

“An excerpt from The Ambiguity of Leadership”

“Chapter 1: Who are Leaders?”

According to Webster’s Dictionary, leadership is arbitrarily defined as, among other things, the “capacity to lead”. The concept of leadership is one that has eluded many and confused even more. This extent of ambiguity, however, is not only pertinent, it is necessary in defining leadership. Webster however was not so far off in his definition. Leadership is always changing based on changing situations. The many facets of leadership cannot be encompassed in one “plain-vanilla” definition. Leadership is abstract, and concrete definitions struggle to describe it. Leadership, for immediate purposes, is the ability of a person(s) to lead in a certain situation.

Leaders are everywhere, from the 2-year-old in day care who

starts the food fight, to the President of a high school senior class, to the CEO of a fortune-500 company.

Leaders come in every shape and size, make and model. They come with titles and without, and they are both born and made. While it may seem that this is taking the easy way out; it may seem that this assertion states that everyone are leaders, this is not so. It simply states that at any place and time, anyone can be a leader, but that does not mean that everyone is a leader.

It is now important to describe that while there are many types of leaders (in companies, on sports teams, in the home, in the classroom, in organizations...as you can see this list could go on and on) they will be separated into two very broad categories. These two types of leaders will be deemed, part-time leaders and full-time leaders.

Before these leaders are explained and their roles defined, the importance of situation must first be explored.

A person's situation can be defined in many different ways. The situation is what forms and builds leadership. Without a situation, other people, and problems/goals/tasks, a leader cannot truly lead. After all, what good is a doctor if he/she has no patients, no medical supplies, no medicine, and no hospital in which to practice? Situations change constantly for each individual based on the people involved, physical location, growth and development of each individual, etc. In one day, a person may encounter 15 different situations. In the case of my personal experience, the situations I encounter, to name a few, are my sorority, classes, dorm-life, living with my roommate, sports teams,

community service. My list continues to develop and change every day.

Leaders are everywhere, but without the situation to lead, they are like planted seeds with no water, no nutrients, and no sun to grow. Leaders can show their leadership in any situation, but there must be some sort of a spark, from either within or from exterior motivation to begin their leadership role. Some leaders chose to lead and feel comfortable leading in most if not all situations, and some only lead when forced to, or only in very selective situations.

Part-time leadership, as you may have already guessed, are the people who choose, or are chosen to lead only part of the time. It is not an inherent trait to them as a person. This does not make them a bad leader; in fact, they may be the some of the best leaders in the

select situations in which they lead. They may not be comfortable leading 100% percent of the time or their priorities may lie elsewhere. However, this is not the type of leadership for which to strive. These leaders may sometimes be close-minded toward leadership in other situations and may never explore their full potential as a leader. Chances are if you are a successful leader in one situation, you will be a successful leader in others.

The other leader, the full-time leader, is what some may think of as born-leader. However, it is important to assert leaders can be born or made. Think of leadership as a driving force, not a set of characteristics or personal traits. These leaders seek out leadership in all situations of their life. They are not better leaders than part-time leaders, but they strive for

leadership always, and strive for improvement and accomplishment in all areas of life. While it is difficult to conceptualize the two different types of leaders without generalizing them, the full-time leaders are many times of higher character and values, since they try to lead and set examples in all situations in their life.

It is important to consider both types of leaders. The general categories are not concrete classifications that can never change. It is not that when you are one type of leader you cannot shift to the other, and back again.

For instance, when I was in high school I was mostly a part-time leader. I was highly passionate about leading my sports team, and accepted a few other leadership positions, but leadership was not a desire or major priority in my life. As of recently, I have begun to

expand my interests and adopt leadership in all areas of my life. While I cannot yet say that I am the perfect, ideal, everyone-should-be-like-me full-time leader, I have made a great deal of progress from where I stood a year ago. After all, leaders must constantly grow and adapt. It is crucial that leaders are able to look upon their own actions and leadership abilities so that they can improve and expand their leadership for the future.”

*The opening chapter of my book, The Ambiguity of Leadership gives just a taste of my views on leadership, how to become a successful leader, and what makes an admirable person. The opening chapter focuses more on the actual person than the idea of leadership, which is just as, if not more, important.*

*One of the ideas that has really driven my ideas behind*

*leadership is a quote from Winston Churchill. It says, “We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.” One of my guiding principles of leadership is stated throughout latter parts of the books—good leaders are good people as well.*

*A CEO of a company may make \$600,000 a year, and may expand the company year after year. However, if he is doing so through corrupt business, and harming other members of the company, then he is neither a good leader nor a good person.*

*Back to the quote by Winston Churchill, it is important for a leader to put the needs of others before themselves. Leaders should not lead for themselves, for recognition, or for money, instead they should lead for the benefit and advancement of others. Many may disagree and say that the aforementioned CEO is a*

*great and talented leader, but I will disagree always.*

*While I could expand almost infinitely on leaders, it is important for me to discuss briefly leadership as well. Many will lump these two together; leaders do leadership, and leadership is what leaders do, but on the contrary, leadership is not so simple.*

*In the beginning of my book, I begin by defining leadership as “the ability of a person(s) to lead in a certain situation”. While this definition works when exploring leaders, it does not describe what leadership actually is, which, once again, is highly indecisive and vague.*

*I must begin by saying that for all intensive purposes, I will propose a definition for leadership. This said, I feel that leadership cannot be confined in the constraints of a 15-20 word summation. It changes and*

*varies with everything under the sun.*

*With that disclaimer, leadership is the constant struggle to improve or advance the situation of an organization, group, or yourself and those around you, while being guided by a goal, vision, or idea. In my opinion, strong leadership involves drive and passion for the leadership task.*

*I defined leadership as a “constant [ongoing] struggle” which may be surprising to some people. While leadership can be very rewarding, it is very rarely easy. Leadership requires perseverance, determination, and above all dedication to a dream. It seems that many people think leadership requires certain traits or even a ‘dog-eat-dog’ mentality. Conversely, I think leadership is a driving force, a yearning, or perhaps even a decision to bring change in whatever context desired.*

*Mary Anne Radmacher, an Oregon artist and writer said, "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying 'I will try again tomorrow'." This eloquently describes perfect leadership to me. It is not brazen it nor does not have to be demanding. Sometimes leadership comes with a bang, but sometimes it is a quiet voice. Yet, no matter what the approach, leadership is that continuous struggle, that constant standard, and the permanent drive to improve and change. To lead is one thing, to be a leader another, and leadership; leadership is a mind set, a continuum, an example, and a day-in, day-out practice for which one must constantly strive.*

*- Erin Priddy  
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