

# Leadership

By Tess Tangney

When I started this leadership course in November I thought I had a pretty good idea of what leadership is and how to be a good leader. I don't want to say that I was wrong but I wasn't necessarily right either. I wasn't looking deep enough into the essence of leadership I only saw it on a surface level. For example I thought that a leader was someone who people followed and respected but I wasn't looking at *why* people were willing to follow them or why the leader wanted to be followed. The discussions that we had over the following five weeks caused me to question what I thought I knew and see leadership in a very different way.

The most basic question of 'what is leadership' proved to be the most difficult to answer. This may be because we didn't really understand the question. Personally I never thought of leadership as a specific type of thing, and so had no idea what it was. I knew a good leader from a bad leader, what a leader does and the qualities that a leader has but I think we all struggled with the idea that leadership is something. We finally found out after dancing around the question all evening that leadership is a service, the leader of the group takes actions that are 100% in the benefit of the group and serve the needs of the group. I would never have thought of leadership like that before, it was a completely new concept to me and I found that it changed my view of leadership drastically. Leadership has to be a completely selfless act, which to me seemed counterintuitive as a leader of a group is the most powerful, the highest up and probably gets paid the most in work situations. These all seem like things someone would want for selfish reasons and for personal gain, it does not seem like they are providing a selfless service. However perhaps that is just because I have been influenced by the distorted way in which society sees leadership.

Another reason why we might have found it hard to see that leadership is a service is that sometimes the service which a leader is providing isn't that pleasant and so doesn't seem like a service at all. While a leader can provide support and direction to those who need it they may also have to discipline and correct some members of the group. It isn't as obvious that they are providing a service when they have to discipline someone. However it all depends on the intention behind the disciplining. For example if a leader is making a presentation to a group and one person will not stop being disruptive and the leader has to discipline them it can very easily stop being a service if their intention is wrong. If they are giving out to them because the leader is finding it annoying then it is no longer a service and they are no longer being a leader as they are disciplining them for their own benefit. However if they discipline them with the intention of helping the person get more out of the presentation then they are providing a service and a difficult one at that. I think this is where many leaders fall down, they can become selfish and forget that they are providing a service. From my own experience I found it very hard to discipline someone with their best intentions in mind, I think if somebody can master this they will be a very successful leader. I think it is the true test of selflessness. If a leader is to be truly selfless and provide a good service there are three things they must watch out for: Position, Power and Popularity. These are three things that are very easy to be seduced by, but if you fall for them you are no longer acting 100% for the benefit of

the group. Even if only a small part of you is working for power, say 10% then you are no longer being the best leader you can be.

Great leaders have many qualities such as empathy, patience and determination, however one of the most important is integrity. I think this is an important quality for anyone to have. To have integrity means that you follow your word, you keep your promises and you have follow through. You have to say, mean and do the same thing. I think this is especially important when it comes to the promises we make to ourselves, if we tell ourselves that we are going to go for a run tomorrow then we should go for a run tomorrow. It may seem simple but if we get into the habit of keeping the promises we make to ourselves then it will be easy to keep those promises we make to other people. I found that when I practised this it made me more aware of what I was saying and made me choose my words more carefully because I knew I was going to have to do whatever I said I would. It really highlighted the amount of small white lies I tell myself and realise how useless they were. Another important quality for a leader to have is the ability to make a good decision confidently. We found out that the way to do this was to always keep in mind who the decision was effecting and if you are unsure if it is right or not look and the wider community it would affect. For example if you are making a decision for the group you consider if it is the right decision for them. However if you are unsure you consider if it is the right decision for the organisation you are working in , and then the industry and then the society and so on. You keep referring to the next level of people that your decision might affect until you are confident it is the right decision. I find it interesting and baffling that there is pretty much a formula for making good decisions and yet it is not widely known or used.

I think that one of the most interesting conversations we had was on the topic of fear. We started by distinguishing between the different types of fear: the fear that stops us from doing things that might harm us e.g. jumping off a cliff, and the fear that stops us from doing something which possess no physical threat to us e.g. public speaking. The first type of fear is perfectly natural and essential in keeping us alive but the second type of fear is something we need to learn to overcome as it inhibits us from living our lives to the fullest. It is essential that a leader can face their fears and not be controlled by them as they need to be able to have a clear head to be able to make sound decisions in times of crises. They will not be able to do this if they are paralysed by their fears. These small fears that we come accross from day to day are indicators that we are on the edge of our comfort zone and to move beyond it we need to overcome this fear. We learnt that the way to overcome these fears was to take a physical action towards overcoming the fear, for example if you find you are afraid to speak up in class to overcome this fear you could put up your hand and answer a question. If we do not overcome these fears they will limit us. When I put this is to practice I found the physical action very helpful as it doesn't give you time to think it through and linger on the worst case scenario.

One topic which I struggled with was the idea of limitless potential. Everybody has limitless potential guided by nature and a good leader will know this and help people to achieve their full potential. But even the words contradict each other, their potential is *limitless* but somehow the leader helps them achieve their *full* potential. How can something be limitless and full? It is possible that I am thinking of this too literally but I just don't know if

I agree with the idea that everyone's potential is limitless. I don't believe that everyone has the potential to run as fast as Usain Bolt or that everyone has the potential to be a brain surgeon. However even though I don't fully agree with the idea I can agree that we can limit ourselves by putting ourselves down. A good leader will recognise this and help people to achieve the best they can do because if everyone in the group is working to the best of their ability then the group will benefit as a whole.

I thoroughly enjoyed the in depth discussions we had and I learnt a lot about being a good leader. My challenge now is to put everything I've learnt into practice because it is one thing to know how and another to do it.