

The Paradoxes of Leadership

Bogue, E. Grady. *Leadership by Design: Strengthening Integrity in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, 163 pp.

Kouzes, James M. and Posner, Barry Z. *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, 332 pp.

Bensimon, Estela Mara and Neumann, Anna. *Redesigning Collegiate Leadership: Teams and Teamwork in Higher Education*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, 182 pp.

A popular news magazine, in an early 1980s article about the then-ascendant MBA, interviewed a young holder of a new degree who had plunged headlong from his academic career into business. He despaired of the gap between the aspirations created or reinforced by his studies and the reality of his work world. "I used to think the question is, 'Where shall I drive this magnificent chariot?' Then I found out the question is 'How can I get these horses to move their asses?'"

A decade and a half later, that young man is now presumably in his middle age and in mid-career, and has found, we hope, that even his revised assessment was wide of the mark. Individuals within an organization are not compelled to their full potentials and contributions by being considered or treated as draft animals, even in the greater service of Caesar. Certainly that circumstance is clear to organizers of MBA programs. They generally have shifted curricula in human resources away from manipulative techniques and a philosophy of the interchangeability of people toward a more humanistic orientation, an orientation which acknowledges and honors the value of individuals and their contributions.

In short, the concept of "leadership" has been redefined, and is reflected in literature on the subject. Less emphasis is given to getting to the top of the organizational pyramid, more to the empowerment of individuals through organizational flattening. Less emphasis is given to leaders knowing all the answers, more to asking the right questions. Leadership is less likely conferred upon a single individual because of assumed inherent characteristics, and more likely diffused throughout the organization by means of continuous encouragement and internal entrepreneurship.

Leadership has changed in large part due to the changing nature of the workplace and society. Perhaps in no other sector have more sea changes occurred than in higher education: tightening financial resources, increased diversity within student and professional populations, and greater scrutiny and demands for accountability from legislatures and other governing entities, to name but a few. Within metropolitan universities, the changes are even more varied as we seek to assert a new or refocused identity, and to deal with the implications of that identity on issues such as faculty rewards and the definitions of scholarship. The imperative of leadership is paramount.

Fortunately, the specific environment and challenges of leadership in higher education have enjoyed strong recent attention. Bergquist's *The Four Cultures of the Academy* (1992), for example, postulates the collegial, managerial, developmental, and negotiating cultures. Of particular interest in considering the nature of collegiate leadership are the clashes and conflicts of the collegial culture, in which leadership is broadly shared, and the managerial culture, in which leadership is reserved to the president and perhaps a small group of administrators.

Birnbbaum's *How Academic Leadership Works: Understanding Success and Failure in the College Presidency* (1992) analyzes, through case studies, the keys to initial and long-term leader effectiveness in the academy. Although the focus is upon presidents specifically, the lessons are applicable for other formal and informal leaders. In short, the successful academic leader is more likely to listen to others with respect, be open to influence, avoid simple thinking, de-emphasize bureaucratic frameworks and solutions, voice and model strong values, and encourage leadership by others.

Three newer works expand the discussion of leadership. Two are specific to higher education and one is more general in scope, but together they form a progression, from the core of individual values to the application of leadership skills within a collaborative environment.

E. Grady Bogue is head of leadership studies at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville's College of Education. He is chancellor emeritus of Louisiana State University in Shreveport, where he served a decade as chancellor; he also served as interim chancellor at LSU Baton Rouge. As he opens *Leadership by Design: Strengthening Integrity in Higher Education*, he expresses disappointment that recent works on leadership, not to mention more classic works on that subject and on broader human concerns, appear to have had so little influence on some collegiate leaders. Worse, some leaders "appear to suffer not only a poverty of ideas but from a poverty of ideals as well" (p. xi).

Bogue illustrates his observation through a recounting, painful for the reader, of recent betrayals of educational leadership as reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the popular press: abuses of federal grants, sexual exploitation of students, theft both personal and institutional, exposure of lies, and on and on. Bogue does not assert that these circumstances reflect the overall conditions or standards of the academy, but that they individually and cumulatively diminish us all.

Specific conditions of deficit account for disappointing performance records, Bogue says:

- A flawed sense of role — a condition of empty vision
- A contempt for ideas — a condition of empty mind
- A neglect of constructive values — a condition of empty heart
- A retreat from servant ideals — a condition of empty spirit
- A violation of cultural norms — a condition of empty sensitivity
- A sacrifice of honor — a condition of empty character

In place of these deficit conditions, Bogue calls us to reconsider and reaffirm some core values: honor, dignity, curiosity, candor, compassion, courage, excellence, and service. Each value receives its own chapter, but just as such values do not exist discreetly in the fully formed character, neither are they fully segregated by chapter but are artfully woven together. Bogue combines a rich writing style, reference to works of professional practice and works of art, and copious illustrations drawn from his own experience — "spiritual scars and calluses on the character" — to make his points in a fashion that transcends the intellect and engages the emotions.

Bogue cites Maslow, Emerson, Gardner, and the traditions of seven religions, among other sources, to reinforce the importance of respect for the dignity of individuals. But its implications for practice in higher education are nowhere more acutely drawn than from Bogue's own experience. At LSU Shreveport, the author and his colleagues managed to insert value commitments into the university's mis-

sion statement. One of these was, "We will treat our students and our colleagues with dignity, rendering instructional and administrative service marked by courtesy and competence."

An angry, three-hundred-pound man appeared one day before Bogue's desk to question this commitment. The thirty-year-old man, a truck driver and part-time evening student, had received an F in a course rather than a C, to his surprise and disappointment. He dutifully made an appointment with the instructor, who kept him waiting thirty minutes while she had coffee with colleagues. When the student was finally granted audience with the instructor, she informed him that she had lost his final examination, and would have to consider whether this warranted any corrective action on her part.

"The student did not consult the student handbook and the grievance process contained therein," Bogue reports. "Nor did he consult the department chair, dean, or provost. With malice in his heart, he computed the most direct path to my office, where my diminutive secretary understandably concluded that the size of the issue and the supplicant justified an interruption to the routine of the morning" (p. 17). The appropriate chairman, dean, and the provost were summoned, at which time the student retold his story. The offending faculty member, who had an "unfortunate history of such cavalier treatment of students," is no longer with the institution. The student received his degree during Bogue's last commencement in 1990 at LSU Shreveport, and to the author's relief, was smiling.

"Leadership is a conceptual, moral, and performing art," Bogue concludes. "It is an integrating art form involving the orchestration of ideas, values, and skills." Bogue entreats us to "create a reality of goodness and to construct a climate of effectiveness for the individuals and the organizations [we] hold in trust" (pp. 145-6). The work is complemented with an extensive and varied bibliography.

If we can concur on the basic personal values requisite to moral and effective leadership, we can turn to the next, obvious question: what do followers want and expect in their leaders? Not surprisingly, the answers offered by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner in their *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* vary not a great deal from the values advanced by Bogue.

The pair's previous 1987 work, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations*, focused on effective leadership practice, primarily from the perspective of the leader. Their new book is in many ways an expansion of the chapter of the earlier book, "What Followers Expect of Their Leaders." In tackling the subject of leadership from this perspective, Kouzes and Posner address a notable gap in the literature. "The notion of being a follower seems too passive, not proactive enough for the times in which we live. So we have taken up the challenge of discovering more about what constituents expect of their leaders, this time in behavioral terms" (p. xxi).

The authors' survey of public attitudes about what constitutes desirable leader characteristics and behavior is instructive. That 1993 poll found that four values captured a majority of respondent support. Leaders should be honest (87 percent), forward-looking (71 percent), inspiring (68 percent), and competent (58 percent) (p. 14). The authors find summary for these characteristics in the word "credibility."

The relative scarcity of credibility from the leadership scene is illustrated by research the authors cite. The percentage of American workers who are "cynical" has increased from 43 percent to 48 percent from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Another study found that only 40 percent of American workers gave strong agree-

ment to the idea that management is “honest, upright, and ethical.” Other polls have established nadirs of confidence in business, Congress, and virtually all other institutions. Citizens and employees have seen their institutional leaders talk the talk of increased quality and accountability, but few have seen those leaders walk the walk, and so are more distrustful and distanced than ever.

A shorthand prescription for establishing credibility is offered by Kouzes and Posner: DWYSYWD, or “do what you say you will do.” The rest of the book is given to describing the disciplines associated with establishing and sustaining credibility:

- Discovering yourself
- Appreciating constituents
- Affirming shared values
- Developing capacity
- Serving a purpose
- Sustaining hope

Kouzes and Posner recognize the uncertainties of the contemporary organization. The impacts of a multicultural workforce are unknown. The skills needed for the 21st century are uncertain, and hence educational policies are similarly poorly defined. The true consequences of global interdependence are largely mysteries. While these conditions make it more imperative that leaders establish credibility with constituents, they make it more difficult to do so — and thereby make the pursuit of leadership credibility through rigorous discipline and ongoing evaluation more imperative.

Very few of the authors’ illustrations are drawn from higher education, a disappointment for the academic reader that continues from their earlier work. The disappointment is especially great given that Posner is currently a professor of organizational behavior at Santa Clara University. Kouzes was through most of the 1980s director of a leadership development program there, and the authors’ consulting work includes association with many universities. The authors’ qualitative and quantitative studies which underpin their prescriptions are so extensive, however, as to support strongly their conclusions about general American organizational life and desires.

In *Redesigning Collegiate Leadership: Teams and Teamwork in Higher Education*, Estela Mara Bensimon and Anna Neumann continue their investigation of the nature and practice of educational leadership, particularly but not exclusively at the presidential level. Bensimon and Neumann were research associates and assistant directors on the Institutional Leadership Project which resulted in Birnbaum’s *How Academic Leadership Works*.

Redesigning Collegiate Leadership is drawn from research conducted during and in connection with the ILP, and in particular is based on the extensive study of leadership and team dynamics at 15 institutions. These institutions are not identified generally or with examples. For that they should be grateful; the authors’ analyses are simultaneously blunt and piercing.

“It is high time that the myth of solo leadership, as applied to the presidency and to other leadership roles, be shattered,” Neumann and Bensimon believe. “The presidency is lodged not in one person but in a team” (p. xv). Their experience and beliefs about leadership guide their work, and among other tenets, they hold that organizational agendas do not arise solely from the president, or any other leader, but from interactive groups; that despite the importance of the team, the president

bears primary responsibility and opportunity for team development; and that leadership generates leadership.

Every president participating in Neumann and Bensimon's study believed that they had a team. Analysis of the groups' functionings and interviews with members of the groups, however, led the authors to conclude that only seven of the 15 college presidents had "real" teams, as opposed to "illusory" teams. Real teams performed some useful activity in all three functional domains described by the authors — the utilitarian (providing information, making decisions, planning and coordination), the expressive (providing mutual support, providing counsel to the president), and the cognitive (viewing problems from multiple perspectives, challenging and arguing, monitoring, and feedback).

Illusory teams were marked by directive leadership, presidential primacy in the establishment of agendas, the open or subtle suppression of dissent and difference, and a tendency for the substantive work of the "team" to be done not in group contexts but in individual pairings of administrators. Symptoms abound on the illusory team. The president who holds or cancels meetings only at his or her convenience, for example, is in all likelihood not respecting the time of the team members or their dynamics outside of his presence and influence.

Bensimon and Neumann offer particular caution for university leaders and teams. Real teams were more common at small, private institutions. The authors speculate that the team building at universities is more difficult because of higher differentiation of functional units, the more highly political nature of universities, and the greater external focus of university presidents, among other factors, but they recommend particularly the university team for both higher maintenance and further study.

Redesigning Collegiate Leadership is more than a description of the state of teams in the academy. It is a prescription for presidents and others who would create or strengthen real teams. Assessment instruments and procedures are offered, as well as functional advice on utilizing the assessment findings to build real team relationships.

But why, in the final analysis, is the team important? If Neumann and Bensimon are right, that the presidency as a solo act is an illusion, then full functioning of leadership teams and tapping of their potentials will lead to a strengthening of institutions. Universities dependent upon "just one person's view of reality have limited ability to discern the complexity of organizational life 'out there,' particularly during times of change, when established patterns of meaning dissolve" (p. 145). Bensimon and Neumann are particularly compelling in their argument of the ability of team leadership to tap the potentials presented by our growing circumstances of racial, gender, and other diversity.

The paradoxes of leadership are brought to the fore by the joint consideration of these three works. Dealing with rapid change begins with an affirmation of constant values. The leadership that followers so desire begins with adherence to their instructions. The leadership of the individual is made stronger by empowering others. But the world is not simple, and neither should be our ideas or practice of leadership arts.

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