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Letter from the Editor

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...from the editor

Leadership is a noble calling. In addition to meeting well-defined strategic objectives, leaders must also help their organizations make meaningful contributions to social issues, economic growth, and political stability. That's why effective organizational leadership plays a vital role in shaping our world.

— Robert L. Joss

In our inaugural issue of the *Journal of Values-Based Leadership* (Winter/Spring 2008), ethicist Michael McCuddy proposed three categories of leadership styles. On opposite ends of the spectrum are “selfishness” (where egocentrism and greed are common delineators) and “selflessness” (where altruism subsumes self-interest). A third category was cited: “self-fullness” – a balancing of one’s objectives with due regard for the interests of others – representing a more values-oriented, egalitarian approach to decision-making.

In an attempt to further simplify the defining characteristics of values-based leaders, perhaps one need not look further than *empathy*.

Few film connoisseurs can forget the iconic moment when the young daughter in Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird* embraces the wisdom of her father, Atticus, in cautioning his children to refrain from judging individuals or situations prematurely. He warns of the potential harm from such ill-informed, preconceived notions. As an example, the family’s reclusive neighbor – who had long been the subject of both local vitriolic gossip and collective pity – demonstrates his compassion by leaving Atticus’s children mementos throughout the story and by ultimately saving their lives: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." All persons, and especially true leaders, need to learn about the backgrounds and experiences of others to begin to understand and appreciate their unique perspectives and challenges.

Do our leaders really *fully* consider the effects and anticipated consequences of their leadership decisions – whether in business, governance, social settings, and environmental contexts? For some, leadership is born through direct experience. For example:

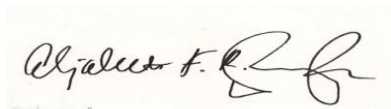
- James Brady (former Reagan White House Press Secretary) and Gabrielle Giffords (former US Congresswoman-Arizona) assumed the helm of the gun reform movement in the US after sustaining critical gunshot wounds in assassination attempts.
- Ohio Senator Robert Portman has become an unlikely proponent of same-sex marriage after his son, who is gay, advocated the expansion of nondiscrimination laws to include sexual orientation and gender identity.
- A deadlocked US Congress recently voted to overturn that segment of *The Sequester* which imposed furloughs of federal air traffic controllers at major US hubs. This bipartisan decision occurred, however, only after receiving complaints

from constituents experiencing long travel delays – and facing similar delays themselves.

However, others have failed to learn from lessons of the past or take advantage of current challenges, displaying a rather flagrant paucity of empathy and ultimately poor decision-making.

- Wal-Mart – the world’s largest retailer – has recently refused to sign an industry-wide agreement addressing the prevention of conditions which led to the deaths of over 1,000 Bangladeshi workers – predominantly young women and girls – from the collapse of a dilapidated garment factory (eerily reminiscent of the tragic deaths of 146 young female sewers in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City in 1911).
- On May 28, 2013, Wal-Mart incurred approximately 82 million USD in fines after pleading guilty to improperly dumping hazardous waste into local sewer systems in both California and Missouri – after nearly a decade of denying these same accusations of environmental degradation.
- In the wake of the deaths of eleven men in the 2010 fiery explosion of a BP oil platform – precipitating the release of 210 million gallons of crude oil and 1.84 million gallons of chemical dispersants directly into the Gulf of Mexico, the destruction of a finely-tuned ecosystem, and the ruination of myriad businesses – former CEO Tony Hayward famously uttered the words: “You know, I’d like to get my life back.”
- Leaders at Apple have only begun to widen the company’s supplier base and to increase its risk diversity, partly in response to the public demand for reform of exploitative labor practices at Foxconn, the world’s largest electronics manufacturing company and historically the major supplier of Apple’s electronic consumer goods.

Action emanating from public pressure or resulting from direct personal experience may produce leaders who genuinely strive to balance the interests of their stakeholders as an integral component of their decision-making process. But individuals who assess long-term impacts and consequences of their contemplated business or policy decisions, who are able to transcend their own immediate interests and weigh those of the vast panoply of affected stakeholders, whose empathetic nature propels them to first “walk around in someone else’s skin” before committing to a final judgment or decision, are leaders who truly deserve the title of “values based.”



Elizabeth F. R. Gingerich, Ed.