

EFFECTIVE DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP: A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

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Chester Barnard begins his essay on "The Nature of Leadership" with the statement that "leadership has been the subject of an extraordinary amount of dogmatically stated nonsense" (1). Many people who have written about the subject and who are not leaders themselves often seem insensitive to the complexity of the factors involved and, because of their lack of experience, fail to take into account the variety of roles which the successful leader intuitively plays, often without being aware of the processes involved. On the other hand, leaders are not notorious as analysts of the nature of leadership. The on-going process of leading, by its very nature, apparently precludes the perspective required for a balanced view and, if the leader does write about leadership, he more than likely has some case to defend.

There are, of course, many kinds of "leadership": political, scientific, industrial, labor, religious, artistic, etc. Each type has its own meaning and requirements. Then there are leaders who play a role only for a brief period because some situation which is itself temporary brings out in them latent and specific talents which are highly appropriate for the moment, but irrelevant when the situation that called these talents forth itself disappears.

Our concern here is with the requirements for effective leadership in democratic society. We shall try to describe what the philosopher calls the "most general specifications" for leadership of this particular variety.

TO SEE WITH THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE, TO FEEL WITH THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE

It is, of course, self-evident that if anyone is to become an effective leader in a democracy, he must possess an unusual ability to understand how and why other people see things as they do. He must be able to project himself accurately into their reality worlds so that his understanding is not merely a matter of intellectual knowledge, but a feeling, a sensitivity that will guide his intuitions. Since democratic leadership is based on common consensus and mutual trust rather than on mere power, force or cunning, the position of leadership in a democratic society depends on attaining power "with" people rather

than power "over" people. The democratic leader cannot "use" people in any Machiavellian sense, exploiting them for his own interests. Neither can he "use" people merely in the sense of transacting with them the prescribed and routine duties of an administrator who is keeping the house in order. In a democracy, the leader will lead only to the extent that he "uses" people in the sense of helping to provide for them the satisfactions they feel in terms of their own cultural development are "out there" potentially available to them if opportunity is provided.

This means, then, that the democratic leader must have an accurate understanding of the assumptions, frustrations, aspirations, purposes, hopes and fears of those he intends to lead. He must be able to create and maintain a correspondence between the un verbalized image people have of a leader and the role he himself plays as a leader. He must be able to devise courses of action which demonstrate to people that the interpretation he is giving to on-going situations and the consequences of action based on that interpretation are providing flesh and blood to their image of what a democratic leader should be. Since common consensus and mutual trust are cornerstones for democratic leadership, the leader can never resort to means for attaining a goal which are inconsistent with the goal itself. The history of democratic societies provides ample evidence that, if the means used to obtain an end are themselves inconsistent with the end desired, people will sooner or later discern the discrepancy and lose confidence in the leader.

Because the psychological reality worlds of the overwhelming majority of people are primarily so concerned with their own personal or local problems, except when some more or less dramatic incident occurs, most people cannot be expected to become greatly concerned about or often even aware of the wide variety of basic issues that affect their lives as members of a large democratic community and as citizens of the world. Yet as people and nations become more and more dependent upon each other in a technological era, with all its complex implications for both domestic and foreign policy, new problems continually emerge and demand resolution. It is provided in the very nature of things that the status quo must constantly be upset.

If people do become aware of the specific nature of the problem, they are generally in no position to understand the intricate details of planning, financing, negotiation, administration or instrumentation required to meet the problem. While people are increasingly recogniz-

ing that they must rely on experts to handle the manifold details required in running modern government, in the final analysis they look to their elected leaders to spell out for them in broad outline the reasons why the problem exists as a problem and the factors that must be taken into account to resolve the problem successfully in terms of their own interests. The democratic leader, then, must not only try to see things the way the people do, but must in addition assume the responsibility of trying to have people see things the way he does and the way he can with all the information available to him. He must point out to people the facts and developments that are significant for them to take into account in terms of their own interest. He must bring people along with him. This particular role of the leader was nicely expressed many years ago by Laotzu:

A sound leader's aim
Is to open people's hearts,
Fill their stomachs,
Calm their wills,
Brace their bones
And so to clarify their thoughts and cleanse their needs
That no cunning meddler could touch them:
Without being forced, without strain or constraint,
Good government comes of itself.

In order to assist him in understanding what people are and are not concerned about, what they are and are not aware of, the democratic leader in modern times can, if he wishes, avail himself of many techniques devised by social scientists to discover just this kind of information. Among these techniques the public opinion survey is pre-eminent. Properly used, it can, within limits, provide an accurate reading of the public pulse and can help the leader avoid the false impression he may have of public sentiment if he relies only on such unrepresentative sources of information as his mail or editorial comment. The leader's role will, of course, be vitiated if he utilizes such devices to make himself synthetic with the mistaken notion that he must keep altering his course to conform to majority opinion. On the other hand, rather like a general in the army who has an intelligence unit to provide him information which makes his strategy and tactics more effective, the democratic leader can utilize these modern research devices to increase his political intelligence and to improve his own chances of achieving the goals he himself deeply believes in.

An example of this use of public opinion data by a democratic leader may be seen in the way in which Franklin Roosevelt kept himself in tune with the feelings of the American people between the outbreak of World War II and America's entry after Pearl Harbor. The President was aware that he could most effectively lead the people to do what he himself thought had to be done only if he did not get too far ahead or too far behind public sentiment, either in his statements or in the measures he advocated to help those who were fighting the Nazis. He was

therefore particularly interested in the results of a question that was repeatedly asked during this period: "So far as you personally are concerned, do you think President Roosevelt has gone too far in his policies of helping Britain, or not far enough?" And the adroitness with which he steered his course in a constant direction is shown by the results which maintained the ratio of approximately 25% of the people saying "too far," 25% saying "not far enough," and 50% saying "about right," even though, of course, America's aid to Britain was constantly increasing throughout this time.

It is relevant to mention in this connection that the evidence from public opinion surveys indicates that when issues have become clear to people as to what they must do and what sacrifices they must make in terms of taxation, rationing, or other restrictions on their behavior, they are much more willing to make these sacrifices than would be generally supposed from the clamor raised by special groups who insist upon a "balanced budget," "higher wages," "less government interference," or some other form of self-interest inconsistent with a bold program the public as a whole would be willing and eager to set in motion.

The democratic leader is, in brief, a person who demonstrates a capacity to make value judgments which other people perceive as providing good guides for organized action which will increase the range and quality of their satisfactions. Consideration of some of the factors involved in this oversimplified description may give us a toe-hold for a better understanding of the function of leadership in a democracy, and of what must be taken into account in selecting leaders or in any program aimed at training leaders.

SOME REQUIREMENTS FOR DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

Because of the very nature of the democratic process and the fundamental principles upon which democratic governments are founded, there are certain psychological functions a leader in a democracy is called upon to fulfill if he is to enjoy the confidence and trust of an effective majority of the population, or, in short, if a leader is to lead.

As we differentiate some of these requirements, it will become apparent that they are in a sense on different "levels" and involve quite different capacities, abilities and skills. And we shall also see that while we are forced to describe each requirement separately, all the psychological functions are interdependent so that no one can be successfully performed unless all others are, too. Effective democratic leadership can be viewed as an orchestration of talents, capacities and responsibilities with each theme and counter-melody playing its essential role at the proper time.

The requirements for democratic leadership noted here are similar to a number of those mentioned by Barnard, but are here accented somewhat differently, since our primary concern is with the *psychological* functions they serve.

1. *The formulation of overall goals which can serve as guiding stars for proposals and actions.* In the final analysis the reality world of every individual can only be held together if his specific purposes and actions are integrated around some value standards that make sense to him, with which he can identify himself, and in terms of which he can judge the worthwhileness of his behavior. People can take value standards with them wherever they go, and can recall them in all the diverse occasions of living. Value standards are the top-level directives. They therefore hold out the possibility of being the most lasting and the most universal standards human beings can have, since they are not bound by time and space.

In deciding what to do in any situation, we turn consciously or unconsciously to value standards to give us the answer to the question of what our action is *for* anyway. If we don't sooner or later find an answer that satisfies us, we become deeply disturbed and bewildered because of an inability to sense the direction in which we *should* go and *why*. If this situation is prolonged, we may become apathetic or fatalistic. Or we may become so haunted by our lack of basic guide lines that we feel lost, and become highly susceptible to the appeals and blandishments of potential demagogues or anyone else whom we think can give meaning and significance to our lives.

What we are talking about here is what is often referred to as "spiritual" or "moral" leadership, an aspect of democratic leadership that is unfortunately often only vaguely understood even by those who talk most about it and who, therefore, often fail to see just when it is needed and why, and just how it can be provided. It is essentially what Gandhi described as "soul-force," a term that sounds quite mystical to most Western ears, but a force that Gandhi demonstrated was exceedingly powerful and that served as the cornerstone of his practical politics.

The formulation of goals on the level of the highest human values and in terms that take account of the exigencies of the times will invariably appear as idealistic. There seems to have been a tendency in the West in recent times to shy away from any such emphasis, possibly because the need for such formulations has not been recognized, or possibly because of a fear of being regarded as naive and impractical.

Yet, on analysis, it often turns out that whenever people are anxious and bewildered by a sense of lack of direction concerning where they or their society are going or should go, the highest idealism proves to be the greatest realism, and is, in fact, the necessary keystone for any program of action that is to prove itself realistic, workable and durable. This is immediately apparent if we review the names of a few historical figures we call great leaders—for example, Jesus, Caesar, Napoleon, Jefferson, Lincoln, Lenin, Wilson, Gandhi or Churchill. Each in his own way and in his own time was a rank idealist.

In order to formulate such overall goals at the value level, to sustain them with surety, or to revise them in favor of more embracing goals, the democratic leader must have the capacity to indulge in the kind of self-inquiry at the value level that involves very different psychological processes and conditions from the kind of effort involved in figuring out *how* to get something accomplished once goals have been formulated. Value inquiry involves the kind of soul-searching that takes place in meditation, in contemplation, in brooding, in prayer, in mulling things over. It is a process which requires leisure and an atmosphere unhampered by the urgent demands of the here and now. It is a process in which the mind must be able to range freely as it tries to sensitize itself to feelings that refer to such factors as rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness, charity and love, duty and responsibility, loyalty and conscience. It is the process Jesus engaged in when he went to the top of the mountain, that Gandhi engaged in during his rigidly enforced days of silence, that Lincoln engaged in as he paced the halls of the White House during early morning hours. It is the process symbolized in the hymn which says, "Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom."

It is only if and when a leader is himself clear on the pattern of values he believes in that he can judge immediate and short-term events and problems with any perspective, weighing alternative courses of action open to him in terms of long-range objectives and often exhibiting in the process an exasperating patience, casualness, or humor in the midst of frustrations, trying times, or temporary failures or reversals. Only if a leader has formulated overall goals that he deeply believes in, can he weather storms of abuse and unpopularity, keep faith in himself, instill faith in others, and solidify their faith in him.

2. *Effectively communicating the nature of goals.* Unless a democratic leader makes a systematic attempt to give people a basic under-

standing of the goals he believes they should pursue and a feeling of the value standards upon which these goals are based, then the goals themselves will remain as inert abstractions, lifeless concepts, or high-sounding phrases. The art of effective political communication is the art of showing people in terms of their own experience just what words, ideas and proposals *refer to*, what their *significance* is to the citizen, how they impinge on and fit into his own reality world, and why they are important and useful to him. The leader must use the language of the people, with all the overtones of feeling and value which make language meaningful and alive.

Such effective communication can perhaps best be achieved if the leader conveys the meaning of his concepts in terms of action which people understand. Ideals, goals, or proposals come alive and their import is recognized if people can understand what symbols mean in terms of some action, some "doing" that puts them into operation and makes them relevant and useful. It is most unlikely that Jesus would have had the influence he had, without his skillful use of parables which quickly and simply brought home to people what he was referring to by the most abstract ethical concepts; it is most unlikely that Gandhi would have had the influence he had, if he had not undertaken such symbolic acts as his march to the sea and his prolonged fasts. Roosevelt quickly conveyed the meaning of his "Good Neighbor" policy when he used the analogy of lending a neighbor your hose if his house is on fire. Lenin was constantly reminding his revolutionary colleagues of the necessity of showing people what Communism meant in terms of their own daily living. For example, writing in 1920 during the early days of the Russian Revolution, Lenin pointed out that:

Without labor, and without struggle, book knowledge about Communism obtained from Communist brochures and other writing is absolutely worthless where it would continue the old gap between theory and practice . . . The generation which is now fifteen years old and which in ten to twenty years will live in a Communist society must so conceive the aims of learning that every day in every village, in every city, the young should actually perform some task of social labor, be it ever so small, be it ever so simple.

It should also be noted in passing that people in a democracy are quick to discern insincerity, dissemblance, or anything that smacks of play-acting. For this reason democratic leaders must be wary of relying too much on ghost-written speeches, no matter how eloquent they may sound. For such rather formal communications invariably place

a screen between the people and the leaders which is likely to distort the consistent image people want to have of their leader, even if the screen is not recognized as such.

3. *The creation and guidance of means to attain goals.* Here the leader's problem is to determine *how* to accomplish the goals he has decided upon. But we should hasten to point out once more that the problem is not quite as simple as it sounds, since goals and the means to attain the goals are so completely interdependent. In the determination of the goals themselves the successful leader must invariably keep taking into account what are the potential or foreseeable methods of attaining those goals. Yet when the leader asks himself the question, "What shall I do?" the differentiation between the two aspects usually involved in such a question—"Why should I do this?" and "How should I do this?"—is essential for clarifying the psychological requirements of democratic leadership. For in answering the question of "How," quite different capacities are involved than those described earlier as the leader tries to clarify for himself the overall nature of the goals he wants to pursue anyway.

In answering the question of "How," the processes involved include reasoning, the gathering of information, the analysis of facts, the understanding of the details of specific situations which must be acted upon in the immediate future, the conferring with others on possibilities, the consultation with experts. All of these processes are concerned with the achievement of some particular overall and long-range goal already decided upon.

This process involves an ability to come out on top in the invariable political give-and-take and compromise that characterizes the democratic process; it involves maintaining an effective relationship with parliamentary bodies and with the various agencies of government; it involves planning and budgeting; it involves maintaining and guiding a political organization.

It is unnecessary here to spell out in detail the diverse activities in which the modern democratic leader must engage if he is to put his program across. This has been done many times by able students of government. Psychologically, the important point to remember is that the process of revising and implementing means is another requirement of democratic leadership, and that the means devised and maintained must themselves be consistent with the goals toward which they are directed and the value standards that have guided the formulation of the goals themselves.

4. *The ability to demonstrate resourcefulness in meeting new, emerging situations.* This requirement of successful democratic leadership was implied in Lincoln's statement in his Second Inaugural Address, when he said: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new—so we must think anew and act anew." The psychological process involved here is the demonstration of an ability to make swift evaluations that turn out to be accurate appraisals of the significance or potential significance of new occurrences in terms of the most general value standards, together with the capacity to devise, adapt or revise the practical measures necessary to accommodate the situation. It means the capacity to discern cues and signs of the times which seem to be pointing to serious crisis in order to avoid the crisis itself, or to mitigate its effects if it proves to be unavoidable because of circumstances beyond the leader's control.

The problem of demonstrating resourcefulness involves the important capacity of timing, of knowing when objectives need a clear statement or restatement, when programs need formulations and revisions, when the times are ripe to put some new program into effect, and just how and when to convey to people the sense of urgency that something new and different must be done. A characteristic of many great leaders is their uncanny sense of timing as, for example, Churchill's speech to a vacillating world the day after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union during World War II, which indicated in clear and uncompromising terms what he felt must be done.

An important aspect of resourcefulness is the capacity of a leader to recognize the tentativeness of his assumptions, no matter how much he may have believed in them. It involves the ability to know when he has made a mistake, when his assumptions have proved false, combined with the courage to admit his mistakes. For, like anyone else, only to the extent that the leader can recognize his errors and admit them can he make better, more accurate, more adequate judgments. Confucius said, "He who makes a mistake and refuses to admit it, makes another mistake." In his autobiography, Gandhi talks of his "Himalayan errors." Mayor LaGuardia used to say, "When I make a mistake, it is a beaut." Horace Greeley illustrated the point in describing Lincoln. "He was open to all impressions and influences, and gladly profited by the teachings of events and circumstances, no matter how adverse or unwelcome. There was probably no year of his

life when he was not a wiser, cooler and better man than he had been the year preceding."

Without availing himself of the opportunity for learning which is provided when assumptions prove wrong, the leader is constantly apt to be confronted with things that just "couldn't happen" and, in the process, bring about a crisis in leadership which people will be quick to recognize. The shock of the consequences of mistakes and misjudgments can be tempered if the leader has the intuitive sense to use understatement rather than overstatement. In so doing he sets up the possibility of giving an impression of overperformance if things do happen to turn out as he had privately predicted.

5. *Providing a sense of participation through close identification with the people.* It is becoming increasingly recognized in all areas of social, industrial and political life that when people are required to work together to accomplish a purpose, their morale, their satisfaction, their output, and their willingness to sacrifice will be greatest only if they have a sense that they themselves are somehow involved in decisions, if their action is in part their own responsibility because they feel they have exercised some choice in the matter.

The wise democratic leader will therefore make every effort to avoid signs of dictation. Even when decisions must be made quickly, he will try to execute them or state them in a way to avoid an impression of imperiousness. He will continually bear in mind that his power derives from the people, and is a power "with" the people, not "over" them.

While it is obvious that any democratic leader must make innumerable decisions on which the public at large cannot be expected to have a seasoned judgment, and about which they may show very little interest, it is essential that when people *are* concerned about a problem and *do* feel strongly, an effort be made to give them a sense of involvement. Insofar as this can be done, the democratic leader will live up to the ideal leader described by Laotzu:

A leader is best
When people barely know that he exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worst when they despise him.
"Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you";
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say, "We did this ourselves."

THE PROBLEM

The combination of characteristics and capacities required to fill successfully the role of a democratic leader, particularly at the national level, are of course to be found in few people indeed. Most who try are apt to lack one or more of the essential ingredients. With the increasingly exacting demands on democratic leaders created by domestic and international problems of mounting complexity, ways and means must be constantly sought to give the leader every chance for success by freeing him from all unnecessary tasks which drain his energies, eat into his time, and divert his attention from major responsibilities which he himself must in large part define within the context of his times and situation.

As democracy competes with authoritarianism and despotism in its various modern forms, the problems of discovering, training, and utilizing leadership obviously become of the utmost importance. For it is now more than ever to democratic leadership that people are looking for expressions of their hopes, for dynamic programs of action that will confirm these hopes in the concreteness of living and will thereby sustain and kindle their faith in democratic government.

REFERENCE

1. BARNARD, C. I. *Organization and management*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univer. Press, 1948. Pp. 80ff.