Leadership Challenges for the 21st Century

Notes from presentation to Peacock Society fall 2007
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Park University
• Parkville
• all around the country
• Downtown KC – Your Downtown University

The Hauptmann School for Public Affairs
• Dr. Laurie DiPadova-Stocks
• Erik
• etc.

Center for Leadership
• focus on preparing students and others for leadership in an “unscripted future”

What do we mean by an “unscripted future”?
• Examples:
  o climate changes
  o technology advances

The 25% of the population in China with the highest IQs is greater than the total population of North America.

China will soon become number one English speaking country in the world.

The US Department of Labor estimates that today’s learner will have 10-14 jobs by the age of 38.

In the US, the top 10 in-demand jobs in 2010 didn’t exist in 2004.

The number of text messages sent and received every day exceeds the population of the planet.

The amount of new technical information is doubling every 2 years. It’s predicted to double every 12 hours by 2010.

Source: [http://shifthappens.wikispaces.com/Various+Versions+of+the+Presentation](http://shifthappens.wikispaces.com/Various+Versions+of+the+Presentation) (Google Video)

Indeed, the challenges are great!

In reflecting on the teachings of Peter Drucker and the future of leadership, one writer concludes:
“The most effective way to seize opportunities to manage ‘the future that has already happened’ is to be proactive, take advantage of emerging trends, embrace change, and become a change leader.”

My definition of leadership includes everyone – and so we all have to deal with change.

What if we lived life backwards?

As one author suggests, the life cycle is all backwards. You should die first and get it out of the way. Then you live for 20 years in an old-age home, and get kicked out when you’re too young.

You get a gold watch and then you go to work. You work 40 years until you’re young enough to enjoy your retirement.

You go to college and you party until you’re ready for high school.

Then you go to grade school, you become a little kid, you play, you have no responsibilities, you become a little baby, you go back into the womb, you spend your last nine months floating, and you finish off as a gleam in someone’s eye.


What a change that would be! And yet, it’s a captivating image – and reminds us of the innate vitality. We experience in ourselves and view in others. But what a change it would be!

We tend to always be resistant to change – to avoid risks… Why? - Often to maintain some sense of security. “Yet,” as Helen Keller said, “Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature nor do humans as a whole experience it. Avoiding change in the long run is no safer than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

Another author: “People who bury their heads in the sand offer engaging targets.”

So, if we accept change in ways we never have before – to meet an unscripted future, we must focus on:

1. Partnerships
   - truly seeing and understanding the interrelatedness of all sectors and systems in not only our immediate world but around the globe
   - locally – government, business, not-for-profits: used to be silos with singular interests, now different
even within one sector, city government used to be small groups of city fathers, political and civil, would run things, now multiple constituencies

creating partnerships – they come and go – requires nimble and flexible mind set

2. Diversity
   o language
   o customs
   o life styles
   o need to become more open to those differences and may experience uneasiness at times

Edgar H. Schein, a leading researcher and writer in the field of leadership suggests that there are 3 particularly important leadership competencies for the future:

1. “Think like an anthropologist.”
2. “Have the skills of a family therapist.”
3. “Cultivate and trust artistic instincts.”
   -intuition
   -being totally present in the moment

And I would add a fourth human quality that has always and will always be important in effective leadership - and that is a positive attitude and in fact, a simple but profound concept, hope.

My favorite story as a young child was The Little Engine that could.

We become who we believe we are.

And as Teilhard De Chardin wrote in his classic work, The Phenomenon of Man: “Between these two alternatives of absolute optimism or absolute pessimism, there is no middle way, because by its very nature progress is all or nothing. We are confronted accordingly with two directions, and only two: one upwards and the other downwards and there is no possibility of finding a half-way house. “

As Nelson Mandela said in his Inaugural Speech in 1994, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?”