

that it excites the imagination and challenges people to work for something they do not yet know how to do, something they can be proud of as they move toward it.

Every achievement starts with a goal. But not just any old goal and not just anybody stating it. The starter of the goal must elicit trust, especially if it is a high-risk or visionary goal, because those who follow must accept the risk along with the leader. Direction, a goal, from a leader does not elicit trust unless one has confidence in his or her values and competence (including judgment) and unless he or she has a sustaining spirit (*entheos*) that will support the tenacious pursuit of that goal.

Important as goals are as the base point of leadership, the faltering of leadership today is not so much for want of goals as for the lack of trust because the evidence of values, competence, and spirit is lacking. This is a candid, cynical age. People rightly want to know, "What are your plans? Can you really do it? It is a big risk, can I trust you?" And not enough who presume to lead measure up.

## Listening and Understanding

Persons who achieve important leadership roles often are not good listeners. By nature, because they are disposed to lead, they may be too assertive. If they wish to become good listeners they may have to learn it as a conscious discipline. And it is terribly important that they do learn because one cannot *serve* as one leads, and sometimes one cannot lead well, without being a good listener. It is an absurdly simple rule, but the fact is that one misses some things one needs to know if one does not listen in a really discriminating way.

Listening is much more than just keeping quiet, although one must keep quiet in order to listen. Listening begins with attention and the search for understanding, both the outward manifestation and the inward conviction of really searching to understand. This must be communicated by the way one attends and the way one responds.

The good listener remembers what the other person expresses (words, mood, expression) and refrains from piecemeal value judgments. The good listener keeps himself or herself in a position to assess the relationship between the facts, attitudes, opinions, and

feelings being expressed and therefore is able to respond to the total expression of the other person. Listening is a discipline that improves face-to-face relations, it saves time in the process of communicating, and it "lifts" both the listener and the one listened to. Listening does not make one a servant or a leader but it is likely to be an attribute of the servant-leader.

Listeners learn about people in ways that modify—first, the listener's attitudes, then his or her behavior, and finally the attitudes and behavior of others. Listening is equally important to a mother relating to her children as to a head of state. Sometimes the heat can be taken out of a child's temper tantrum with just a few seconds of intense listening. Listening is basically an attitude—really wanting to understand. It is also a technique. But the technique without the attitude is phoney.

### Language and Imagination

A prime requirement of leadership is goal setting or goal finding. In any kind of group enterprise the person who can *articulate* the consensus idea is *the* leader, even though someone else may be designated as leader and it may be someone else's idea. This is partly a matter of insight—concept. One can *act* on a concept that one can't articulate. But to lead, one must articulate, one must have the language.

But language is deceptive—it is not a solid, unchanging thing. And it just does not go in a straight line from speaker to listener as water goes through a funnel.

Alfred North Whitehead once said, "No language can be anything but elliptical, requiring a leap of imagination to understand its meaning in its relevance to immediate experience." Nothing is meaningful until it is related to the hearer's own experience. One may hear the words, one may even remember them and repeat them, as a computer does in the retrieval process. But *meaning*, a growth in experience as a result of receiving the communication, requires that the hearer supply the imaginative link, from the listener's fund of experience, to the abstract language symbols the speaker has used. As a leader (including teacher, coach, administrator) one must have

facility in tempting the hearer into that leap of imagination that connects the verbal concept to the hearer's own experience. The limitation on language, to the communicator, is that the *hearer* must make that leap of imagination. One of the great communicating arts is to say just enough to facilitate that leap. Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.

The physicist and philosopher Percy Bridgman takes another view of it when he says, "no linguistic structure is capable of reproducing the full complexity of experience. . . . The only feasible way of dealing with this is to push a particular verbal line of attack as far as it can go, and then switch to another verbal level which we might abandon when we have to. . . . Many people . . . insist on a single self-consistent verbal scheme into which they try to force all experience. In doing this they create a purely verbal world in which they can live a pretty autonomous existence, fortified by the ability of many of their fellows to live in the same verbal world." This, of course, is what makes a cult—a group of people who thus isolate themselves from the evolving mainstream by staying within their own closed verbal world and forfeit the opportunity to lead others. One of the great tragedies is when a proven able leader becomes trapped in one of these closed verbal worlds and loses his or her ability to lead.

Most of us at one time or another, some of us a good deal of the time, would *really* like to communicate, *really* get through to a significant level of meaning in the hearer's experience. It can be terribly important. The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves, first, are we really listening? Are we listening to the one we want to communicate to? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand? Remember that great line from the Prayer of St. Francis, "Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand."

One must not be afraid of a little silence. Some find silence awkward or oppressive. But a relaxed approach to dialogue will include the welcoming of some silence. It is often a devastating question to ask oneself, but it is sometimes important to ask it—"In saying what I have in mind will I really improve on the silence?"

## Withdrawal—Finding One's Optimum

Leadership in any of its dimensions from the home to the world community can be pressure ridden and very taxing—emotionally and physically. Two kinds of people go for leadership: those who are so constituted physically and emotionally that they like pressure, seek it out, and perform best when they are totally intense, and those who do not like pressure, do not thrive under it, but who want to lead and are willing to endure the pressure in order to have the opportunity. The former welcome a happy exhaustion and the latter are constantly in defense against that state. For both the art of withdrawal is useful. To the former it is a change of pace; to the latter it is a defense against an unpleasant state. The former may be the more natural leader; the latter needs a tactic to survive. The art of withdrawal serves them both.

The ability to withdraw and reorient oneself, if only for a moment, presumes that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important—and the important from the urgent—and attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect. One may govern one's life by the law of the optimum (optimum being that pace and set of choices that give one the best performance over a life span)—bearing in mind that there are always emergencies and the optimum includes carrying an unused reserve of energy in all periods of normal demand so that one has the resilience to cope with the emergency.

Pacing oneself by appropriate withdrawal is one of the best approaches to making optimal use of one's resources. The servant-leader must constantly ask himself or herself, how can I *use* myself to serve best?

## Acceptance and Empathy

A college president once said, "Educators may be rejected by their students and they must not object to this. But they may never, under any circumstances, regardless of what the students do, reject a single student."

We have known this a long time in the family. For a family to be a family, no one can ever be rejected. Robert Frost in his poem "The Death of the Hired Man" states the problem in a conversation on the farmhouse porch between the farmer and his wife about the shiftless hired man, Silas, who has come back to their place to die. The farmer is irritated about this because Silas was lured away from his farm in the middle of the last haying season. The wife says this is the only home he has. They are drawn into a discussion of what a home is. The husband gives his view:

Home is the place where when you have  
to go there they have to take you in!

This is the male view, the symbolic masculine—hard, rational, uncompromising.

The wife gives the symbolic feminine reply—gentle, feeling, accepting. What is a home? She says,

I should have called it something you  
somehow haven't to deserve.

Some women are hard and uncompromising and some men are gentle and accepting. What Robert Frost has portrayed for us here are the masculine and feminine *principles*.

Because of the vagaries of human nature, the halt, the lame, half-made creatures that we all are, the great leader (whether it is the mother in her home or the head of a vast organization) would say what the wife said about home in Robert Frost's poem. The interest in and affection for his or her followers which a leader has, and it is a mark of true greatness when it is genuine, is clearly something the followers haven't to deserve. Great leaders, including "little" people, may have gruff, demanding, uncompromising exteriors. But deep down inside, the great ones have an unqualified acceptance of those who go with their leadership.

Acceptance requires a tolerance of imperfection. Anybody could lead perfect people—if there were any. But there aren't *any* perfect people. And the parents who try to raise perfect children are certain to raise neurotics.

It is part of the enigma of human nature that the "typical" person—immature, stumbling, inept, lazy—is capable of great dedication and heroism *if* he or she is wisely led. Many otherwise able people are disqualified to lead because they cannot work with and through the half-people who are all there are. The secret of institution building is to be able to weld a team of such people by lifting them up to grow taller than they would otherwise be.

Individuals grow taller when they are accepted for what they are and are led by the ablest and strongest and ethically soundest people. (Ethical in the sense of being sensitive to what helps people grow taller and more autonomous and disposed to act on that knowledge.) Leaders who fully accept those who go with them are more likely to be trusted.

### **Know the Unknowable— Beyond Conscious Rationality**

The requirements of leadership impose some intellectual demands that are not measured by academic intelligence ratings. The two are not mutually exclusive but they are different things. The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way: he or she needs to *have a sense for the unknowable* and be able to *foresee the unforeseeable*. The leader knows some things and foresees some things which those he is presuming to lead do not know or foresee as clearly. This is partly what gives leaders their "lead," what puts them out ahead and qualifies them to show the way. This is why geniuses must sometimes accept the leadership of those who are mainly wise.

Until quite recently many would attribute these qualities of knowing the unknowable and foreseeing the unforeseeable to mystical or supernatural gifts—and some still do. Now it is possible at least to speculate about them within a framework of natural law. The electrical body field theory suggests the possibility of an interconnection between fields and could explain telepathy. Some are willing to speculate on the possibility of memory traces being physical entities, thus providing a basis for explaining clairvoyance. In far-out

theorizing every mind, at the unconscious level, has access to every "bit" of information that is or ever was. Those among us who seem to have unusual access to these "data banks" are called "sensitives." What we now call intuitive insight may be the survivor of an earlier much greater sensitivity. What we now normally have of intuition may bring us much nearer the optimal balance between conscious and unconscious rationalities. Much of this is highly speculative but it is within bounds of what some scientific minds are willing to ponder within the framework of what is known about natural phenomena. Information recall under hypnosis is suggestive of what is potentially available from the unconscious.

What is the relevance of this somewhat fanciful theory to the issue at hand, the thought processes of a leader? One contemporary student of decision making put it this way: "If, on a practical decision in the world of affairs, you are waiting for *all* of the information for a good decision, it never comes." There always is a little more information that one might have if one waited longer or worked harder to get it—but the delay and the cost are not warranted. On an important decision one rarely has 100 percent of the information needed for a good decision no matter how much one spends or how long one waits. And if one waits too long he or she has a different problem and has to start all over. This is the terrible dilemma of the hesitant decision maker.

As a practical matter, on most important decisions there is an information gap. That is why we have leaders. If all the information for all of the decisions were always available we would have a computer-run society and decision makers, leaders—people to do this—would not be necessary. But there usually is an information gap between the solid information in hand and what is needed. The art of leadership rests, in part, on the ability to bridge that gap by intuition. The person who is better at this than most is likely to emerge as the leader because he or she can *serve*, can contribute something of great value. Others will depend on the leader to go out ahead and show the way because his or her judgment will be better than most. Leaders, therefore, must be more creative than most, and creativity is largely discovery, a push into the uncharted and the unknown. Every once in a while a leader finds himself or herself needing to

think like a scientist, an artist, or a poet. And his or her thought processes may be just as fanciful as theirs.

Intuition is a feel for patterns, the ability to generalize based on what has happened previously. Wise leaders know when to bet on these intuitive leads, but they always know that they are betting on percentages—their hunches are not seen as eternal truths.

Two separate “anxiety” processes may be involved in a leader’s intuitive decision, an important aspect of which is timing, the decision to decide. One is the anxiety of holding the decision until as much information as possible is in. The other is the anxiety of making the decision when there really isn’t enough information—which, on critical decisions, is usually the case. All of this is complicated by pressures building up from those who “want an answer.” Again, trust is at the root of it. Has the leader a really good information base (both hard data and sensitivity to feelings and needs of people) and a reputation for consistently good decisions that people respect? Can he or she defuse the anxiety of a lot of people who want more certainty than exists in the situation?

Intuition in a leader is more valued, and therefore more trusted, at the conceptual level. An intuitive answer to an immediate situation can be a gimmick and conceptually defective. Overarching conceptual insight that gives a sounder framework for decisions (so important, for instance, in foreign policy) is the great gift. But even there, courage to act on insight and take immediate losses in the interest of long-term sound actions may be the greater virtue. It gets down, in the end, to humility. Is the leader really a servant?

### Foresight—the Central Ethic of Leadership

The common assumption about the word *now* is that it is this instant moment of clock time—*now*. In usage we qualify this a little by saying *right now*, meaning this instant, or *about now*, allowing a little leeway. Sometimes we say, “I’m going to do it now,” which means, “I’m going to start soon and do it in the near future,” or “I have just now done it,” meaning that I did it in the recent past. The dictionary admits all of these variations of usage.

Let us liken *now* to the spread of light from a narrowly focused



beam. There is a bright intense center, this moment of clock time, and a diminishing intensity, theoretically out to infinity on either side. As viewed here, *now* includes all of this—all of history and all of the future. As one approaches the central focus, the light intensifies as this moment of clock time is approached. All of it *is now* but some parts are more *now* than others, and this central focus that marks this instant of clock time moves along as the clock ticks. *This is not the way it is!* It is simply an analogy to suggest a way of looking at *now* for those who wish better to see the unforeseeable—a mark of a leader.

Prescience, or foresight, is a better than average guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future. It begins with a state of mind about *now*, something like that suggested by the light analogy. What is there in the present moment of clock time is merely the intense focus that is connected with what has gone on in the past and what will happen in the future. The prescient individual has a sort of “moving average” mentality (to borrow a statistician’s term) in which past, present, and future are one, bracketed together and moving along as the clock ticks. The process is continuous.

Machiavelli, writing about how to be a prince, put it this way, “Thus it happens in matters of state; for knowing afar off (which it is only given a prudent man to do) the evils that are brewing, they are easily cured. But when, for want of such knowledge, they are allowed to grow so that everyone can recognize them, there is no longer any remedy to be found.”

The shape of some future events can be calculated from trend data. But, as with a practical decision mentioned earlier, there is usually an information gap that has to be bridged, and one must cultivate the conditions that favor intuition. This is what Machiavelli meant when he said that “knowing afar off (which it is only given a prudent man to do) the evils that are brewing, they are easily cured.” The prudent man is the man who constantly thinks of “now” as the moving concept in which past, present moment, and future are one organic unity. And this requires living by a sort of rhythm that encourages a high level of intuitive insight about the whole gamut of events from the indefinite past, through the present moment, to the indefinite future. One is at once, in every moment of time, historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet—not three separate roles. This is what the practicing leader is, every day of his or her life.

Living this way is partly a matter of *faith*. Stress is a condition of most of modern life, and, if one is a servant-leader and carrying the burdens of other people—going out ahead to show the way—one takes the rough and tumble (and it really is rough and tumble in some leader roles), in the belief that, if one enters a situation prepared with the necessary experience and knowledge at the conscious level, *in the situation* the intuitive insight necessary for one's optimal performance will be forthcoming. Is there any other way, in the turbulent world of affairs (including the typical home), for one to maintain serenity in the face of uncertainty? One follows the steps of the creative process which require that one stay with the conscious analytical process as far as it will carry him or her and then withdraw, release the analytical pressure, if only for a moment, in full confidence that a resolving insight will come. The concern with past and future is gradually attenuated as this span of concern goes forward or backward from the instant moment. The ability to do this is the essential structural dynamic of leadership.

Foresight is seen as a wholly rational process, the product of a constantly running internal computer that deals with intersecting series and random inputs and is vastly more complicated than anything technology has yet produced. It is regarding the events of the instant moment and constantly comparing them with a series of projections made in the past and at the same time projecting future events—with diminishing certainty as projected time runs out into the indefinite future.

The failure of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an *ethical* failure, because a serious ethical compromise today (when the usual judgment on ethical inadequacy is made) is sometimes the result of a failure at an earlier date to foresee today's events and take the right actions when there was freedom to act. The action that society labels "unethical" in the present moment is often really one of no choice. By this standard a lot of guilty people are walking around with an air of innocence that they would not have if society were able always to pin the label *unethical* on the failure to foresee and the consequent failure to act constructively when there was freedom to act.

Foresight is the "lead" that the leader has. Once leaders lose this lead and events start to force their hand, they are leaders in name only. They are not leading; they are reacting to immediate events

and they probably will not long be leaders. There are abundant current examples of loss of leadership that stem from a failure to foresee what reasonably could have been foreseen and from failure to act on that knowledge while the leader had freedom to act.

There is a wealth of experience available on how to achieve this perspective of foresight, but only one aspect is mentioned here. Required is that one live a sort of schizoid life. One is always at two levels of consciousness: one is in the real world—concerned, responsible, effective, value-oriented. One is also detached, riding above it, seeing today's events, and seeing oneself deeply involved in today's events, in the perspective of a long sweep of history and projected into the indefinite future. Such a split enables one better to foresee the unforeseeable. Also, from one level of consciousness, each of us acts resolutely from moment to moment on a set of assumptions that then governs our life. Simultaneously, from another level, the adequacy of these assumptions is examined, in action, with the aim of future revision and improvement. How else can one live and act in the real world with a clear conscience?

### Awareness and Perception

Framing all of this is awareness, opening wide the doors of perception so as to take in more of what is available of sensory experience and other signals from the environment than people usually take in. It is not hard to do and it makes life more interesting; certainly it strengthens one's effectiveness as a leader. When one is aware, there is more than the usual alertness, there is more intense contact with the immediate situation, and a lot more is stored away in the unconscious computer to produce intuitive insights in the future when needed.

William Blake has said, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything will appear to man as it is, infinite." Those who have gotten their doors of perception open wide enough often enough know that this statement of Blake's is not mere poetic exaggeration. Most of us move about with very narrow perception—sight, sound, smell, tactile—and we miss most of the grandeur that is in the minutest thing, the smallest experience. We also miss leadership opportunities. There is danger, however. Some people cannot take

what they see when the doors of perception are open too wide, and they had better test their tolerance for awareness gradually. A qualification for leadership is that one can tolerate a sustained wide span of awareness so that he or she better "sees it as it is."

The opening of awareness stocks both the conscious and unconscious minds with a richness of resources for future need. But it does more than that: it is value building and value clarifying and it armors one to meet the stress of life by helping build serenity in the face of stress and uncertainty. The cultivation of awareness gives one the basis for detachment, the ability to stand aside and see oneself in perspective in the context of one's own experience, amid the ever present dangers, threats, and alarms. Then one sees one's own peculiar assortment of obligations and responsibilities in a way that permits one to sort out the urgent from the important and perhaps deal with the important. Awareness is *not* a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity.

A leader must have more of an armor of confidence in facing the unknown—more than those who accept his or her leadership. This is partly anticipation and preparation but it is also belief that in the stress of real-life situations one can compose oneself in a way that permits the creative process to operate—and this is what makes dynamic, visionary leadership possible.


This is told dramatically in one of the great stories of the human spirit—the story of Jesus when confronted with the woman taken in adultery. In this story Jesus is seen as a man, like all of us, with extraordinary prophetic insight of the kind we all have some of. He is a leader; He has a goal—to bring, among other things, more compassion to the lives of people.

In this scene the woman is cast down before Him by the mob that is challenging Jesus' leadership. They cry, "The *law* says she shall be stoned, what do *you* say?" Jesus must make a decision; He must give the *right* answer, right in the situation, and one that sustains His leadership toward His goal. The situation is deliberately stressed by His challengers. What does He do?

He sits there writing in the sand—a withdrawal device. In the

pressure of the moment, having assessed the situation rationally, He assumes the attitude of withdrawal that will allow creative insight to function.

He could have taken another course; He could have regaled the mob with rational arguments about the superiority of compassion over torture. A pretty good logical argument can be made for it. What would the result have been had He taken that course?

He did not choose to do that. He chose instead to withdraw and cut the stress—right in the event itself—in order to open His *awareness* to creative insight. And a great one came, one that has kept the story of the incident alive for 2,000 years—“Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone.” 

### Persuasion—Sometimes One Person at a Time

Leaders work in wondrous ways. Some assume great institutional burdens, others quietly deal with one individual at a time. Such a man was John Woolman, an American Quaker who lived through the middle years of the eighteenth century. He is known to the world of scholarship for his journal, a literary classic. But in the area of our interest, leadership, he is the man who almost singlehandedly rid the Society of Friends (Quakers) of slaves.

It is difficult now to imagine the Quakers as slaveholders, as indeed it is difficult now to imagine anyone being a slaveholder. One wonders how the society of 200 years hence will view “what man has made of man” in our generation. We may look pretty bad.

But the eighteenth-century American Quakers were, many of them, affluent, conservative slaveholders and John Woolman, as a young man, chose as his goal the ridding of his beloved Society of the practice of slavery. Thirty of his adult years (he lived to age fifty-two) were largely devoted to this. By 1770, nearly a hundred years before the Civil War, no Quakers held slaves.

His method was unique. He didn’t raise a big storm about it or start a protest movement. No moral stigma was heaped on the Quaker slaveholders.

Although John Woolman was not a strong man physically, he

accomplished his mission by journeys up and down the East Coast by foot or horseback visiting slaveholders—over a period of many years. The approach was not to censure the slaveholders because Woolman thought slaveholding was wrong (although he did emphatically think it was wrong). Rather, the burden of his approach was to raise questions: What does the owning of slaves do to you as a moral person? What kind of an institution are you binding over to your children? Person by person, inch by inch, by persistently returning and revisiting and pressing his gentle argument over a period of thirty years, the scourge of slavery was eliminated from this Society, the first religious group in America formally to denounce and forbid slavery among its members. One wonders what would have been the result if there had been fifty John Woolmans, or even five, traveling the length and breadth of the Colonies in the eighteenth century *persuading* people one by one with gentle, nonjudgmental argument that a wrong should be righted by individual voluntary action. Perhaps we would not have had the war with its 600,000 casualties and the impoverishment of the South and with the resultant vexing social problem that is at fever heat a hundred years later with no end in sight. We know now, in the perspective of history, that just a slight alleviation of the tension in the 1850s might have avoided the war. A few John Woolmans, just a *few*, might have made the difference. Leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by convincement rather than coercion. Its advantages are obvious.

John Woolman exerted his leadership in an age that must have looked as dark to him as ours does to us today. We may easily write off his effort as a suggestion for today on the assumption that the Quakers were ethically conditioned for this approach. All individuals are so conditioned, to some extent—enough to gamble on.

### **One Action at a Time— The Way Some Great Things Get Done**

Two things about Thomas Jefferson are of interest in this context. First, as a young man he had the good fortune to find a mentor, George Wythe, a Williamsburg lawyer whose original house still

stands in the restored village. George Wythe was a substantial man of his times, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the Constitutional Convention. But his chief claim to fame is as Thomas Jefferson's mentor. It was probably the influence of mentor on protégé, as Jefferson studied law in Wythe's office, that moved Jefferson toward his place in history and somewhat away from his natural disposition to settle down at Monticello as an eccentric Virginia scholar (which he remained, partly, despite Wythe's influence). The point of mentioning George Wythe is that old people may have a part to play in helping the potential servant-as-leader to emerge at his or her optimal best.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Jefferson, more important in history than the Declaration of Independence or Jefferson's later term as president, was what he did during the war. With the publication of the Declaration, the war was on and Jefferson was famous. He was importuned on all sides to take important roles in the war. But he turned them all down. *He knew who he was* and he was resolved to be his own man. He chose his own role. He went back to Virginia and didn't leave the state for the duration of the war.

Jefferson believed the war would be won by the Colonies, that there would be a new nation and that that nation would need a new system of law to set it on the course that he had dreamed for it in the Declaration of Independence. So he went back to Monticello, got himself elected to the Virginia legislature, and proceeded to write new statutes embodying the new principles of law for the new nation. He set out, against the determined opposition of his conservative colleagues, to get these enacted into Virginia law. It was an uphill fight. He would go to Williamsburg and wrestle with his colleagues until he was slowed to a halt. Then he would get on his horse and ride back to Monticello to rekindle his spirit and write some more statutes. Armed with these he would go back to Williamsburg and take another run at it. He wrote 150 statutes in that period and got fifty of them enacted into law, the most notable being separation of church and state. For many years Virginia legislators were digging into the remaining hundred as new urgent problems made their consideration advisable.

When the Constitution was drafted some years later Jefferson