

Power and Leadership by Henry Anderson

This past winter I got in an argument with one of my best friends about politics. Frankly, I thought I knew more than her, and I didn't hesitate to tell her so. I interrupted her before she finished her thoughts; I brushed aside her perfectly valid concerns, and I figured we had been friends for so long that she would get over it. It turned out she did not get over it, and it took weeks of reconciliation for us to move past it. I had to offer a sincere apology, and I'm so glad I did.

Now compare that to the opposite scenario. Several months ago I started writing for my school paper, *The Ubysey*. At the paper's weekly meetings with the editors, I was struck by how terrified I was to speak—or do anything for that matter. I would stand in the corner and try to blend into the walls. I was afraid I'd be discovered as a fraud, as incompetent, as unworthy of being there. I remember distinctly even being horrified by the prospect of stepping on people's toes, literally. The conference room was so crowded that brushing against people was unavoidable, but I would contort my body and slouch my shoulders to take up as little space as possible — almost like, no, exactly like a mouse who, upon you sweeping away his nest, stands in the corner perfectly still, petrified, hoping you won't notice.

Now, so that we're all on the same page, I'll be the first to admit that neither of those anecdotes are particularly interesting on their own. What is interesting, however, is that both those stories seem to have a very similar theme: I, perceiving there to be some sort of imbalance of power, acted in a way that was out of sync with my Pasquaney values and what I would like to think is my true self—whatever the heck that is.

In the argument with my friend, I believed I had some sort of upper-hand, an undue sense of superiority because I took our friendship for granted and watched enough clever YouTube videos to think I was an expert. At the newspaper, I was stretching my comfort zone and entering a situation where I was the new guy at the bottom of the totem pole. Rather than trying to stand-out, I was trying to fit in and be accepted.

What's weird about all of this is that it was all completely subconscious. I acted so differently in each situation that one might think I was two completely different people, but at the time I wasn't even aware of it.

Upon realizing this I thought of dozens of other places and situations where I had acted out of character without knowing it. For instance, why was I so talkative and cheerful at Pasquaney but gloomy and reclusive in high school? Why do I speak all the time in some lectures but dread raising my hand in others? Why do some people perceive me as shy and meek while others perceive me as confident and outgoing?

The answer to these tediously rhetorical questions, and the topic of this discussion, can be summed up in one word: **power**. Or, to sum it up in many words: what you perceive your status to be in your relationships and communities can affect and change the very way you act, what you value, and who you are.

All around you, if you look for them, you will notice systems and structures of power or hierarchies. Personally, I found these hierarchies to be most obvious in high school, where certain kids would get excluded and ignored while others were admired by their peers and teachers. They got all the girls and got invited to all the parties. Sometimes they acquired this sort of influence because they were kind or witty, but I found at my school that it had to do more with wealth, athletic ability, fashion sense, and a willingness to drink. Once you got labeled as belonging to a certain rank in this social dynamic, it was practically impossible to get out.

(As an aside, if it's not already obvious, I did not have the best time in high school, but that doesn't mean that you won't. And hopefully this talk will help you with that.)

When I got to college—what some, though very few, might call the adult world—I noticed that these sorts of superficial, status-defining qualities were much less valued. This was especially true at an enormous campus like that of the University of British Columbia where there are so many people from so many diverse backgrounds.

Reinvention leads us to one of the essential lessons I want you to take away from this talk: in many cases, power is an illusion. Consider for a moment this riddle from the

incomparable *Game of Thrones*: “A King, a priest, a rich man, and a sellsword are in a room. Those three men tell the sellsword to kill the other two. Who lives and who dies?”

I’ll let you ponder that for the second.

The answer depends on what the sellsword values. Does he value the authority of the state, religion, or money?

Unfortunately, there’s no swordplay involved, but this same exact principle applies to our own lives and communities. Whether it’s as small as a summer camp or as large as a nation, a community that has the right values will find the right people to lead them—and a community gets to choose its own values. What an enormous responsibility.

In other words, social hierarchies, no matter how unfair they may seem, are not necessarily destructive. For instance, even though we hold that every member of our community here at Pasquaney is equally valuable and important, we still have a rather distinct social structure. Think of the universal admiration and respect Mr. Vinnie and senior counsellors like Townley, Kirk, and Bubbles all receive, or the way campers look up to COIs and camp officers who have grown to become the leaders of their peers.

Now of course, you may have heard grumblings of how this unfair. “Why do the Harveys get everything?” is something I hear around the hillside a lot. But the truth is that camp couldn’t function without this hierarchy. We’ve fostered a social environment that rewards the tenets of good leadership—tenets like kindness, honesty, and humility—and promotes and encourages those individuals who embody those values. Some of this happens naturally, but it’s also something the founders of Pasquaney built into its very structure.

A perfect example of this is the Captain of Industry or COI. On the surface, a COI’s role is merely to check duties, cover rest periods, and help us through the morning routine—all things that the council already does. As such, throughout my camp career, I’ve talked with plenty of people who are disenchanted with the COI system, some even arguing that camp should get rid of COIs entirely because the position creates division among the campers. But electing Captains of Industry gives the council a means of recognizing leadership among the boys that ought to be emulated. In other words, it allows us to make sure Pasquaney’s social hierarchy, its leadership, reflects its values and tradition.

But all of you, as campers, also have a means of ensuring that your leaders reflect our values. First of all, every time you make a decision in a time of crisis or uncertainty, you are making a statement about whose leadership you will follow, whose advice you will heed, whose character you will imitate—and no leader can operate without those. But even more concretely, you can choose your leaders by casting a vote. Right here on Sunday when you vote for officers at Camper Meeting. You may have heard cynics and doubters among you say that these votes don't matter, that camp officers have no power, but they do. Once again, with your vote, you are making a statement about who every camper ought to respect and emulate, you're making a statement about what our values are.

The truth is that over the past few years, we have had leaders of camp—both COIs and camp officers—who haven't lived up to our values. In many regards, this is the council's fault for failing to see and react to behavior that occurred behind our backs. But there is also an extent to which leaders were being chosen because they were cool, confident, and funny, rather than thoughtful, honest, and good. When you cast your ballots on Sunday, keep in mind what values your vote will represent.

At Pasquaney, we are privileged to have a system of leadership that is value-driven, self-aware, and subject to change, but you will find yourselves in other social environments that are unjust and seemingly permanent. You may find yourself in jobs where your boss treats you without respect, but you may also find yourself in the position of the boss, mistreating your workers simply because it's customary to do so.

When you find yourselves in these situations, don't let your perception of where you stand in society determine your behavior as I did when I argued without listening or when cowered in the corner.

Once you are aware of social hierarchies, you will find that that there are few ways one can respond. You can fight your way up the social ladder and reinforce it from the top. You can stay at the bottom and grow attached to the security of having a place where you belong, all the while harboring resentment for those who have achieved more than you. You can even step outside the community, like an artist or hermit, and critique society from the outside. Or, you

can follow what I will call, for lack of a better term and a healthy amount of love for this institution, the way of the Pasquaney Man.

The Pasquaney Man (or woman) develops his own sense of self, and as a result he can jump from community to community and act the same way wherever he goes. He recognizes that one's class and status do not determine one's self-worth, and he treats everyone with equal respect as a result.

This summer at camp be a Pasquaney Man. Look for the ways that you unknowingly alter your behavior around other people. Recognize why you are doing this. Perhaps it is because you want to impress other people, or you think other people should be trying to impress you. Resist the temptation to do what is cool and funny rather than what is good. Model for others what it means to do what is right, and be sure to follow only those who aim to do the same. Yes, camp will be all the better for it, but more importantly, when the façade of status and power is removed, you will finally be able to see clearly what values you stand for, what leaders you respect, and who you are.