**Leadership as a Vocation**

A common thread in the myriad definitions of leadership in the literature is the exercise of influence over others. The leader exercises influence to help an individual or a group of individuals achieve a set of agreed-upon goals. Therefore, leadership can be thought of as a process of exercising influence over others in order to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2004). This process can be either smooth or rough depending on the leader's style and personality variables of both the leader and the followers.

Effective leaders make moral and ethical decisions and apply those decisions by drawing on a collection of skills acquired through experience and training. That collection of skills can be likened to the toolbox of a skilled craftsperson who knows exactly which tool to use in a given situation. Also like a skilled craftsperson, a leader's application of tools is somewhat of an art, developed through trial and error over time. Both a leader and a craftsperson make careful decisions with an eye to end products, exerting influence to shape and develop where necessary.

Much like dedicated craftspeople or artists who acknowledge their artistic endeavors as a vocation, or *calling*, that gives direction and purpose to their lives and positively affects the lives of others, so too can leadership be considered a vocation or calling. There are numerous examples of dedicated and visionary leaders throughout history who have leveraged their position as leaders to selflessly improve the lives of individuals, organizations, and society at large.

A person may adopt the vocation of leadership due to a desire to make a difference in an ever-changing world of diversity and economic growth. Such a leader may feel called to make a difference through guiding and directing others to achieve their own goals. The leader does not take on the position for power, personal glory, or money, but because the leader truly cares about others and making a difference by helping everyone to improve upon their strengths and abilities to make themselves or the organization successful.

The clergy or ministers may be the most obvious examples of leaders in society who have adopted leadership as a vocation. Just like ministers of the gospel know they are called to lead people to a relationship with Christ, secular leaders recognize what it takes to reach goals, and apply their abilities to help others achieve their desired end results in the most effective and efficient way possible. In this case, like ministers, secular leaders work in a self-sacrificial manner to help others achieve their own ends for their own good.

In particular, this school promotes a specific vision of secular leadership as service to others, which combines faith with work in order to promote the good of all. The school's statement on the integration of faith, learning, and work states:

Our work within the world matters to God and our neighbors and must be carried out with integrity and excellence. While few doubt that it is possible to serve God through ministry and mission work, we are convinced that God is also honored by faithful service within so-called secular vocations. Integrating faith and work is a practical and logical extension of faith-learning integration.

Leadership is one of the most obvious of the "so-called secular vocations" in which a person can exemplify professional and personal excellence and integrity through faithful service to God, others, and the good of the community. The perspective of leadership as vocation requiring service to others echoes the definition of leadership in the Bible:

Be shepherds of God's flock, the believers who are under your care. Serve as their leaders. Don't serve them because you have to. Instead, do it because you want to. That's what God wants you to do. Don't do it because you want to get more and more money. Do it because you really want to serve. (1 Pet 5:2)

Again and again, the Bible offers up the image of the good shepherd, the one who lays down his life for his sheep, as the most perfect model of leadership (John 10:11).

**Who Is Called?**

Historically, leadership was viewed as a trait and it was assumed certain people in society possessed innate qualities that made them leaders. Scholars of the 20th century focused on the trait approach in leadership. Their studies were the first systematic efforts to examine the concept of leadership. Several scholars examined what makes certain people great leaders and others not so great. From these studies emerged the concept of "great man" theories of leadership, which identify the innate qualities and characteristics of great social, political, and military leaders. Trait theorists tend to focus on the leader traits and what the differences are between a leader and a nonleader. The traits studied included physical stature, appearance, social class, emotional stability, fluency of speech, and sociability (Northouse, 2004).

Trait theory, however, is a restrictive view of leadership that posits the idea that only individuals possessing special characteristics can be leaders. The development of contemporary leadership theories and approaches offers a much broader perspective of leadership, redefining it as a process that can be learned. For example, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) suggest that leaders are different from followers, identifying six trait characteristics to support their argument. They indicated that leaders are different from followers based on their drive, desire to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business. Significantly, they added that while it is possible for these traits to be inborn, they can also be learned. This argument supports the thinking that leaders can be made, inasmuch as they can be taught and helped to acquire these trait characteristics.

Stogdill (1948) reviewed 124 traits of leaders and concluded in his study that no particular trait had a high correlation with leadership effectiveness. Traits that leaders used varied to fit different situations. Stogdill concluded that a leader did not become a leader because of the possession of a particular set of traits. Yukl (1989) also concluded that two different leaders can be successful in the same situation using different sets of traits. Despite the efforts of researchers, no one set of traits has been identified to differentiate leaders from nonleaders (Boje, 2000).

Contrary to traditional trait theory, contemporary leadership scholarship indicates anyone called to the vocation of leadership can be trained and developed into successful leaders. The key, as indicated in the work of Stogdill (1948) and Yukl (1989), is knowing what leadership tools to apply in which contexts to drive the most successful outcomes. This course presents an overview of those tools while prompting the self-reflection and discovery process necessary to further develop desirable leadership qualities and traits for the purpose of serving the common good.

**References**

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