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Leadership is About Developing 1 Voice and 1 Movement

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Leadership is About Developing 1 Voice and 1 Movement

By Germayne Graham
UCF Forum columnist
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When your time to lead comes, what practices will define your leadership?

There are many models, theories and aspirational frameworks that define and describe leadership. I am drawn to the observed behaviors and practices of identified leaders during times of change or big movements. Over time, these practices and behaviors become attached to speeches, quotes, marches and sound bites.

They clearly demonstrate who leaders are and what they do. These behaviors inspire followers to go beyond their personal limits, endure physical and emotional injury, lose jobs and homes, and challenge insurmountable obstacles. They cause followers to believe, change and take action.

There are quite a number of folks who actually got this leadership thing right!

Always included in that list are leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. These are the ones who did not just lead movements but created a remarkable change to the value of human life. These are also the names that come up when you ask someone to define a true leader or describe the characteristics of leadership. These are powerful examples because they used their values and morals to challenge systems of power. They did not necessarily have positions of power that were won in elections but they won the hearts of followers using their values, courage, passion for humankind and righteousness.

In leadership studies, one theory or model of leadership that describes the leadership behaviors and practices is Kouzes and Posner Five Practices of leadership. They studied and defined five common practices that they say all successful leaders engage in. These behaviors are: Modeling the way, Inspiring a shared vision, Challenging the process, Encouraging the heart, and Enabling others to act.

All of these behaviors involve influence and a working relationship between leaders and followers. Followers are inspired to dig deep down inside and make changes, impact others or take an action. I have a lot of respect for these five practices and I teach them and other theories of leadership in my classes. I have found that after conducting

counseling sessions in a previous role and discussing, analyzing and teaching leadership in my current role that there are some additional behaviors or practices that I include:

Listening to the loudest dissension: Leaders can grow and expand their vision when they listen to the follower who does not always agree with them. Experimenting with different voices, ideas and input will often lead to better outcome because the product reflects the vision of all who are involved. At the end of the semester when I receive feedback from students who took my class, I always feel accomplished and reassured when students receive the outcome that I set out to accomplish. I am most attentive to the students who voice critical differences or suggestions for making my class better. Their opinion may add something that will benefit other students who will follow.

Observe with purpose and intention: As a therapist, I've learned a lot about micro expressions and nonverbal gestures. There are certain emotions that are expressed the same regardless of gender, culture, race or age. By observing followers, one can catch a glimpse of true emotions expressed consciously and unconsciously. Engaging in purposeful observation will allow a leader to change the course of his or her vision to include details that will empower others. While teaching class, if I catch a glimpse of confusion, embarrassment, rejection, or even sadness, I can back up to rethink or restate something that may change the course of learning for my student.

Building mutually beneficial relationships: Before one becomes a leader, the vision is individual. As it grows it becomes a vision of common purpose. Leadership is about developing one voice and one movement. In this simple vision, everyone wins because everyone is a member of the team. Leaders engage the team to make sure that every voice matters. Martin Luther King Jr. described this concept best in this quote: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Leadership can be defined by a number of theories, frameworks and definitions but it is clearly defined by the voices of the people who the leader serves and the behaviors and practices that cause movements and change.

Again I ask: When your time to lead comes, what practices will define your leadership?

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