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# The Awesome Responsibility of Leadership (Romania)

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Romania  
October, 2013

## The Awesome Responsibility of Leadership

C. William Pollard

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Leadership is an Awesome Responsibility of a leader has become a major part of my life.

I am honored and humbled today to receive this recognition from Emanuel University.

Honored because of the standards of excellence in education and service to God that Emanuel University has achieved.

Humbled because I know of the leadership and sacrifice that was required from many of you including your President Paul Negrut to achieve this result. To God Be The Glory.

Judy and I had the privilege of being with Paul and Delia 26 years ago during the dark years of Ceausescu's rule, at that time when Paul shared with us the vision for establishing a Christian University committed to teaching and developing leaders for the future – leaders in the church,

leaders in the professions, leaders in business, leaders in education and, yes, leaders in government – all with a commitment to serve our Lord and Savior. And here we are today – sharing in the fruits of God’s blessing and benefiting from the faithful leadership of Paul and many of you in making it happen.

Yes, leadership is an awesome responsibility! A leader has only one choice to make – to lead or mislead.

When there is misleadership or an absence of leadership there will be no meaningful results no matter how leadable the objective.

In the United States, Peter Drucker was often referred to as the father of modern day management. He has also been recognized for his contribution to the study and understanding of leadership principles.

For Drucker, leadership was not about those topics that are often emphasized in many of the popular books on leadership. These would include “leadership qualities,” “personality traits,” “charisma,” or a list of the “seven or ten characteristics of a good leader.” Drucker would often point out that leadership, in and of itself, was not good or desirable. He would go on and say that leadership was just a “means” and to “what end” was the crucial question. For Drucker, and for me, the end of leadership is

the people who follow, the direction they are headed, and the person they are becoming as they fulfill the mission and purpose of the organization being led.

Thus, a leader must know what he or she believes and why they believe it. They must know where they are going and why it is important for people to follow.

To accomplish this end objective of leadership, a leader must recognize the need to serve those being led. A leader must be able to define reality and understand the make-up of the human condition. In so doing we should recognize that our humanity cannot be defined solely by its physical or rational nature, but it also has a spiritual dimension.

It is this spiritual side of our humanity that influences our character, our ability to determine right and wrong, to recognize good and evil, and to make moral judgments. It is the driver for developing a philosophy of life and a world view that can provide a moral and ethical standard. A standard that is not relative and seeks truth even when there are no prescribed rules.

One of the reasons why Drucker was so interested in ServiceMaster was our mission as incorporated in our four objectives: To

honor God in all we do; To help people develop; To pursue excellence; and To grow profitably. He saw us not just as a business firm making money by serving customers, but also as a moral community that was held together by a commitment to the common purpose of the development of the whole person. A focus on who people were becoming in their work, not just what they were doing.

Defined as such, our leadership at ServiceMaster was more than a duty or a function of a title or rank; it was instead the need to fulfill this obligation to the people who followed. Max DePree, in his book *Leadership Is an Art*, has referred to this obligation as a posture of indebtedness of the leader to the people being led. As a leader implements this commitment, there develops a relationship and bond of trust with the people who follow and which confirms the legitimacy of the leader's authority as a person you can rely upon.

One of the best ways I have found to communicate this responsibility and obligation of leadership is to picture it as a debt – a liability, if you will – on the balance sheet of the leader.

The learning and understanding of what it means to responsibly lead and manage people in any organizational effort should never be divorced

from questions of faith or the question of God. For some in our secular societies, this conclusion may be difficult to accept, but others are ready to recognize its validity.

In his book, *The Fourth Great Awakening*, Robert Fogel, an economist from the University of Chicago and a Nobel Prize winner, traced the history of religious faith in America. In so doing, Fogel concluded that a major issue in the U.S. culture today was simply a lack of a distribution of what he referred to as "spiritual assets". There was, he said, a void in our society in the development of the character of people and a provision for their spiritual needs.

He also went on to say that in order for the business firm of the future to resolve the growing complexities of ethical issues, it will have to acquire more "spiritual capital".

In his commencement address at Harvard University, entitled *Worlds Split Apart*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn reminded the graduates of the misery and evil of the life he had experienced under a communist regime and the consequences for a society without a moral compass. He also noted, however, that he was increasingly finding in the West a growing dependence upon no other scale but a legal one. Such a society, he said,

would never reach for anything higher than a set of rules and the letter of the law. It would never take advantage of the high level of human potential and possibility. In such a culture, he concluded, there would be nothing more than moral mediocrity, paralyzing the noblest of impulses. For Solzhenitsyn, the source of truth and faith in his life came from God, an authority beyond himself. As he concluded he reminded the students that how one decided this question of God, *The Issue that Split this World Apart*.

One of the best ways that I found to share and lead responsibly in a way that reflected my faith as a follower of Jesus Christ was to serve as I led. In seeking to so serve, the truth of what I said could be measured by what I did.

Servant leadership has roots in the teachings of Jesus. The often cited example is His teaching of the disciples the night before He was betrayed. It would be the last time He would be with all of them before He was crucified. As He took a towel and a basin of water and washed their feet, he was reminding them of what would become a changing role for them in the future. They would no longer be disciples. They would become leaders in spreading the word of God's redeeming love and in

building His church. He was teaching them in a very practical and poignant way that to be effective as leaders of His church, it would not be about them – their titles, positions of authority, or the platform that they would assume. Instead, it was about the people who would follow and the nurturing and growth of those people in their faith and example of life so that they would be able to multiply themselves in the lives of others.

Does this example fit in today's world more than 2,000 years later? There is certainly no scarcity of feet to wash and towels are always available. I suggest that the only limitation, if there is one, is the ability of people in leadership to exercise the spirit of being humble, subordinate self, and to become engaged with compassion and love for those they lead. When we lead by serving, we assume a commitment to be an example in both our public and private life for others to follow, to be an initiator for change and growth, and to be always willing to do whatever you ask others to do.

Servant leadership has been a continuing learning experience for me. It has not come naturally. The first thing I had to understand was what it meant to walk in the shoes of those I would lead. This was a lesson that I would learn as I first joined the ServiceMaster senior management team



and spent the first two months of my ServiceMaster career as a Senior Vice President out cleaning floors and doing the maintenance and other work which was part of our service business. In so doing, I was beginning to understand what would be my dependence upon and responsibility to the people I would lead.

Later on in my career, as I became CEO of the firm, the faces of our service workers would flash across my mind as I was faced with those inevitable judgment calls between the rights and the wrongs of running a business. The integrity of my actions had to pass their scrutiny. When all the numbers and figures were added up and reported as the results of the firm, they had to accurately reflect the reality of our combined performance – a result that was real – a result that our customers and our shareholders could depend upon. A result that would reflect the true value of the firm. Otherwise I was deceiving myself and those that I was committed to serve.

Unfortunately, there are often many trappings around a position of leadership – the perks or prestige of the office and the arrogance of success can tempt leaders to focus on self and think they have all the answers rather than focusing on their responsibility to others. It is the evil

of hubris. It is often subtle and can have a cumulative effect on a leader's judgment unless it is nipped in the bud.

A leader should also recognize that an investment in people can be risky. Mistakes are often painful. Implicit in leadership is the power to make decisions that affect others. You can be right in your intent and decision, but wrong in how you use power to implement that decision. The mistakes I have made as a leader, that hurt the most, are those that have resulted in breached relationships with others. In seeking to achieve specific performance goals, I have at times pressed too hard for results without understanding the subjective factors of fear, insecurity, or risk of failure that were influencing substandard performance of the individuals involved. The pain of honestly facing your mistakes and seeking forgiveness is part of the learning process of investing others, and yes, sometimes recouping the investment for a greater return in the lives of others.

It was C. S. Lewis who reminded us: "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – they are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat,

but it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit.”

Integrating faith and learning has been a hallmark of Christian higher education. It has become an integral part of what you are doing here at Emanuel. It is special for Judy and me to be here as you inaugurate this Center for Leadership Development. As you are teaching and training leaders of tomorrow – you will be affirming that our Godly and Christian values can make a difference in the life of the leader and those being led. You will be taking an important step in helping students understand not only the importance of integrating faith and learning but also integrating faith and doing.

For me, the world of business became a channel to lead and invest myself in the growth and development of others. A channel for fulfilling and living my faith; a channel that reached from a janitor’s closet in Saudi Arabia to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China – from sweeping streets in Osaka, Japan to ringing the bell of the New York Stock Exchange. The marketplace provided a wonderful opportunity for me to embrace and engage those who do not believe the way I do, but whom God loves and who, by my words and actions, could see the reality of His love.

The global marketplace provides a wonderful opportunity for followers of Jesus Christ to live and share their faith. For us at ServiceMaster this grew to involve the management and employment of over 200,000 people, delivering services to over 10 million customers in the U.S. and 45 other countries. There is a common language of performance in the market that **crosses** secular, cultural, and religious barriers. When there is performance people listen. And yes, as some people listen they respond to the redemptive message of God's love. As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to be His Ambassadors to a lost and needy world.

A leader has only one choice to make – to lead or mislead.

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