

On Leadership  
1-9-04

I would like to thank the School for Adult Learning for hosting the Women's Leadership seminar. I have attended a few sessions and I have learned much from many presenters. I also want to thank Kaye for her kind introduction. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to take an ego trip. Today's session is called "Natural-Born Leader?" In fact, if I were willing to take an ego trip, I am not qualified to be a leader. Kaye wants me to use my childhood experience to talk about how I became a leader, so I will share with you a little bit of my life experience. First of all, I am still in the learning process of becoming a leader. In fact, in my mind, I have never planned to become a "leader." I only know that I am committed to my family and my work. Although many people think a leader is born, I have a different idea. I think leaders are made, and they make themselves. We learn to become leaders. Biological predisposition may be a factor, but I think the important thing is not to discuss whether a leader is born or not. We can always argue about "nature vs. nurture." I think the important point I want to make is that we need to discuss how nature and nurture interact so that a leader is created. I am much geared toward the creation of a leader. That is why I did not say, "How a leader is born." I said, "How a leader was created." There are so many leadership-training courses and seminars. However, I think leaders cannot be taught; leaders have to learn to be leaders.

There are three foundations for a leader to be created:

I. The timing or the social environment.

A leader arises at a time of enormous challenge, difficulty, and need. Sometimes, a leader arises when an organization or nation is in crisis. I think there would have been no Chairman Mao in China or Churchill in England if there had been no social chaos or war during their times.

If we insist that a leader is born, birth order may create a social condition (environment) for the first-born. The first-born child tends to be more prone to become a leader. I was the first-born in my family. My parents had hoped to have many children. My father gave me a Chinese name, Tsai-fong. "Tsai" means grass or the mass, and "Fong" means wind, or the leader. My father felt since I was the first-born, I would serve as a leader to my younger siblings.

When the wind blows, the grass bends. It was a quotation from the Confucian classic, the *Book of Poetry*. From a sociological point of view, this is what we say about "role expectation" and "role model." Since I was young, my parents expected me to "lead" and to be the role model for my younger brother and sisters. It was during my early childhood family socialization that I told myself that I should be a good person, because my younger siblings would pattern themselves after me. I have three younger sisters and one younger brother. They all respect me highly. They respect me because I have been a good role model for them. I love them and I would do anything for them. I am very blessed that I have a good sibling team and I am a very good team player. We all get along well and we think about each other's welfare and ultimately, our family's welfare comes first. Later, this idea has been imprinted in me. I always think my organization's welfare comes first.

My family members respect me and they trust my integrity. Even though they are my followers, I listen to them carefully. In fact, I am their follower, too. I listen to their needs and I ask for their advice. To be a good leader one must be a good listener and a good follower first.

I have learned a few qualities of a leader in my childhood experience. My childhood provided me opportunities to learn a leader's qualities, including being a role model, trustworthiness, love, and royalty. My mother is one of the most successful women physicians in Taiwan. I remember she said to us once, "I am the crab. All my nurses are my legs. We must work together in order for the crab to move forward." This statement has been imprinted in my mind

since I was young. I learned that a leader must be a team player, and a leader must work harmoniously with his or her co-workers. My mother treated her nurses just like her daughters. It was a family concept. I have extended this idea of “family” to my work team, or to my students since I started my teaching career 31 years ago.

2. The second foundation for leadership is good morals, ethics, and humanity. Another quote from Confucius says, “A king cannot be a king unless he is virtuous.” There is a distinction between a tyrant and a true leader. We can easily see the distinction between Hitler and Gandhi or Saddam Hussein and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Integrity is one of the most important characteristics of a leader. Successful leaders are individuals of strong ethical standards, people who know what they stand for, people of integrity. Once again my Chinese upbringing gives me a fundamental Confucian teaching—the teaching of ethics. In class, I always told my students, “I mean what I say and I say what I mean.” I told them, “I am tough but I am fair.” There are many students. Each is unique. But my teaching philosophy is that education should be for all, regardless of their backgrounds.

I think that to be a good teacher is to be a good leader. I often classify three levels of teachers. First are those who present to students social facts, and they describe facts only. I call this group of teachers “so-so teachers.” Second are those teachers who interpret social facts. I call this group “fine teachers.” And third are those teachers who inspire students—they are the “great teachers” or the leaders.

A good leader is someone who has the ability to motivate, to inspire individuals to greatness far beyond what they could ever have imagined was possible. Oftentimes, students think I challenge them. But I work with them. I tell them I will work with them if they will work as hard as they can. Quite often students say, “Dr. Lin, you work our tails off!” But most of them who stick with me to the end of the semester would say, “Gee, I didn’t know I could come up with such a good paper.” They were happy that they made it.

Someone was quoting a story about Napoleon. About his victory in Italy, he was asked how he forced his army over the Alps. His answer: “One does not make a French army cross the Alps; one leads it across.” Those who have taken a Social Research class or who have done a thesis with me would understand Napoleon’s statement.

A good leader exercises mutual trust. A good leader does not micromanage. I have had many student assistants over the years. (By the way, I am still at the bottom of the scale at this university. I have been working here for thirty years and I am a director of Asian Programs and I am the executive director of the University of Indianapolis Press and I don’t even have an administrative assistant or a secretary. Whose problem? I will not get into it. I rely on what I call “volunteers” and student helpers.) When I work with my student helpers, I tell them to keep their own time sheets. When I give them a job assignment, I give them enough information for them to proceed. I don’t care whether they do their jobs in my office, in the library, in their dorm, or in front of me or not. As long as they get the work done in time, that is fine. I often give them enough room to create and innovate. I have been very fortunate to have many good helpers. Many of them are volunteers. I have organized six international symposia and I have worked on countless projects. Who helped me? Mostly, it was volunteers. I remember one volunteer, who is in his seventies, said to me one day, “Phylis, you are the only one who takes my retirement seriously. I want to thank you for providing me opportunities to prove myself as still being useful.” True leaders motivate people to pursue worthwhile objectives.

I have so many volunteers working with me on different projects. They believe in me. And I believe in myself first.

3. This leads me to talk about the third foundation of leadership: Know yourself and be an unselfish person. A leader must “think less of himself or herself, but not think himself or herself less.”

A leader must be competent. Competence and confidence are interrelated. Competence comes from years of experience and endless learning. Whenever I do a lecture in class, I ask myself whether I would be able to discuss the subject matter for at least three hours without my notebook. If I couldn't, I would feel I was not prepared or not competent on the subject. I prepared myself well before any class. If we are well prepared for any task, we will not have fear. We will have confidence.

Warren Bennis, a distinguished professor of Business Administration at the University of Southern California, said, “Only when we know what we are made of and what we want to make of it can we begin our lives.” We play many roles in everyday life. We are a product of our role set. I am a woman, professor, daughter, wife, friend, sister, director, Chinese, senior citizen, consumer, etc. Every role we play is a part of ourselves. We must discover our strengths and our ability to learn.

We can learn anything we want to learn. I visit Best Buy, Circuit City, and Lowe's quite often. You will laugh at me. I went to these stores to look for new products in computer accessories, new models in digital cameras, or new building products. Last year, when I went to Best Buy to look for an MP3 player, the salesman almost laughed at me. He did not think this short Chinese lady with gray hair would be interested in buying an MP3. But I have a passion for learning new things. In teaching, I always bring new material that I just learned a week prior to the lecture.

Through learning, I develop myself. Warren Bennis considers one of the basic ingredients of leadership a passion for the promises of life; the key to realizing the promise is the full deployment of yourself, and full deployment is simply another way of defining learning. Learning new things prompts me to take challenges. Last August, I took on a new challenge—to be in charge of the University of Indianapolis Press. Everybody knows that the whole publishing business is in trouble, and the worst case is the university press. I took the challenge and I took the risk, but I was determined. First, I organized a very wonderful working team—I called it the Advisory Board. They are my right and left hands. We have been working together for almost six months now. They trust me and we have a common goal. I learned so many things these last six months, including acquisitions, editing, marketing, design, layout, contracts, barcodes, ISBN applications, distribution, InDesign software, etc.

Guess what? We will produce a few books this year, because I am willing to learn, I am a good team player, I am a selfless individual, and I know how to make the best use of the limited resources with perseverance. I am not afraid of failure. I deploy myself, strike hard, and work as hard as I can. When I am in doubt, I ask for advice. I am blending both the academic and business models together. The Press must have academic integrity and it must have a business mind as well. I have every confidence that the University of Indianapolis Press will prevail.

I deploy myself, strike hard, and try everything. I am a visionary. I have a sense of where I want to go and what I want to accomplish. I remember a story I read in the book *Working* by Studs Terkel. He told a story about three bricklayers. Asked by a bystander what they were doing, the first bricklayer said he was laying bricks. The second bricklayer replied, “I need to lay 500 bricks every day because I am making a living.” And the third bricklayer said, proudly, “I am building a cathedral.” That vision or sense of purpose is an essential ingredient of leadership. I had a vision 25 years ago when I founded the Social Work program at this university. I proposed to build a program with a vision of the future; to be able to serve not only the needy, but also the emerging community needs in areas of health, family, business, and immigrant populations. We want to build a program not only to serve the locals but also to serve the distant. We hope to build a

program with not only national characteristics, but also with the characteristics of a global village. We hope to be connected nationally and internationally.

To be a leader one must think everybody's important. To me, I think the person who invented the flush toilet or the cross screw is just as important as an astronaut who flies to the moon. A leader must recognize everybody in the team. A leader must have the ability to make the best use of the limited resources. I founded Asian Programs. I have an extremely limited budget. I rely on volunteers and networking strategies. I have the ability to mobilize the available resources and maximize their usage.

I think about how I can serve more people every day of my life. I am a service-oriented person. I often think less of myself, but I never think myself less. I learn how to be assertive but not to be aggressive. I have a few great mentors and a few good friends. I am supported by life-long friendships. I am blessed by having a good family. They form pillars of my life. Most of all, my parents taught me the importance of humanity. My father left me three words: truthfulness, beauty, and kindness. He taught me the essence of humanity and integrity.

I hope I have shared with you facets of my life (I said "facets" because there are other parts of my life experiences, such as being a cancer survivor, the founder of Asian Programs and the Social Work Program at this university, a member of a minority in America and at the workplace, the daughter of a very successful woman physician, etc.). All of these life experiences help me to develop certain ingredients for leadership: inner strengths, vision, passion, integrity, perseverance, verbal assertiveness, courage, decisiveness, and the art of compromise, optimism, and humanity.

Leadership is a continuous learning process. Leadership is like a Chinese painting. You don't know how to describe it but when you see it, you know what it is.

Thank you.