

**Leadership: Education's Challenge and Responsibility**

**Keynote Address**

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**Serving the Deaf**

by

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## **WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE? WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY?**

All of us gathered here today face the challenge and the responsibility of leadership everyday. We face this leadership at home, in the community, and at work.

As educational administrators, we occupy one of the most critical leadership roles among the nation's numerous professional ranks. As important as politics, business, and not-for-profit entities are, none of them have the life-long impact that education has. K through 16 and beyond provide the foundation for all of the professions and for an enriched and enhanced quality of life. Ours is a challenging – and daunting – responsibility.

As educational administrators serving the deaf, your leadership challenges and responsibilities have two special dimensions.

First, you must be sure that deaf men and women are prepared to succeed in both the hearing and deaf worlds. These worlds can only so easily become two separate and disconnected worlds. We have to be sure that they are seamless. In this way, our deaf students can view themselves as belonging to one world, which includes both deaf and hearing people.

Second, you must work to educate hearing people about the attributes, history, and culture of deafness. In this way, hearing people will know the value and benefit to them of access for deaf people to hearing environments. They will also learn the value and benefit to hearing people of access to deaf environments.

If we do our educational work, five important consequences will follow:

- Deaf people will have pride and comfort in their deaf history, culture, life, and accomplishments.
- Deaf people will have acceptance and comfort in hearing environments.
- Hearing people will have understanding of and respect for deaf environments.
- Hearing people will welcome deaf people into hearing environments – social community, and work. Hearing people will rely on and value the contributions of deaf people.
- Deaf people will easily, comfortably, and proudly live in a deaf environment when that is appropriate, in a hearing environment when that is desirable and necessary, and be able to move seamlessly between these two environments.

Some deaf and hearing people, in fact, may have the view and sense that there is just one environment in which we all live and work, with some people being tall, some people being of European ancestry, some people being quick, some people being civil, some people hearing, and some people deaf. As it turns out, that is my own particular perspective.

## WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

My definition of leadership is an adaptation from a recent survey (April 2001) conducted for the National Urban League by DYG, Inc., a nationally recognized survey research firm. DYG interviewed 100 chairmen, CEO's, and COO's of *Fortune* magazine Top Executives, and 100 executive and senior vice presidents who are the Next Generation of Top Executives. The survey sought to identify the personal attributes necessary for long-term success. While I use the results of this survey, I have reorganized these results and will present them in a different way.

Specifically, and consistent with the survey results, I believe that leadership reflects the following five major attributes:

- *Character* (91% of respondents view this attribute as crucial to success.) Character is described by integrity (of which I shall speak further later on), ability to overcome obstacles, determination and grit, willingness to risk being wrong, drive and ambition, ability to both follow and lead, and loyalty.

Let me say a few words about several of these descriptors. Many of us may have encountered "leaders" who were not willing to make a decision because there was a risk that they could be wrong. In these cases, no mistakes were made because no action was taken. These "leaders" cannot be successful leaders.

About following and leading – there are times when a leader recognizes that he/she must follow another individual, and cooperate with and support fully that individual's lead. One cannot be an effective leader until one knows how to be an outstanding follower.

This leads to the concept of loyalty. Loyalty is both bottom-up and top-down. A leader must be loyal to the people to whom he/she reports, and at the same time, must be equally loyal to the people who report to him/her. In addition to personal loyalty, a true leader has an unambiguous organizational loyalty at all times.

- *Communication Skills* (88% of respondents judged this attribute to be crucial to success.) A leader must be able to orally express himself/herself persuasively in one-on-one situations, small group situations, around the luncheon table situations, and before large groups such as the one here this afternoon. The best ideas cannot be implemented unless the people needed to support the implementation understand and buy into the decision.

Moreover, there is no substitute for outstanding written communication. As a leader, I do not have time to rewrite recommendations that come to me from vice presidents. I do not have the time to re-read a sentence or a paragraph in an attempt to understand the concept that is being proposed. A leader must be able to put into clear, pithy, and understandable language the essence of his/her proposals and recommendations.

Strong oral and written communication skills are the prerequisites for every action a leader needs to take.

- *Vision and Action* (76% of respondents view this attribute as crucial to success.) This attribute reflects an individual's drive and will to succeed, ability to motivate and inspire others, ability to take independent action, ability to get people to work together in teams, capacity to be visionary, ability to think strategically, and ability to set the tone. Let me say a few words about several of these descriptors.

A leader must be able to motivate and inspire others to think for themselves, to contribute to the solution, to take the initiative, and to fully support their leader's vision and plan of action. To gain this kind of support, the leader must have the courage to take independent action when that is necessary. This may be action that is unpopular and risky but, in the leader's mind, absolutely essential. Timing is everything. In addition, the leader must know that typically it is teams of people that make things happen. The leader must know how to work within a team, how to build a team, how to lead a team, and how to make a team work.

Again, the above capabilities reflect a leader who is visionary and, therefore, can get people to think about what never has been thought of before, and to contemplate doing what has never been done before. There must be a long-term strategy for accomplishing the vision. This vision and strategy, along with the leader's style, must set the tone for the organization.

- *Creativity* (50% of respondents thought creativity was crucial to success.) Creativity reflects a leader's ability to solve difficult and complex problems by being innovative and inventive.
- *Personality* (50% of respondents believe this attribute to be crucial for success.) Leaders must be diplomatic in their relationship with others. They must know how to get along with others. I have had vice presidents who possess all of the attributes I have described above except for the ability to work effectively with others. A leader needs to know that he/she can present a problem for solution to two or three immediate subordinates and that a viable solution will be forthcoming for him/her to consider. If one of those subordinates demonstrates over time an inability to work with others, the leader then is forced to step back and referee the problem solution process. This takes time away from the leader's other responsibilities. In effect, he/she is doing the job of subordinates. A subordinate who consistently demonstrates an inability to work with others is not viable, even though he/she possesses every other desirable attribute. Every disagreement cannot be a win/lose scenario. Solutions must be sought in which no one gets everything he/she wants, but in which everyone wins and, therefore, can support the recommendation. This is what leaders have to do. This is what the leaders to whom they report demand.

## **ROLES OF RAW INTELLIGENCE, TALENT, AND INTEGRITY**

Some of you may be surprised that I did not speak of raw intelligence and talent in the discussion so far. Of course, everything being equal, the smarter and more talented the individual, the better leader he/she will make. However, in the total scheme of things, 44% of the participants in the survey believed that raw intelligence was crucial for success and 42%

believed that exceptional talent was crucial for success. These percentages are below (in some cases, significantly below) the attributes identified above.

I concur in this assessment. When we hire a junior person – for example a new teacher or an assistant professor – we talk about how smart and talented they are, and how strong are their formal academic credentials. We do not talk very much about character, communication, vision and action, creativity, and personality. It is not that we do not recognize how important these attributes are. It really is that we do not have a lot of information on the basis which we can judge these attributes early in a person's career. We try to find evidence of these attributes, but that evidence is usually fragmentary and inconclusive. That is why so many people, who start out so strongly in terms of credentials, intelligence, and talent, do not emerge as leaders ten or twenty years down the road. That is why individuals whose formal measures of intelligence, talent, and credentials are not as high as many others do emerge as our leaders. Everything being equal, we want the smartest, most talented, and most credentialed people we can find. However, not everything is equal in the five attributes I have named above. The first three, in particular, are the most important.

To cite an example of what I mean, and to bring into the picture (as I promised at the outset) a discussion of integrity, let me tell you of an experience I had in Hawaii. Every year, one of the two daily newspapers (a morning and an evening daily at the time) hosted an evening banquet in one of the large Waikiki hotels. The guests were the valedictorians and salutatorians of each of the high schools throughout the state, along with the parents of the scholars and the principals of their schools. Those guests who had to come from a nearby island stayed overnight, at the newspaper's expense, at the Waikiki Hotel. The custom was to have a Keynote Address at the conclusion of dinner. One year, I was asked to provide the Keynote Address.

I asked myself, what could I possibly say to such an outstanding group of young people? After ruminating over this dilemma for several months, I came up with an idea. I asked my assistant ( I was then president of the University of Hawaii) to review both the morning and evening newspapers every day for two weeks and make a note of every alleged or proven ethical violation reported. I found that there were approximately eight citations in each paper every day (not including the sports pages, which would have been a book all by itself). Every profession in society was represented. There were ethical violations alleged or proved for leaders in business, education, medicine, law, politics, religion, the military, and so on. There was a common theme in each of these cases. Each of these individuals was described as brilliant, hardworking, and possessive of a strong support structure of friends and family. Yet, they had all gone astray.

So, I had my message for the young men and women on the night of the banquet. I told them that they were obviously intelligent and talented; otherwise, they would not be there. They obviously worked hard; otherwise, they would not be there. They obviously had strong support from their families, friends, teachers, and counselors; otherwise they would not be there. I then said that others before them had those same characteristics. And many of them had succeeded and were now leaders in their various professions.

However, some of these leaders had fallen. Somewhere, they had taken the wrong fork in the road. Their integrity was challenged, and they did not meet the challenge.

How do you gain integrity? The answer to this question is hard to find. I suggested to the young people that they listen to the teachings of their parents, church, and educators. The Ten Commandments are described in every religion in one form or another – follow them. I suggested that when they came to an ethical branch in the road, to ask what is good, what is right, what is fair, and then follow the branch that provides the positive answer to each of these questions. I cited names, times, and places of some of the people who were in the news that day. I asked them to be ever alert about the wrong forks in the road so that they would not find themselves on these pages.

Integrity is something you do every day in little ways. It is being open and honest in every encounter. It becomes a habit that reflects your essence as an individual. When you have integrity, it shows without your thinking about it. The people who work with you will know it and respect it. They will follow your lead. You will be a successful leader.

## **CONCLUSION**

I would like to conclude as follows. The mission of Educational Administrators Serving the Deaf is significant. Every individual in our society should be able to contribute. If everyone does contribute, everyone else will benefit. Everyone else means both hearing and deaf people.

Leadership, as I discussed it above, is crucial and critical to achieving this mission.

Integrity is the single, most important trait in successful leadership. I would like to point out that in the survey described above, integrity was cited by chairmen and CEO's (92% of them cited it) as critical for success. Interestingly, the Next Generation executives cited it highly, but only at an 84% rate. That is why they are Next Generation executives and not yet CEO's. My guess is that when their time comes, if they were to take the same survey, their current 84% would also increase to the 92% level.

Finally, for those gathered here today, leadership is our challenge. Leadership is our responsibility. You are here, as educational leaders, because you have met this challenge and responsibility successfully so far in your careers and lives. The nature of the five attributes I discussed above is that we can never achieve perfection in any one of them. We need to continually refine and improve our capabilities in each of these attributes. Those of us who cannot find a way to do so, will probably remain at our current leadership levels. Those of us, who can continue to improve, will continue to rise in the leadership hierarchy in our profession.

My expectation and my request is that all of you here today make a commitment to work as hard as you can to continually improve your character, communication, vision and action, creativity, and personality attributes. Our students need this from you, and their need is our motivation.