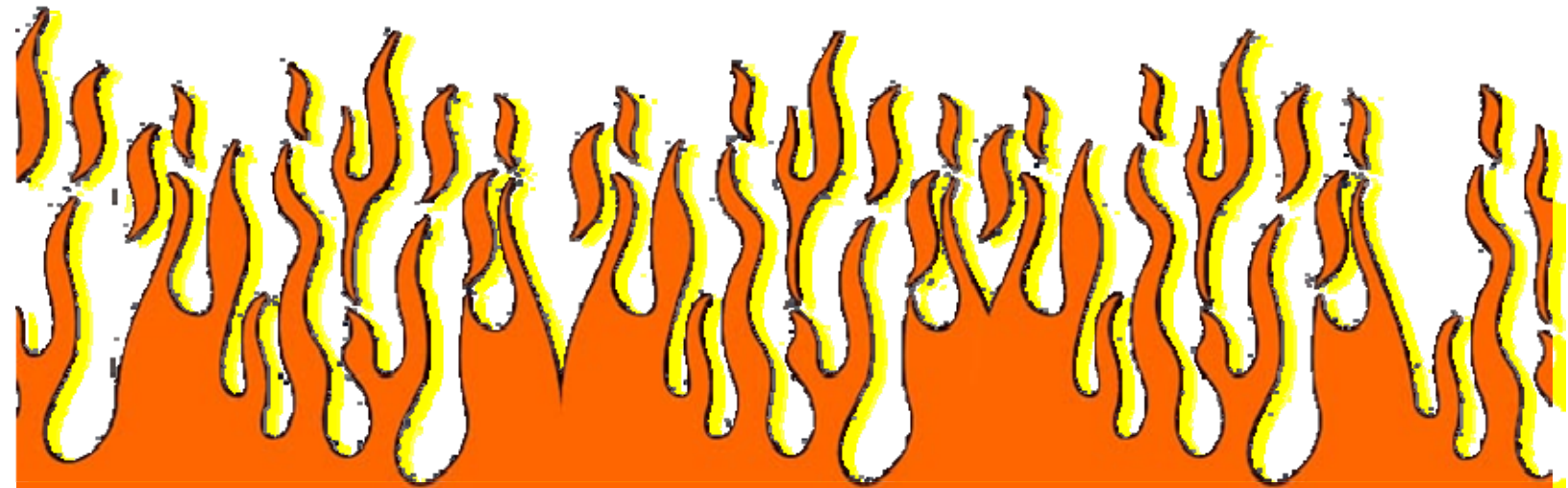


Igniting the Flames of Leadership

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A tiny flame flickers in the mist of a chilled, lonely night, sparking a mysterious glow that enchants all those around. This tiny light hypnotizes its watchers to gaze at its beauty and wonder its mystery. The faint crackle that accompanies the light echoes as the only sound that radiates throughout the night. Eyes gleam and marvel at its spectacular beauty of vivid colors of luscious orange, red, yellow, and a faint flurry of blue that illuminate the black skies. All sit and wonder the mysteries that hide behind the enraging flames that spark out in all directions. This wildfire will not go out unless it loses sight of its original simple flame. It continues to spread, captivating the lives of those who allow it to enter in to their borders.

Leadership is like a wildfire on a dark, cold night. It starts out simple and spreads fast, catching the lives of those who dare to enter. This flame is a great analogy of my philosophy of successful leadership in America's society. In order to do things we must be like wildfires in our settings. When one thinks of the word *wildlife*, death and destruction are typically accompanied. No one ever takes time to marvel at the beauty of fire or examine its magnificent features. Creating this wildfire in your leadership abilities is not an instant snap of the fingers and BOOM! there's your wildfire; it's much more of a process that has three major steps.

An effective leader must first ignite the flame. Even though it's possible, most fires don't spontaneously ignite themselves, there has to be a start somewhere along the way. The same thing goes with leadership, someone along the way must decide to take charge and create a design that followers can pursue. Leadership is designed to be empowering. A particular person or group of people, designs a project in which followers

will be assisting in accomplishing their goal. A leader must make important decisions on behalf of their entire environment and take in part everyone's needs and make a decision based on the greater good of the entire community. This leader must see the big picture or must see where the flame's path, even before the flame is lit. There needs to be boundaries set for accomplishing a goal. In my own leadership project for this class, the igniting my flame step initially began when I brainstormed different ideas for my project and called around to my contacts to see where I could go with my ideas. I started out wanting to make fully stocked costumes for forty-four children at UK Children's Hospital, thinking getting donations would not be an issue. After surveying my options, I realized that my goals were unrealistic of getting accomplished and I needed to stop and assess my limitations. In this step, it is so easy to dream bigger than boundaries will allow. Before establishing roots and deciding particular tasks and deadlines, a place must be set for the fire to first be lit.

Also in this particular step, deadlines should be set for each member of the group to follow. If the leader sets small goals/deadlines for each person, the goal will more than likely be completed more efficiently. Accomplishing goals empowers the audience by allowing them to have a feeling of completion and importance in the group. This could spark followers to want to do more and take on other tasks.

An effective leader must spread the fire. A simple flame on a dark night spreads so much light and gathers those around to surround the flame. The flame should be contagious and spread like a wild fire. The spreading step actively attempts to engage an audience into wanting to follow their leaders and participate to accomplish a common goal. In my own personal experiences, someone in charge can not get in front of a group

of people and unenthusiastically ask for volunteers and expect results. In order to get others to want to follow your way, a leader must enthusiastically spread their flames or share their passions hoping to provoke similar passions in other people. This step demands a key word that I live by, "motivation." Without motivation, a goal cannot be accomplished in a complete effective manner on time with full hearts. A task will simply be done to be finished. Having motivation as one of your leadership characteristics almost guarantees success of some degree. A leader can motivate by distributing rewards for accomplishing goals or giving incentives for being successful such as better parking spots, gift certificates, or more vacation days.

In my own leadership project, I had to make my volunteers as excited as I was to work with children at UK Children's Hospital. If they came into the situation not wanting to be there, my project would have been a failure. The children we interacted with feed off of our excitement because we were motivated to be there and shared that common goal. Engaging your audience starts by spreading the flame to those around that are willing to accept and share the passion for the flame to continue into a full force wildfire.

An effective leader must control the fire. The previous step explored to spread the flames to those around, hoping to spark similar passions. A fire can be spread but if it becomes unattainable it can be labeled as destructive. The person that sets the fire must set boundaries. Boundaries go along with exemplifying a model example to be an effective leader. This in my opinion could be the most important step in being a leader. In order for others to follow, one must set the example and model the way. This is important in all aspects of a leader's life, including school, involvement, participation, conduct, and social activities in order to gain the respect of their audience. A leader once said that one

must be the change they wish to see. Setting the example inspires others to want to follow your example in order to create a positive change.

Another aspect of this step plays a role in the boundaries idea. An idea can be sparked like a fire, capturing everyone around by its beauty and mystery. However, fires spread and destroy people, land, and animals which is why its portrayed so negatively in our society. If a fire is kept in boundaries, like a camp fire, its uses are beneficial. For example, camp fires radiant heat and can be used to cook food, etc. A camp fire is kept in boundaries and carefully watched so it won't get out of control. Leadership is like a camp fire. A leader must know their followers weaknesses and strengths and know where and when to overstep their boundaries. A tyrant leader acts in a controlling manner, shouting out orders and disrespecting their followers. A leader must know their boundaries and where to delegate responsibilities and make sure they are aware of overstepping their boundaries.

In my own experiences it can be very easy to overstep boundaries. For example, a leader could take all the responsibilities and be negative towards everyone. A leader could delegate the wrong responsibilities to the wrong person, leading to a disaster. A person that is great at dealing with people could be assigned working behind the scenes with extreme stress and not handle the situation correctly. A leader must know their members strengths and weaknesses and delegate responsibilities based on that.

These three steps don't necessarily have to occur in the assigned three steps, they can occur in any order. A leader can set the example first and then empower their audience. To be an effective leader three E's need to be followed: empower, exemplify, and engage. They don't have to occur in any order, they just need to demonstrate. The

three E's are part of my own leadership philosophy that has helped me grow as a leader. My own experiences in college have taught me so much about myself as a leader and about the type of leaders that I respect and know is effective.

A fire has to be ignited, spread, and contained in its borders. Leadership is very similar to fires in that it has to be spread, ignited, and contained. Flames continue to flicker until the goal is accomplished or loses sight of its original goal. Leadership can grow like fires grow and do great things. It can also destroy if it loses control of its boundaries. A leader must empower, engage, and exemplify its fire to those around.