The Journal of Values-Based Leadership

Volume 15
Issue 1 *Winter/Spring 2022*

Article 14

January 2022

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Recommended Citation

Iodice, Emilio F. (2022) "City Lights: A Story of Leadership, Passion, Self Confidence, Positive Thinking, Vision, Persistence, Compassion, Love, Generosity, Gratitude and Hope," *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22543/0733.151.1398>

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/jvbl/vol15/iss1/14>

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City Lights: A Story of Leadership, Passion, Self Confidence, Positive Thinking, Vision, Persistence, Compassion, Love, Generosity, Gratitude and Hope

— EMILIO IODICE, ROME ITALY

Charlie Chaplin was one of the greatest silent movie stars of all time. He had millions of fans. His films were seen around the world.

Chaplin was a man of endless talents. He did his own stunts, could dance and act, direct, produce, and write music. His pictures were enormously popular and he made a fortune in the movie business.

Chaplin's star began to fade with the dawn of talking pictures in 1927. Originally believed to be a fad, the "talkies" quickly became the standard for the industry and swept across the globe.

By 1928, Chaplin's career was evaporating. He believed silent films were the most powerful medium of expression because silence was the universal language. His once adoring public, no longer agreed.

His personal, professional, and financial life was in deep trouble.

Courtesy, First National Pictures and Wikipedia

A highly publicized divorce ruined his reputation. Stories from his ex-wife about Charlie's affairs made headlines and touched off a series of scandals that seemed to endlessly feed gossip columnists.

"As I began to love myself
I found that anguish
and emotional suffering
are only warning signs
that I was living
against my own truth.
Today, I know,
this is authenticity."

Courtesy, Hindustan Times

The Internal Revenue Service demanded nearly \$2 million in back taxes (\$30 million in 2021 dollars). Major studios stopped production of silent films and banks no longer extended lines of credit or loans. Critics said Chaplin was finished. He had no future.

His art was dead and his life was in shambles. The most famous movie star

on the planet considered giving up. He was 39 years old.

Instead, he decided to fight. He believed in himself and that one, last, great silent movie would end the era with a stunning and unforgettable legacy produced by Charlie Spencer Chaplin.

He sold his stock portfolio and self-financed his new film, entitled “*City Lights*.” He was warned by the experts in Hollywood to drop the idea. They said it would never work. The movie would be a flop and a commercial disaster. By the time it was finished, he was near bankruptcy.

Less than two years into production, Chaplin had spent \$2 million. He never invested nearly that much in creating some of his best work. The actor, director, producer became anxious and nervous. He was losing control.

The film was a series of separate scenes pieced together. Shoots were canceled and actors spent hours and days waiting for Chaplin to show up and work. As word reached the Hollywood press, more stories emerged about his imminent downfall.

Suddenly, Chaplin rose out of the ashes of depression, gossip, trouble and anguish. He focused on the task at hand: finish the film and make it into a masterpiece, despite the huge problems he faced. At a certain point in the shooting, he became resolute. “Nothing could deter me from making it,” said Chaplin.¹

“*City Lights* tells the story of Chaplin’s Tramp and how he falls in love with a blind flower girl. Her family is in financial ruin and on the verge of losing their home. The Tramp, having befriended a drunk rich man who manages to forget him whenever he’s sober, manages to get enough money to keep them in their apartment. Thanks to a bit of mistaken identity, she thinks he’s rich himself, not knowing the trouble he has to go through in order to get the

money, whether it’s begging, borrowing, or literally shoveling horse manure off the ground. He goes to any length to help her and doubles his efforts when he discovers an expensive procedure that will give his love her sight back. He goes to the drunken rich man for the money and gets it, but through a series of unfortunate circumstances, he is believed to be a thief of the money by both the rich man and the police. In the chase to arrest him, the Tramp manages to get the flower girl the money for her procedure before he’s arrested and thrown in jail.”²

The final scene in the movie is by far the most important.

The setting and the acting borders on perfection. It summarizes the feelings of generosity,

¹ <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/30080/masterpieces-charlie-chaplins-city-lights>

² *Ibid*

compassion, gratitude and most of all, hope that is the essence of the film.

It is a story about values and how Chaplin led himself and others into creating the last great vision of the silent movie era.

The clip starts when Chaplin is released from prison. He is depressed, broken, and homeless, and has lost everything. He is walking more slowly, wandering on the streets aimlessly and, unwittingly, finds himself near a flower shop.

The former blind girl operates the store with her grandmother. She thinks “she has heard the slam of a limousine’s door, which was how she knew her “wealthy” tramp was near. She hears him everywhere, desperate to make a connection again with the man who changed her life. Before, she was merely a beggar on the street selling flowers. With her eyesight, she was able to open her own shop and provide for her grandmother and make something of herself.”³

The Tramp walks past the store. He finds a discarded flower in the gutter and picks it up. It is like those he used to buy from her. The fallen blossom represents beauty at its core, mistreated and thrown away.

Courtesy, United Artists, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJKfmsuvGHg>

Newsboys torment Chaplin and make fun of him in a heartbreaking scene filled with injustice. She watches from her store at the beleaguered Tramp and laughs at him, almost jeeringly. The Flower Girl does not know who he is. To her, he is an unfortunate destitute. He silently walks up to her. He recognizes her. Compassionately, she hands him a flower. He brings it to his lips. She takes a coin and wraps his hand around it.

She holds his hand and suddenly, a light emerges in her eyes. The world stops. The Flower Girl feels something familiar in that touch. He looks at her and asks, “You can see now?”⁴ She is shocked, “taken aback and brings his hand to her chest, cherishing it.”⁵

The movie ends, leaving us with the feeling that they lived happily ever after.

“Near the end of his life, Chaplin still marveled at the magic of the scene: ‘I’ve had that once or twice, he said. In City Lights... I’m not acting Almost apologetic, standing outside myself and looking ... It’s...beautiful.’”⁶

The story and the final moment, in particular, is about care and love. It is timeless.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ <https://www.charliechaplin.com/en/films/5-city-lights/articles/4-Filming-City-Lights>

The message of *City Lights* is one for us today.

After the war against the Great Virus of the 21st Century, where we were subjugated by fear and blinded by desperation, we find hope in generosity, kindness, heroism, and leadership. We as people, from all nations, rose to defeat a common enemy and restore our energy to right the wrongs of this planet and save humanity and all the goodness it represents.

The film was huge success. It took nearly 3 years to produce and when it debuted in 1931, was enormously popular.

“In the final analysis, Chaplin had done what many thought impossible. He had produced a

Albert Einstein and Charlie Chaplin at the Premier of City Lights, Hollywood, 1931, Courtesy Medium.com

critically and commercially successful silent film three years after the demise of American silent cinema. More astonishingly was the ‘*City Lights*’ reissue in 1950, when it was praised by ‘*Life*’ magazine as “the best movie of 1950.” ‘*City Lights*’ is Chaplin at the height of his powers, providing a loving look—and farewell—to the pure art of silent filmmaking.”⁷

“Perhaps the surest confirmation that *City Lights* was a masterpiece came at its Los Angeles premiere, where Chaplin’s friend Albert Einstein, the world’s greatest thinker and humanist, was in the audience.”⁸

⁷ <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-film-preservation-board/documents/citylights.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/30080/masterpieces-charlie-chaplins-city-lights>

In the Spotlight:
CHARLIE CHAPLIN

- 1 “FAILURE IS UNIMPORTANT. IT TAKES COURAGE TO MAKE A FOOL OF YOURSELF”
- 2 IN 1919, CHAPLIN CO-FOUNDED UNITED ARTISTS
- 3 ON JULY 6, 1925, HE WAS THE FIRST ACTOR TO BE ON THE COVER OF *TIME* MAGAZINE
- 4 HE ONCE LOST A CHARLIE CHAPLIN LOOK-ALIKE CONTEST
- 5 HE RECEIVED AN HONORARY OSCAR ON APRIL 10, 1972 AFTER A 20-YEAR EXILE IN EUROPE
- 6 CHAPLIN WAS KNIGHTED IN 1975 AND BECAME SIR CHARLES
- 7 CHAPLIN DID IT ALL: HE ACTED, DIRECTED, WROTE, PRODUCED, EDITED, AND COMPOSED MUSICAL SCORES FOR HIS MOVIES

Courtesy, Wordpress.com

Courtesy Nouveautycoon

“During the final scene I noticed Einstein wiping his eyes,” Chaplin reported.

About the Author

Emilio Iodice is a former American diplomat, business executive, university administrator, professor of leadership, and best-selling author, presidential historian, and public speaker.

Emilio Iodice was the son of immigrants. He received his BS from Fordham University, his MBA from the City University of New York, and was named to Beta Gamma Sigma – the honorary society of top business graduates. He conducted doctoral work at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Iodice spent over four decades as a senior executive and as an educator and as a university administrator, including being a key official for several administrations, and reaching the top ranks of the civil service, and the US diplomatic corps. He was among the most decorated officers in history with a Gold Medal for Heroism, a Gold Medal and Silver Medal, nominations for the Bronze Medal, and commendations and citations. He was Minister in key missions abroad and was named to the list of future Ambassadors. He was knighted by the King of Italy and received Medals of Honor from Spain and Italy. At age 33, he was named by the President to the Senior Executive Service as the youngest career public official to reach this distinction.

Before joining Loyola University Chicago as its Director and Vice President of the University, he was Vice President of Lucent Technologies in charge of global operations. He taught at Trinity College and, after nearly a decade at Loyola, was awarded the title of Director Emeritus and Professor of Leadership.

Among his best-selling books are: *A Kid from Philadelphia*, *Mario Lanza: The Voice of the Poets*; *Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times*; *Sisters*; *Future Shock 2.0*; *The Dragon Brief 2020*; and *Reflections, Stories of Love, Leadership, Courage and Passion*. In 2017, his book *When Courage was the Essence of Leadership, Lessons from History* was published and in 2019, the new edition was launched. Three new bestselling books were published in 2020 and 2021: *The Commander in Chief*; *The Return of Mussolini*, *The Rise of Modern-Day Tyranny*; and *Liberation*, which reached the number one bestselling status after one week. Royalties from the sale of his books go to support charitable causes.

Iodice was recently named a Senator of the Royal Family of Italy. He is Director of the Scientific Committee of the Italy USA Foundation, a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Values Based Leadership and sits on the Board of Trustees of several educational institutions.

Iodice resides in Rome, Italy. He can be reached at efiodice@yahoo.com and his books and works can be found at: <http://www.iodicebooks.com>.