

Leadership

Please raise your hand if you would like to be a leader. Great, now ask yourself two questions: why is it you are interested in being a leader and what does it mean to be a leader? In the world today leaders are too often seen as an exceptional group of people who possess a set of poorly defined characteristics that are innate to them alone and allow them to influence others. Instead of being able to define leadership, it is often easier to point it out in people's actions. At camp, we talk about an older boy having a "soft touch" with an out of control younger camper or we say someone simply commands the respect of his peers, in the outside world a politician is charismatic or a CEO is intuitive. We look up to these people and envy their influence, power and all the benefits that come with their positions. After all who wouldn't want to be respected like the President of the United States or have the financial success of the CEO of Goldman Sachs? When you think about leadership is it these things you seek, are these things driving your desire to lead? If so I hope you reconsider, the world does not need any more people interested in leadership for its perks. This idea, the idea of leadership as a reward with money influence and power, could not be any further from what an actual leader is.

There is a story about a retired Secretary of Defense who gave a speech on leadership at a large conference. He had spoken at the same conference the year before when still serving as the Secretary. That year he had been flown in on business class, picked up at the airport, and taken by limo to a five star hotel where he was already checked in. The next morning he was driven by the same limo to the conference where he was escorted backstage and given fresh coffee in an ornate ceramic mug. The next year when he was no longer in office he was given none of these niceties. He flew in coach class, caught a taxi to a cheaper hotel and then to the conference, and once there made his own way backstage where he found himself a lukewarm coffee in a Styrofoam cup. He told this story as the opening to his speech that day, saying that the most important lesson that he could confer to the attendees was that any benefits and advantages received while holding a rank, position or title aren't meant for you. They are meant for the role you fill, and when you leave that role the benefits leave with it. Any benefits are a byproduct and not the main end of leadership.

Too often today people seek leadership and titles just to benefit from them. The irony here is that leadership is not earned through gaining a title: it is not a rank worn on a collar, nor is it even an elected position. Though these positions may grant a person authority. Authority alone does not make a person a leader. Leaders come from all walks of life and are in all levels of organizations from floor workers in a factory up to executives on Wall Street. There are people at the highest levels of companies around the world who possess no leadership characteristics and people in the lowest places that truly embody strong leadership.

So what then is leadership? First off it important to note that leaders are made not born. Leadership is not some vague concept that people are either born with or aren't. Anyone can be a leader if, as Pasquaney teaches you, you work at it and consciously think about fostering within yourself the values that define great leaders. What are those values and what is leadership? Simply put leadership is a commitment to serve others and put their needs ahead of your own. Leadership is a conscious decision to devalue your own interests and to elevate the ones of those you have the privilege of leading. It is a monumental responsibility. It is a hard and often thankless job that requires an intense degree of selflessness. If you really think about the responsibilities incurred when leading, the prospect becomes far less appealing.

Simon Sinek, explains this idea, which I call servant leadership in his aptly named book, *Leaders Eat Last*, whose title comes from a tradition within the United States Marine Corps. When a group of Marines are in the field on active combat duty, the officers always ensure that their men are well fed before taking any food for themselves. This tradition does not stem from any written order nor is it forced on the men by the Marine Corps hierarchy. The Marine officers do it of their own volition because they know true leaders care more about the men they are privileged to lead than themselves. This seemingly simple action is the perfect example of servant leadership in practice. Great leaders understand that the cost of leadership is self-interest. As the enlisted men see the care that their officers have for them, they naturally are more inclined to work hard and follow the officers. The men develop a deep sense of trust within their group and strong cooperation ensues. This type of relationship works because it is built into our DNA. Our early ancestors living in a far more dangerous world evolved into social animals so that they could be more productive in communities built around trust. Pasquaney teaches us these same values. Every day we

practice ideals like, “His need is greater than mine,” or we listen to chapel sermons and Tree Talks that illustrate the values of a servant leader. Whether it be messages about the importance of truth and honesty, decision making, or asking for help, Pasquaney teaches us that we will live richer lives and be stronger leaders if we think of others needs before our own. Through your Pasquaney education, you already have the essentials to be great leaders.

Servant leadership is not just a moral position either; the leadership style I am advocating is vastly more effective than the traditional leader-follower model that we are used to in our daily lives. As I stated before, servant leadership naturally builds trust and cooperation within a group. This will make a group instantly more efficient. Don't believe me? Let's look at a very concrete example from camp. In three years living in the dorms, I have basically seen two leadership styles from COIs. The first gets the boys to be highly efficient and the dorm is almost always ready for morning inspection. The boys require no extra check-ins from the council after the COI does his work. The boys often describe those weeks by saying that they felt that they had ownership of their bunk and the dorm's performance. They knew they could get the job done and the COI trusted them to do it, helping as needed but mostly just keeping a seeing eye in the background. With the second style the boys are slower, taking longer than usual to get going. However, those COI's are usually much louder and more energetic, and they may even give very specific instructions to the boys. Nonetheless, the boys will continue to struggle getting to Dana on time and being ready for Mr. Vinnie's walk through. What is the difference? The answer is simple: 90% or more of the time when given a task, we know what we should be doing and some one telling us to do it only demotivates us. That is management not leadership. In the second style the boys were managed and even though the COI wasn't trying to, his style of leadership told the boys they didn't know what to do. They lost initiative, control of their situation, and their confidence. They weren't preparing their dorm for Mr. Vinnie, the COI was. No one wakes up in the morning and is excited to be managed; they seek motivation, inspiration and someone to lead them. Leaders empower, they step back and seek to support others. At camp the consequences are low, but in the real world there is an all too pervasive myth that leaders are responsible for innovation and the direct success of a company. True leaders know that wisdom, ideas, and even leadership come from people at any and all levels of organizations. Leaders support those people by seeking contributions, then empowering people to act on those ideas encouraging people to believe in their vision. Instead of this

style of leadership, leadership is too often seen as simply giving orders, and people trying to lead too often fall into this trap. I am guilty of this as much as anyone. It is natural to enjoy having control in a chaotic world, but too often people in positions of authority develop an addiction to this control, which will breed resentment in the people that they are supposed to be motivating and inspiring. In contrast strong leaders delegate responsibility and authority as much as possible, because people function at a far higher level when they feel a sense of responsibility for their job and are not just simply obeying directions given by a superior.

I would like to end with another anecdote, this one from the outside world that illustrates how effective servant leadership can be. Alcoholics Anonymous has helped people beat the terrible addiction of alcoholism for over seventy-five years. They are known for their 12-step program, of which some of us are probably familiar with the famous first step, admitting that you have an addiction. But that is only step one and as many people will tell you lots of addicts start the program but don't finish the critical 12th step. A recovering alcoholic once described the program's secret to success this way, "The key to getting sober through AA is step twelve, plenty of people make it through the first eleven steps but if they don't complete the twelfth step they are highly likely to drink again." Step twelve is a commitment to help another alcoholic become sober. Step Twelve is service, service makes us stronger and allows us to beat the toughest addictions and in a larger sense to conquer the hardest problems we will face in our personal or professional lives. When a person commits to put others needs before their own and protect their group, that group becomes exponentially more driven and effective at accomplishing any problem or task that may present itself to them.

So, like I asked at the beginning, what does it mean to be a leader? Leaders are the ones who run headfirst into the unknown. They rush toward the danger. They put their own interests aside to protect us or to pull us into the future. Leaders sacrifice what is theirs to save what is ours. And they would never sacrifice what is ours to save what is theirs. This is what it means to be a leader. It means they choose to go first into danger, headfirst toward the unknown. And when people feel sure they will keep them safe, they will march behind them and work tirelessly to see the leader's visions come to life and proudly call themselves their followers. Because of your Pasquaney education, you all can and should be those leaders that we need so desperately in our future.

