

LEADERSHIP

Defined

“

Leadership is not making the first bold and courageous move, or persuading others to follow someone they would rather not, or possessing a list of characteristics and traits. Such traits are assets everyone who wants to succeed in life should develop, but they do not guarantee that person will be a leader.”

In 2010, I gave a speech to Wall Street executives at the Museum of American Finance located at the former headquarters of the Bank of New York, 48 Wall Street, New York. The Bank occupied that building from 1796 until 1998. The Museum of American Finance is an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution.

As I addressed the audience of Wall Street executives about the historical events that took place within the walls of this magnificent building, the museum’s curator placed in my hands a rectangular piece of plexiglass with estimated dimensions of 2x6x10. Enshrined inside was what is called “The Washington Bond.”

Holding a document, albeit now enshrined in plexiglass, that President George Washington and very likely Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton handled with their bare hands, was breathtaking.

I held up the note for the audience to see and elaborated upon some of its interesting historical details. I also expounded upon the founding of the United States Treasury in 1789 and the significance of subsequent key events that followed in the formative years of the United States of America.



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Signed by the hand of President George Washington

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This bond, dated January 17, 1792, was owned, and signed by George Washington while he was President. It is for \$185.98 of Assumed Debt; interest was paid from January 1, 1792. This was part of Alexander Hamilton's plan for liquidating the debt of the individual states and funding the national debt. By endorsing the back of the bond with his signature, Washington also endorsed the new republic and placed his faith in its future.”

(Museum of American Finance)



Bank of New York headquarters (1796-1998), 48 Wall Street, now home to the American Museum of American Finance, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution.

Source: Alan Barnett - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24348653>



Courtesy The Museum of American Finance



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The leader's character (the "stuff" from which he is made) and his integrity (how his "stuff" endures the heat of battle) are masterfully conveyed to the audience in such a way that evokes an urgent and continuing desire to be in proximity to that person, or to at least follow his activities through other mediums as though he or she were in his physical proximity.

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Then I continued with my speech, which was intended to educate and inspire. The audience listened to every word I spoke with rapt attention. Keep in mind, in that room were some of the wealthiest, most powerful, and most influential people on earth.

When the event concluded, I was surrounded by men and women asking if I would like to have dinner, or breakfast, or go for a walk, or give the same speech to their entire firm. Members of the audience felt compelled to remain in my proximity.

Why? What caused this desire within them?

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In that moment I observed and understood something for the very first time...what leadership actually was. To understand what it was, I first needed to clearly understand what leadership was not.

Contrary to the rote definition taught in universities around the world, leadership is not making the first bold and courageous move, or persuading others to follow someone they would rather not, or possessing a list of characteristics and traits, such as decisiveness, trustworthiness, the ability to empower others, the ability to communicate clearly, and the demonstration of resilience amid turbulence. Those are traits everyone who wants to succeed in life should develop, but they do not guarantee that a possessor of such traits will be a leader.

What is leadership then?

As a word, it is a noun. It can mean the position or role of a leader, or the period of time when someone fills that position or role. For example, "the organization experienced great success under his leadership." It can also mean one's ability to lead, or the act of leading itself. Yet, none of those descriptions captures the essence of the meaning of "leadership."

Then what exactly is "leadership?"

In the moment of that speech, when all eyes and ears were upon me, the audience was experiencing a particular type of feeling. This feeling can only be evoked in others by the presence of a true leader. The "feeling" has since been described to me by a few who were in the audience that day as a "burning curiosity" by one and a "joyful enthusiasm" by another. Perhaps there are even better descriptions than those.

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The word 'influence' is derived from the Latin word, 'influere,' which means 'to flow into, stream in, pour in.' The essence of leadership is influence. influence produces effects within another by insensible or invisible means. A leader through his or her 'character presence' opens a 'metaphorical conduit' within a person where intellectual, philosophical, or spiritual energy may flow. This 'flow' results in sentiments of affinity towards the leader and a heightened estimation of self by the follower.

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The ‘feeling’ is a derivative of the ‘reason’ a follower innately senses. The ‘reason’ is, at its core, ‘influence.’
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Annette and Matthew Hutcheson

The leader will utilize his words, his command presence, his preparation, his subject matter mastery, his use of visual aids (such as rare historical documents), and his ability to hold their attention through an arsenal of keenly developed oratory skills.

The leader’s character (the “stuff” from which he is made) and his integrity (how his “stuff” endures the heat of battle) are masterfully conveyed to the audience in such a way that evokes an urgent and continuing desire to be in proximity to that person, or to at least follow his activities through other mediums as though he or she were in his physical proximity.

In other words, if that “feeling” is not evoked in others, the person is not a leader.

The feeling encourages the follower to emulate the leader and he or she gladly does so. The feeling cultivates aspiration and suppresses ambition. It gives the follower a feeling of safety and belonging. The feeling tempers a follower’s reaction to a leader’s mistake, or buffers the effect of bad news related to the leader or his leadership, or softens the disciplinary correction of a follower by the leader. The “feeling” is a derivative of the “reason” a follower innately senses. The “reason” is, at its core, “influence.”

What you are feeling is “influence.”

This type of influence is not arbitrary or capricious. It evokes in others rightful expectations, hopeful anticipations, and heroic aspirations and actions.

Leadership establishes acceptable behaviors within the organization or community that followers generally agree are righteous and the consequences for violating are fair.

Leaders have an innate understanding of equity – which is the concept of “what should be” as compared to the law – which is “what is.” Even those who do not

understand their own emotions well, or are otherwise disconnected from them, can innately sense “something” about a person that sets him apart from the crowd. That “something” is exuded influence. In conclusion, the essence of true leadership is influence that evokes feelings which compel a follower to pursue proximity to the leader. The greater the influence, the greater the feeling. The greater the feeling, the easier it is for the leader to share and accomplish great visions. The greater the feeling, the easier it is to defeat monumental defeats. The greater the feeling, the easier it is to repair hurt feelings, resolve misunderstandings, bridge community or organizational discord, and successfully negotiate procedural disagreements.

It is said that money makes the world go ‘round.’ It is not true. Influence does. Leadership is that special feeling evoked through influence.

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