should be grateful to the many people who stimulate us along the way.

- **Enabling People To Unite And Cooperate In Their Efforts Of Service**

It is always impressive to see what is possible when people put aside their disagreements and decide to act in unison for the benefit of another. It can be very true that those who need to be served can be harmed by the fact that, those who are supposed to help them are fatally distracted by infighting, irrelevant agendas and other such things. Often, there are people who see that these are occurring and take initiatives to reduce them and to substitute a spirit of cooperation, peacemaking and reconciliation. From this can come a focus on the important things that are forgotten when people “lose the plot”.

This kind of unifying and constructive conduct is a kind of leadership, but we may not always appreciate its value and necessity.

- **Helping People Find Their Voice**

It is a crucial aspect of human dignity, both for those who offer service and those who require it, to be able to have and express their own sense of how things could or should be. Rather than being solely acted upon by others, they can more readily become active agents in their own lives. This normally involves the person discovering their own sense of values, purpose and issues such that their decisions become more their own. It is remarkable how much more readily this can occur when the people involved are supported and encouraged to see value in their own thoughts, passions, concerns and definitions of the issues. This sense can bring people a clear grasp of their own potential to make a difference and thus to be more effective and satisfied in their lives.

The Need For Each Person To Explore Whether They Have A Possible Leadership Contribution To Make

The immense variety and complexity of people defies easy categorization. There is certainly no standard “off the shelf leader”. On the contrary, the kinds of highly specific and individualized combinations of qualities that people possess, makes it obvious that each person may have their own distinct contributions they can make whether that is to one purpose or another. Similarly, in matters that may require a degree of personal leadership, it is not always obvious what this might be. This is why people may have to visit this question periodically as fresh events and challenges cause one to wonder anew.

A helpful concept in all this may be the notion that people have different “callings” that propel them into quite different roles, promptings and challenges. What validly suits one person may be toxic for another. Equally, the burdens of one calling may be bearable by the person suited to them, and unsustainable by someone for whom such a “cheminage” is foreign. This is why care must be taken to be sure of what it is that one is called to, and to have the wisdom to recognize what one is not suited to.

One dimension of this is for the person concerned to be open to what it is that is good within them, such that they can cultivate, give and share this for the benefit of others. Following this goodness and where it can lead to the benefit of others can often be a way to discern one’s calling just as paying attention to directions we take that end up being harmful to ourselves and others. In both instances, the unique identity and suitability of the person is revealed. From this can eventually come some sense of what might be the kind of leadership contribution that is most constructive and possible for that individual to pursue. This is a way of taking direction from within. If we look just at what is needed, we shall certainly understand what ought to be done. However, that may be quite a different matter than whether a particular person should do it, however much it is

needed. Personal leadership is best offered where the person is well matched to the challenge. We must select the challenges that leave us doing and being good in the service of others.

Conclusion

We are greatly indebted to the many people who pass through our lives and leave behind the fruits of the particular leadership contributions they can offer. Service to others is greatly enriched by being able to tap into these great resources within people. Mobilizing ourselves and others to seek to be of service, is often the only way that things will get done. It is therefore important to leave a place in our thinking for personal leadership, as the good that can come from it may be just what people need. It is an irreplaceable asset and much can be gained from its thoughtful cultivation and use.