

Biography Paper - Leadership

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Biography Paper – Leadership Development over the Lifespan

Introduction

Though there are a multitude of books and articles discussing leadership, leadership is a difficult construct to come to terms with. Leaders have been depicted as early as 5,000 years ago when the Egyptians painted hieroglyphics denoting leadership, leader and follower. Taoism has emphasized leadership qualities in terms of guiding and nurturing. (Sarros, 1992). This paper will review an individual subject's development of leadership skills over a lifetime. First a list of questions will be developed. Then an interview will be conducted to discover the pertinent facts and observations from the Subject. Following this, a review of literature will be conducted regarding leadership skill development over lifetime. Finally there will be a comparison between this literature and the Subject's life experiences to see how the Subject's life matches or doesn't match the research predictions.

Interview Questions

The following questions are designed to reveal life experiences that may be pertinent to lifespan development of leadership skills. The questions are listed below.

Section I – Early Years (ages 1-10) and Development**Question I.1**

Please describe your family structure and how this changed over life.

Question I.2

Please describe your pre-school years – ages 1 to 5 and mention any significant memories that you remember.

Question I.3

Please describe your parent's styles and how they dealt with kids (parenting skills), and other people (their leadership skills). Include significant others if important (brothers, sisters, teachers, etc.)

Question I.4

Please describe your formal education. How did teachers work with kids at this time?

Question I.5

Please describe your living and economic structure early in life?

Question I.6

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time?

Section II – Adolescent Years (ages 10 -18)**Question II.1**

Did your family structure change at this time?

Question II.2

Please describe school and / or work environment at this time – were you working?

Question II.3

Please describe your goals and aspirations (socially, academically, career, etc.)

Question II.4

How did athletics influence your life at this time?

Question II.5

What was your economic situation at this time?

Question II.6

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time?

Section III – Adult Years (ages 18 +) – World War II**Question III.1**

Describe your military experiences (times, places for reference)

Question III.2

Please describe what you consider remarkable learning experiences due to the war?

Question III.3

What positive experiences and benefits came out of service in the war?

Question III.4

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time?

Section IV – Adult Years (ages 18 +) – Career**Question IV.1**

Describe your remarkable job and business experiences (times, places for reference)

Question IV.2

How did each job contribute to gaining leadership skills?

Question IV.3

What were the toughest experiences (especially regarding working and leading people) ?

Question IV.4

What positive experiences and benefits came out of these jobs?

Question IV.5

How did economic considerations influence you at this time?

Question IV.6

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time in this area?

Section V – Adult Years (ages 18 +) – Family / Kids**Question V.1**

Describe your family experiences (times, places for reference)

Question V.2

How did family responsibility and economic situations contribute to your career goals and decisions?

Question V.3

How did the family effect to your growth as a leader?

Question V.4

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time in this area?

Section VI – Personal Views of Life

Question VI.1

What is your philosophy of leadership? What is your leadership style?

Question VI.2

What are the most important qualities of leadership?

Question VI.3

What do you think people need to know about leadership?

Question VI.4

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that we have not covered?

Question VI.5

Who are your leadership examples?

Interview Responses

We want to study how the participant developed excellent leadership skills over his lifetime. The interview was conducted at the Subject's home on December 5th, 1998. The responses will be presented in 2 ways, 1) in a chronological summary table, and 2) Listed along with the question.

Chronological Summary

Fact		Description
Date of Birth		2/20/22
Age at Interview		76
Career highlights		
1940	Graduation from High School Worked with Father and brothers sinking coalmine shaft. Enrolled @ Ohio University with money from job (Only 3 out of graduating class went to college. Only enough money for one semester (it was \$50). Brother Harold took him to sandblasting plant where they sandblasted bathtubs. Next job in a TNT plant. Was a leader of 5 to 7 people all older than him. Said this was a great opportunity to be a leader.	
1942	WWI Veteran – Navy	

1946	Discharge from Navy Bought restaurant, ran for 1 year
1947	Sold restaurant, got married, moved to Bowling Green University to finish degree in education. After graduation, got what the doctors said was tuberculosis – was required to be in a sanatorium (quarantine) for 1 year – released to go to Arizona for the “air”.
1951	Taught in Arizona (found out he never had tuberculosis) in the Alhambra School District. Completed Masters Degree in Education.
1954	Went back to Ohio, Principal at a Junior High School.
1960	Back to Arizona, Principal at Avondale.
1964	Principal at Murphy.
1965	Completed Education Specialist Degree at ASU.
1967	Superintendent at Tolleson School District.
1972	Moved to California, Superintendent at Vista Del Mar School District north of Santa Barbara
1978	Back to Arizona, Superintendent at Creighton School District, Phoenix, Arizona.
1984	Retired

Questions and Responses

Below is a list of questions and responses by the Subject. Information in summary above Responses are in *ITALICS*.

Section I – Early Years (ages 1-10) and Development**Question I.1**

Please describe your family structure and how this changed over life.

I had two Brothers, Harold, 14 years older, and Ralph, 5 years older. My sisters were Monette, 15 years older, Elanor, 7 years older and Betty, 2 years younger. One brother died as a baby. No family members died in early life. Family structure changed as kids left home. Finally, Subject and younger sister were only family members left.

Question I.2

Please describe your pre-school years – ages 1 to 5 and mention any significant memories that you remember.

None.

Question I.3

Please describe your parent's styles and how they dealt with kids (parenting skills), and other people (their leadership skills). Include significant others if important (brothers, sisters, teachers, etc.)

Father was "insignificant" – was gone during childhood and lived elsewhere except weekends. Mother was "inconsequential" after Subject's age 12 because

sister and Subject took care of her due to developing epilepsy. Both parents rarely disciplined, but when they did it was with the “razor strap”. Because of the rural setting (Athens Ohio), the kids had lots of freedom.

Early memory in 7th and 8th grade was Glen Gardiner – the principal and teacher. Always looked good (nice tie and shirt), was a person Subject emulated. Dealt with situation very well when on Dec 21st, 1931 there was an explosion in the local mine that killed 81 people.

Question I.4

Please describe your formal education. How did teachers work with kids at this time?

Teachers were great. Very humane – they understood the community of poor people, coal miners and bootleggers.

Question I.5

Please describe your living and economic structure early in life?

During the depression, father was rarely home. Kids would dig in “gob pile” (refuse coal pile from mine) for coal to burn at home. They had no food (no fridge for meat). Had an “outside john” and used the Sears and Roebuck catalog as toilet paper.

Question I.6

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time?

None.

Section II – Adolescent Years (ages 10 -18)**Question II.1**

Did your family structure change at this time?

See above I.1.

Question II.2

Please describe school and / or work environment at this time – were you working?

At 10 to 11, hitch hiked 15 miles to golf course to caddy, and sold paper on Saturdays in town. Money went for family.

School was very important – “kept me going”. Located only 400 yd from home, it was an escape from the living situation.

Question II.3

Please describe your goals and aspirations (socially, academically, career, etc.)

Goal was to become teacher (emulating Glen Gardiner). Academic goal was to get out of High School and get money for college. Socially, no specific goals, started 1st grade with same kids he graduated with.

Question II.4

How did athletics influence your life at this time?

Did football sophomore, junior and senior years. Coach Joe Gara was someone he emulated.

Question II.5

What was your economic situation at this time?

Worked with Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC's). Learned a lot and operated equipment. Was a leader of a crew of 5 people (all older than him).

Question II.6

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time?

None.

Section III – Adult Years (ages 18 +) – World War II**Question III.1**

Describe your military experiences (times, places for reference)

Joined in 1942 at 19. Was a Petty Officer in the Navy. Honorable Discharge in 1946.

Question III.2

Please describe what you consider remarkable learning experiences due to the war?

Technical training (about guns and bombs). Was lineleader in handling armaments for planes. Managed 6 to 12 people. Tough experiences were airplane wrecks and people who got killed around equipment. One person walked into a propeller and he saw his body get chopped up.

Question III.3

What positive experiences and benefits came out of service in the war?

See II.2.

Question III.4

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time?

None.

Section IV – Adult Years (ages 18 +) – Career**Question IV.1**

Describe your remarkable job and business experiences (times, places for reference)

See chronological summary.

Question IV.2

How did each job contribute to gaining leadership skills?

Early school contributed through emulation of Glen Gardiner. No particular ones mentioned.

Question IV.3

What were the toughest experiences (especially regarding working and leading people) ?

In Ohio, boy committed suicide at his school. As principal, he had to manage the whole school's recovery. In Arizona, working through a push for a union at school district..

Question IV.4

What positive experiences and benefits came out of these jobs?

More time working with people. More experienced.

Question IV.5

How did economic considerations influence you at this time?

No influence. He got jobs for challenge, not due to economic need.

Question IV.6

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time in this area?

Education was very important, hence the pursuit of Education Specialist degree.

Section V – Adult Years (ages 18 +) – Family / Kids**Question V.1**

Describe your family experiences (times, places for reference)

Married June 21st 1947, Had 1st boy 18 months later. Second child born in 1966.

Question V.2

How did family responsibility and economic situations contribute to your career goals and decisions?

None, wife always worked.

Question V.3

How did the family effect to your growth as a leader?

No effect.

Question V.4

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that happened at this time in this area?

None.

Section VI – Personal Views of Life**Question VI.1**

What is your philosophy of leadership? What is your leadership style?

Philosophy of leadership: The ability to compromise on situations & recognize the total problem, not just part of the problem.

Leadership style: Compromising to the degree that it is not in conflict with your philosophy of life (values). "We'll do it our way, but if it doesn't work, we'll do it my way"

Question VI.2

What are the most important qualities of leadership?

Having standards (of right and wrong) set for yourself, and what you hold others to.

Question VI.3

What do you think people need to know about leadership?

That values must be commensurate with people in the community being lead. Leaders must be conscious of needs of community, and committed to religious beliefs.

Question VI.4

Are there any other significant contributions to your development (particularly regarding leadership skills) that we have not covered?

None.

Question VI.5

Who are your leadership examples?

Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodroe Wilson, Colin Powell, Justice Reinqvist and Sandra Day O'Connor.

Literature Review

A literature review on the subject of leadership could take much more space than we have available. In Bass and Stogdill's work *Handbook of leadership*, there were more than 4,000 references to leadership in a number of disciplines. There are hundreds of vastly different varieties of definitions of leadership that don't agree with each other (Sarros, 1992; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Atwater, Penn & Rucker, 1991)). In addition, while there is so much material, leadership seems to be a subject that is studied as a *current skill or state* rather than something developed. In other words, while there are developmental theories of leadership, they are outnumbered by the vast works on leadership "development" which refers to gaining those skills that fit the definition of leadership being asserted. Like love, everyone knows leadership exists, but nobody can define it. That being said, we will attempt to summarize current thoughts on developing leadership skills over a lifetime as it relates to the current Subject.

Through time, thoughts on leadership have changed. Not just due to new thinking, but due to the changing world and the societal needs of leaders. Earlier in history, leadership skills tended to be thought of as a matter of birth. Leaders were *born*, not made. This is called the "Great Man" theory of leadership. Kings, queens – those of the correct lineage could lead and others must follow. Learning wasn't a factor (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Later, as this failed to explain leadership, it was believed that great events made leaders of otherwise ordinary people. As Bennis and Nanus (1985) state: "Presumably Lenin was just 'milling about' when a revolution pounced on his deliberations, and Washington was simply 'on hand' when the colonies opted for countrydom". This also was an inadequate explanation.

Current research results in many different views of who leaders are and what that means. All agree that there are different styles and kinds of leaders (Jorstad, 1991). Developmentally, we know that leaders develop early in preschool. This tends to focus on evaluation of peers, more than directing specific activities – sort of establishing a pecking order. At this early age there is no good research regarding *why* the child with higher leadership tendencies is that way. Some suggest child size (bigger kids are physically stronger) but this isn't a very strong correlation (Fukada, Fukada & Hicks, 1994). In school age children leadership skills seems to be related to self-actualization. Karnes, Deason & D'ilio (1993) found strong relationships between all scales of the Leadership Skills Inventory and a self-actualization scale called Reflections of Self by Youth. This suggests that we develop leadership skills if lower level needs are taken care of (Maslow, 1971).

Leadership in adolescence is difficult to examine. Several kinds of learning are going on at one time during this portion of a person's life. Adapting to the existing social structure, physical appearance, athletic ability, popularity, leadership in school activities are paths to status at this age. (Newman, 1982). Unfortunately, academic achievement has been found to have little effect on status (Coleman, 1961) though we might suspect some cohort effect based on the time of the study. In one study, only 2.5% of students thought academic achievement was important to being in a leading crowd, though 80% thought it important to their future (Friesen, 1968). As one might expect, fitting in is a primary goal in adolescence and therefore has an effect on valued leadership skills (Newman, 1982).

It is also important to recognize later life also has many leadership examples. As Schaie and Willis (1996) point out, many leaders in their field made their contributions at a very late age. They present these examples, to name a few:

Person	Age	Accomplishment
Wilhelm Wundt	88	10 volume Treatise on Social Psychology
John Henry Comstock	71	Introduction to Entomology
Asa Gray	77	Elements of Botany
Popes	Over 60	Leaders of the Largest Church in the World
Ronald Regan	Old	President of the United States
Benjamin Franklin	78	Bifocals (among other things)

This demonstrates that there are leaders even at advanced ages. Both leaders in a *field* where they may or may not lead other people directly, and people who lead and manage many people (Shearring, 1992).

Other literature suggests that leadership is related to developing the ability and drive to overcome adversity. People who are comfortable with adversity and have a high resilience are more likely to take risks and achieve. This is not necessarily something developed over a lifespan, but it may be related to opportunities for adversity and success in overcoming them (Stoltz, 1997).

In conclusion, while there is some information on leadership at different stages in life, there are many factors influencing the fact that there is not much available literature on this skill developed over the lifespan. These factors include: little agreement on the definition of leadership, cohort effects on what leadership means, but I feel that the strongest difficulty revealed by the research is that there are different *values* on what leadership is in each group (leaders in pre-school are different from leaders in adolescence). This is the most difficult factor to isolate. Leadership changes over the lifespan – so how do we measure it. Is it the same skill – it appears

not to be? Is it just manifestation of self-actualization? In effect, this means that longitudinal study of leadership is a difficult process at best. Firstly, to define leadership consistently , next to measure it. Despite not having any lifespan models to compare, in the next section, we will endeavor to see how our Subject fits some of the research that we do have to examine.

Subject vs. Research

As stated in the previous section, we have not found specific models for leadership over a lifespan in the literature, however, we have seen leadership in stages through the lifespan. Therefore we can compare our Subject's answers to each stage that we have examined. We will also suggest how this time may have prepared the Subject for leadership skills that are valued at an adult level because that is the age that we observe high ability in that area. Finally we will summarize this analysis with what we think the reasons are for his skills in this area.

Early Years (ages 1-10)

Firstly our study reported above, that high leadership in pre-school was related to high self-actualization. Our Subject did not report much memory of these years (prior to 10), and what he did report was not consistent with high self-actualization. He grew up during the depression and very poor. In addition, his father was gone much of the time and mother was not very available (he had 5 siblings to compete with). It is clear that his basic needs (food, shelter only) were barely being met and therefore he would not progress toward Maslow's (1971) self-actualization. Though we did not find literature to support it, we can suggest that these hardships also provided opportunities to overcome many obstacles, developing a high ability in this area. Stoltz (1997) suggests this as a highly important skill to have for a leader.

Adolescent Years (ages 10 -18)

In adolescence, the Subject reported athletic participation, and high social "fitting in". Apparently this was as early as 1st grade because all of the same kids traveled up academically together. This is consistent with feeling comfortable as a leader in school. More importantly, it seems, was the opportunity to lead a group as a junior in high school in the Civilian Conservation

Corp (CCC's). This was not only an opportunity to practice leadership, but also to overcome the obstacle of going to school at the same time. Most other men in this era had quit high school well before this (including his older brother).

Other important factors at this time would include his role models – the principal and football coach, who he said he wanted to “emulate”. These people certainly were leaders and that had an important impact on him and his community (Rohs & Langone, 1993). In fact he pursued exactly the type of work they did, starting out in education to be a coach, and later switching to administration. In addition, he also was presented with a difficult family situation, with the father gone most of the time, and the mother with a chronic condition that only he and his younger sister were available to care for. This was another stage of adversity that might have factored into his development. Successful resolution of adversity leads one to have more tolerance for future adversity (Stoltz, 1997)

Adult Years (ages 18+) - Military, Career, Family

As stated earlier, the overabundance of literature on leadership at this age makes this difficult to isolate as a skill. Our Subject got many opportunities to be a leader throughout this age (refer to chronological summary above). From 17 in the aforementioned CCC's, to leading a group in a TNT plant, to leading a crew in World War II, to owning a restaurant, followed by college, and many jobs in the education field including superintendent of large city school districts. This early experience in being put in charge probably helped in the later development of skills for the bigger jobs.

Personal Views of Life

His philosophy response is also consistent with language he described above that is consistent with the “I – We” construct suggested by Cunningham (1992). This is where leaders tend to take a responsible role for a group activity.

Summary

We know that the Subject had many leadership roles, but why was he selected at the early age to lead people? His response was that the manager and he got along, but it seems like there is more than that. Our subject seemed to have three distinguishing experiences that may have helped develop the necessary skills to be selected as a leader. Firstly, he had to overcome lots of adversity through his life up to leaving in the military. Secondly, he had to deal with it largely on his own (parents were “inconsequential”). Lastly, his role models were in leadership positions (principal, teacher, and coach). Following these experiences, he was given opportunities to be a leader and seemed to grow in these roles, developing further the skills necessary for larger and larger roles and positions.

Conclusion

There are so many leadership theories around, we could match almost any subject to a theory. Our Subject seemed to match the adversity model of leadership the best, and certainly didn't match any model that suggests early comfort and early self-actualization based on basic needs being met. The exception to this may be in high school regarding social needs, due to the small town and the fact that all of his peers knew each other for their entire academic career. The teachers and faculty were also part of this small community and contributed to the safety of the environment as well. In conclusion, we suggest our Subject developed his leadership qualities through adversity per Stoltz's model (1997) and leadership experience itself. Leaders come in many different shapes, sizes and styles. From Ghengis Kahn to Julius Ceasar, to Moses, there have been many different leaders and as many different stories about their early life. This is one thing that's consistent with our message here.

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