

We rely on leaders to make critical decisions, inspire us to do our best, and help chart an uncertain future. But what exactly makes a good leader? And how do the best leaders cope with controversy, pressure and at times a public that simply doesn't care? In this issue of *FOCUS*, we explore what it takes to be an effective leader, why good leadership matters and what happens when low-key community leaders find themselves embroiled in conflict. We also profile several take-charge types who have used their leadership skills to make a difference in their workplace or communities.

At the Helm

Good leaders navigate all waters

By **Lindy High**

“A leader’s role is to raise people’s aspirations for what they can become and to release their energies so they will try to get there.”

*David Gergen
in U.S. News & World Report*

The above came to me in a mailing from a local organization. My reaction: “Oh, yuck.”

It’s not that this isn’t a laudable objective. It’s just that in my experience, leaders often have other things in mind — say, achieving goals — than my self-actualization. I have been guided by leaders, learned from them, been inspired by them. But the one time I was invited to “release my energies,” the suggestion came from a meditation teacher exhorting us to relax.

Over the years I have worked in the private and public sectors; for men and for women; for both major political parties; for people who were hired, or appointed, or elected; for individuals and for boards. I’ve served under more committee chairs than I care to remember, for both profit and not-for-prof-



it organizations, and have even been top dog myself on occasion.

In all of this, I've reached a couple of conclusions about what leadership is, and what it isn't.

First, there are leaders and there are managers. Some people are good at both, but we often confuse the two. Thus we're disappointed when our "leader" can't manage his or her way through an open door. The two things call for different qualities. (I'm trying to avoid the term "skill sets," which is rapidly joining the short list of most overused terms of the late 20th century, right up there with "empowerment" and "creating a win-win situation.")

The Junior League of Boise is a great training ground for community volunteers. Among my JLB handouts, I came across a *Harvard Business Review* article on the differences between "management" and "leadership."

Among them: Management is about coping with complexity, while leadership is about coping with change. Leadership sets the direction, and management develops the process. Managers focus on organizing and staffing. Leaders focus on making sure everyone understands the big picture.

Think of it this way: Behind every great leader there is usually a talented, thoughtful manager skilled at implementing the leader's ideas.

Men would follow him anywhere — but mostly out of curiosity."

— Line from a recent e-mail purporting to list actual officer evaluations from the British Army

An organization's need for a leader or a manager depends on the situation. As the *HBR* article put it, "... the peacetime army

can usually survive with good administration and management up and down the hierarchy, coupled with good leadership concentrated at the very top. A wartime army, however, needs competent leadership at all levels. No one has yet figured out how to manage people effectively into battle. They must be *led*."

Too often, we look for leaders without thinking through the differences between managers and leaders. No wonder headhunters command high consulting fees: They help us examine our internal cultures, our constituencies and our short- and long-term needs, all in an effort to put leaders in leadership positions and managers in management positions.

Second, we are easily beguiled by the myths of leadership: that these people are charismatic charmers, who often rise mysteriously out of nowhere at the right moment and who have an uncanny knack for finding like-minded people to put their collective shoulders to the agreed-upon wheel.

Not so. Leaders come in all styles: painfully shy, gregarious, somber, fun-loving, diffident, egocentric, whatever. When they do well, it's because they're prepared. And they seem to have a high tolerance for opposing views. They know that ideas need testing, and they're not afraid to look for holes in their own theories.

So what are those qualities that make a good leader? I've asked a lot of people that question lately, and the responses have been surprisingly uniform.

Good leaders are competent. That doesn't mean they know how to do everything. But it does mean they're pretty good at what they can do, and when they're on unfamiliar ground, they know (or learn) enough to make real-

istic demands. That's important: Most of us move from frustration to anger to withdrawal when we're given impossible jobs. Leaders know what they are asking.

They are savvy about the mix of ingredients that motivate us to do our best. We tend to work harder, and longer, and more productively if we have a clear sense of direction, of how our work fits in the larger scheme of things — in other words, why it's important — and how we are doing. Leaders tell us these things. In contrast, managers make sure we have the tools and time we need to get the job done.

The biggest thing I'm worried about is being blindsided, which by definition is something you didn't think of."

— Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, quoted in *Showdown* by Elizabeth Drew

Good leaders have clear goals in mind. They know how to plan ahead, and they have confidence in what they are doing.

The late Don Watkins, once considered the godfather of the Idaho press corps, used to advise his "clients" — former Gov. John Evans, former Superintendent of Public Instruction Roy Truby and the late U.S. Sen. Frank Church, among others — not to "chase the bunnies," by which he meant not getting distracted by minor issues as they pursued major ones. Leaders know how to focus on what they are doing and on why they are doing it.

And they can convey their vision to others. Jerry Evans, former state superintendent of public instruction, often reminded me that "you can't blow an uncertain trumpet." This is more than sound-bite talent. This is the ability to speak clearly, forcefully, and convincingly, in language others can

ALUMNI LEADERS EXPLAIN THEIR KEYS TO LEADERSHIP

Preparing for my tasks, doing my homework and then following my basic values, all the while being true to my convictions and conscience, are the cornerstones of leadership for me.

— Paula Forney, '77, member, Boise City Council

Leadership is a journey; it's ongoing, and the more you learn the more you realize what you don't know. [Poor leaders] do things right; great leaders do the right thing, which is much more important.

— Pug Ostling, history graduate student, Boise restaurateur and community leader in business and the arts

Effective leadership can be a changing process if the people you are leading are not a constant. I give autonomy, building loyalty through giving more respect than I need to get back. I have confidence in my own ability, which allows people to have confidence to follow me. And I have to be honest and accurate in my assessments and dealings with players and coaches, which provides them an opportunity to find their place within the team and learn the importance of their role to the success of the group.

— Elaine Elliott, '77, University of Utah head women's basketball coach

Working with people ... helping them see the common ground they share with others is a key element in leadership. When people stop talking, that is when you have problems.

— Robert Corrie, '92, Mayor of Meridian

Responsiveness. A good leader is one who looks at the whole picture and finds a way to respond to people in a fashion that is helpful. A leader works well with people. It is helpful to work with all sides and not hold grudges.

— Bethine Church, '42, political and civic activist

understand, about a plan, a hope, a goal, or even a problem.

Retired Maj. Gen. Darrell Manning, former adjutant general of the state of Idaho, adds courage to the list — not as much the courage it takes to lead in battle, although in wartime that is critical, but rather the day-to-day grit leaders need to make hard decisions. Eliminating a program, terminating an employee, deciding not to support a community cause or a political candidate, speaking out on a controversial issue — these are hard things to do, and it's tempting to take an easier path.

It also takes courage to take a stand. I remember then-Gov. Phil Batt's news conference after workers' compensation was extended to farmworkers. His pleasure at success was blunted by the knowledge that many of his friends in the agricultural community were on the other side of the issue.

No wonder, then, the popularity of the old phrase: "It's lonely at the top." It's lonely at the bottom, too, but the decisions aren't as far-reaching.

Another quality of leadership: calmness during crisis. Leaders don't run around wringing their hands and fretting out loud about how things are going. They don't panic — or, if they do, they panic quietly and privately. The phrases they use in emergencies are soothing: "Let's get the details. Let's not jump to conclusions. Let's find out what really happened."

Leaders learn from experience. Leaders don't have to be told twice — they get it. Integrity and ethics are important, too, because good leaders must be respected.

And, although this is not universal, leaders seem to have good senses of humor, or at least humane understandings that the world and its people can be pretty amusing at times.

“Nothing you do is ever wasted. You can always be the bad example.”

— Bill Rankin of Caldwell, retired businessman, former bandleader, and my father

Obviously not all leaders are “good.” Adolph Hitler stands as the undisputed poster boy of leadership misused and talents misdirected. But we have so many examples of leadership skills put to highest and best use.

One of the bonuses of living in Idaho is the chance to see our leaders up close and make informed judgments about their enduring qualities. That doesn't mean we don't goof up now and then when we select them, but it does mean we get a bird's-eye view of both our successes and our mistakes. □

Lindy High of Boise is a longtime state employee, serving as a senior assistant to Gov. Phil Batt during his administration and now as a management assistant to Marilyn Howard, Idaho's superintendent of public instruction.

LEARNING TO LEAD

By Amy Stahl

All the right stuff. That's what Debbie Kaylor learned in her business classes at Boise State.

But the skills she picked up in a campus leadership training program and as a volunteer for student organizations are what landed her a job at Boise-based Extended Systems. Now, the 1993 business management/human resource graduate manages human resources at the high-tech company's sites around the globe.

Kaylor remembers being thrilled to be nominated for the university's Leadership Quest program. “It was an honor to be selected — and that in itself boosts confidence,” she says.

Boise State offers leadership training through student housing and other areas of campus, but perhaps the most visible program is Leadership Quest, a one-day annual program designed by the Student Union to recognize emerging and established student leaders. Participants are nominated by faculty, staff and administrators.

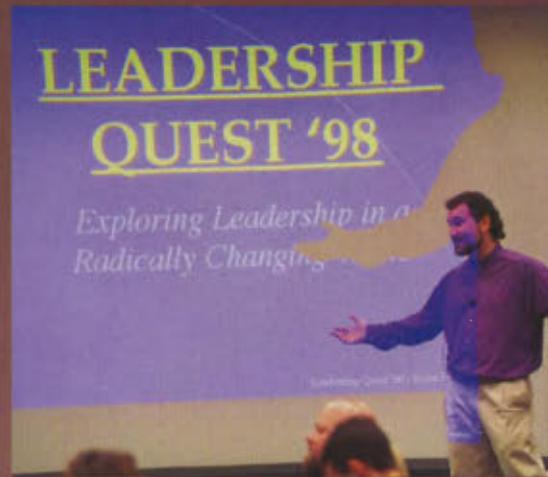
Last year, nearly 200 students listened to national speakers and local business and community leaders such as US WEST executive Barbara Wilson, Boise Mayor Brent Coles and Idaho Supreme Court Justice Cathy Silak. They also attended sessions on communication systems, community building, stress relief, ethical decision-making and gender roles.

The intent is to provide students with the basic tools they need to develop their leadership skills, says Student Union Associate Director Rob Meyer.

Kaylor says the program gave her the chance to brainstorm with students from throughout the university and “present ideas in a safe environment. In the real world you don't have that safe harbor,” she says.

As a student, Kaylor realized the value of getting involved on campus. She was the first chair of the downtown Homecoming parade and she worked with more than 100 student clubs as a Student Activities program assistant.

“All were opportunities to step outside my comfort zone,” she says. “In the College of Business, my friends were my only point of reference.”



Leadership training is also offered to student body officials, club presidents and other students on a more limited basis through periodic sessions on how to run meetings, organize events, assemble a

budget and other issues. An ethnic retreat was started two years ago to cultivate leadership among diverse populations.

More extensive leadership training is offered to residence hall students through the student housing office. Before the start of school, Boise State's 26 resident advisers attend an intensive two-week program that covers conflict management, judicial processes and learning styles.

Student housing also offers a two-credit communication class on residence life leadership. Started just four years ago, nearly 60 students enrolled in the popular course last year. Instructor Rebecca Hancock, assistant director of student housing, says the course is intended to “get students connected” and help them develop an understanding of teamwork and community that is relevant to residence hall living and the outside world.

Hancock wishes that more students would see the value of getting involved on campus.

“The more involved you are in campus life, the more successful you'll be in academics,” she says. □