

Utah Valley University

From the Selected Works of Susan R. Madsen

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Thinking about Leadership by Nanerl Keohane (Featured Publication & Author Interview)

Susan R. Madsen, *Utah Valley University*



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Featured Publication & Author Interview

Thinking about Leadership

by Nannerl Keohane (Princeton U.P., 2010)



Our guest interviewer this month is Susan R. Madsen. Susan is an associate professor of management at Utah Valley University and an independent leadership and change consultant. She has been heavily involved

for many years in researching the lifetime development of prominent women leaders. During the course of her work, she has personally interviewed numerous women university presidents, governors, and international leaders. Her books include On Becoming a Woman Leader: Learning from the Experiences of University Presidents (2008) and Developing Leadership: Learning from the Experiences of Women Governors (2009).



Author Nannerl O. Keohane is the Laurance S. Rockefeller Distinguished Visiting Professor of Public Affairs and the University Center for Human Values

at Princeton University and former president of Wellesley College and Duke University. She is the author of Higher Ground: Ethics and Leadership in the Modern University and Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

Thinking about Leadership?

Nan: From the time I became President of Wellesley, I had wanted to reflect on leadership. I took the job for many reasons but, in part, because as a political theorist, I was really interested in understanding leadership or holding power from the inside. And I told myself when I took the job, I will learn more about what it feels like and someday I'll come back and write about it. So I've thought about this book, in a general sense, for twenty, thirty years, but this was the first time I could sit down and really reflect on it. The title was chosen by the publisher. My alternative was "Leading Questions" and he said that wasn't a good title for many reasons and so he suggested *Thinking about Leadership* and it sounded good to me.

I really like the title because that's exactly what you do—think about leadership.

That's right. And, that was his point. So, I was convinced he was right from the start.

You chose five or six core topics that seemed to emerge from important insights you've gathered from your background and experiences, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. In the introduction you outlined the purposes of your book. One was "to provide a fuller sense of the aims and activities of leaders and suggest how we might judge their performance," and the second was "to help clear away some

of the underbrush to permit a clearer view of the subjects we were exploring." How do you think your book does both of these?

That's a very good question. If you're going to say something is among your aims, you ought to do it. It's easier to answer the second one. The clearing away of the underbrush is, as you probably know, a reference to a phrase of John Locke's when he described his aims as a theorist. I thought that was a good model. I was not trying to set up a whole new structure about leadership—invent a theoretical structure with lots of bells and whistles—instead I wanted to get rid of some of the preconceptions or some of the smoke and mirrors so that people could see more clearly what the essential features of leadership are and how we might go about understanding them better. The idea of getting rid of some of the extraneous stuff or some of the stereotypes, some of the overly rhetorical glib comments about leadership was my way of clearing away the underbrush. So we're really focusing on what's central to leadership, what's important about it in direct and relatively straightforward ways.

In terms of the first point about the aims and activities of leaders and judging their performance, in the book itself I don't talk that much about what criteria we might use to judge a leader's performance, but I do discuss the importance of certain kinds of activities on the part of leaders, whether it's learning how

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Democracy?

6. **Susan:** I'm always interested to find out what inspires authors to write books on leadership. So, what inspired you to write this book, and why did you choose the title

to make good decisions, managing their closest followers, choosing good people, relating well to the folks who are following them—in a sense of being trustworthy—and reaching out to ask for suggestions. We judge a leader, in part, by results. When a leader has set forward goals that we have, in some sense, endorsed or participated in, then if that leader provides ways for us to work together to achieve those goals, that should count as a form of success.

But it is an even better record if the goals are achieved through methods or activities which are engaging of others, which are honest and straightforward, activities that show clarity of perception and a sense of consequences for the long run. So it's a complicated issue. I don't have a formula for judging leaders, but I do think we should pay attention both to how well they achieve the aims they have clarified or enunciated and also the kinds of methods they use to get there.

I think you're right. You wrote about the importance of being both inside *and* outside as an observer in looking at leadership and understanding it. You mentioned that an outside observer is likely to be more aware of the impact of a leader's activities, and to see more clearly how a leader influences other people. Yet, you also explained that leadership has to be seen from the inside as well to really have that well-rounded appreciation for what's involved. How do you bring together both of those perspectives in moving this leadership dialogue forward?

I do try to bring both those perspectives. I suppose what's most unusual about the book is the attempt to show the inside perspective from the point of view of someone who's actually held leadership positions and had

some power, but to do so not as an account of one's own activities, not as a memoir, but instead with an analysis of what it is you think you were doing and how you approach the activities of a leader—making decisions, appointing other people to work with you, etcetera—and how it feels to be actually *doing* that rather than looking at it from the perspective of folks who are being affected or who are seeing the results.

I also think that chapter six of the book ["How Do Character, Ethics and Leadership Interact"] is quite important on this point because as you know, it's a lot about the ways that leadership can have an impact on you. Holding power can make a difference in both your perception of the world, your take on the world, and also, at some level, your personality because it is different from not having power. I was trying to recount that as well. It's a lot about the ways in which having power can have an influence on your character, the personal characteristics that might lead you to choose to have power and the specific kinds of ethical challenges you're likely to face in holding power or being a leader which are in some ways similar and in some ways different from challenges that you face ethically as an ordinary individual going about your daily life. So I was thinking about those activities that you really can only see if you are in the position of leadership or, if like Machiavelli or the advisors of a president, you're working very, very closely with some powerful people.

On the other hand, there are certain things that are really hard to see from the inside. You don't have as clear a sense of how other people are going to be affected by your activities because you're thinking about issues both from an instrumental and from a goals oriented point of view and less from a view of how each individual

who is touched is going to have some aspects of his or her own life changed with some new opportunities opened or others that may be foreclosed on. A leader who is making decisions is not usually thinking in any depth about how this is going to feel for the individuals who are affected, partly because, often, there are just too many people to make those kinds of judgments and also because you never really know how it feels.

One of the best phrases here would be Aristotle's: the wearer of the shoe is in a better position to judge the shoe than the cobbler. The cobbler may think he's made a beautiful shoe but if it pinches and it makes it impossible to walk, it's not a good shoe. But, only the person who wears the shoe knows that. So it's like the follower is wearing the shoe and the leader is making the shoe. But, on the other hand, the follower doesn't necessarily know how to make shoes and the cobbler or the leader is crafting the framework or guiding the situation.

That is a great analogy.

Well Aristotle has a lot of great analogies.

While serving as a college or university president multiple times you really had that inside view, yet you do state that there are some things that you did not see from the inside. How were you able to get that outside view while you were on the inside?

I do talk about that at several points in the book, as you know, and it is a subject of particular interest to me. One aspect of it is that you reach out to the people whom you trust who are closest to you but who are also, in a sense, on the outside. They're sort of quasi inside and quasi outside

and you say, so tell me how this policy is affecting people, tell me what the impact of these decisions really is, and tell me how our decisions are regarded by the folks who are supposed to be affected by them. People who are around you whom you trust, but who have some distance from what you're doing, can give you thoughtful answers on that. They can convey what they hear from others about both the strengths and the weaknesses of what you're doing and you have to be really open to this. You have to be open to critical comments as well as praise. One of the things I say fairly often is that leaders are very subject to flattery. It's very easy to assume that everything is just going hunky-dory—particularly if you're doing a good job—and that everybody thinks you're great whereas in fact, there may be a good deal of grumbling in the background that you don't hear. But, if you have some people around you whose ears are attuned to the grumbling and who are not out there just to undermine you or cut you down but who are really invested in your success, they can say, look, here's a problem that is being perceived about what you're doing that you're not hearing about directly but if you allow it to fester, it's going to come back and really haunt you. That's the kind of comments you can get if you have people around you whom you can trust.

8. You also need to be open to wider forms of communication. This is one of the things that are distinctive about a democracy. There will be the press. There will be the blogs. There will be a lot of people who will be running their mouths off about what's good and what's bad about your work. You can't spend all your time reading those papers and those blogs but you can have people around you who pay some attention to them.

And, you ought to at least sometimes dip into them yourself and not just trust somebody coming to you with a digested summary.

Of course it's really hard to accept the kind of criticism that can sometimes come, especially if you think it's ignorant or misguided which [chuckle] it sometimes is. It's not as though critics are always right; but you still need to know what the critics are saying, at some level—particularly if it's being said by thoughtful people who are not just exercising their right of griping—in order to do a better job. You may want either to adjust your course a little bit or explain what you're doing more clearly or in a different way. Taking such steps may remove some impediments that would otherwise lie in your path. It can take a lot of time to clean up messes or deal with roadblocks. If you can figure out in advance where they're likely to spring up, and try to make it less likely that they will appear, you'll have more energy to spend on positive things.

Excellent. I did appreciate and enjoy your notion of family resemblances. This was a different way for me to think through the leadership issues you presented. Can you explain what you mean by that term and then how it relates to leadership?

Right. Ludwig Wittgenstein developed this notion of “family resemblances” to describe what it is that different forms of games have in common. Ball games, card games, word games, he would have used video games if they had existed at the time. Lacrosse and chess seem like very different phenomena; what do these games have in common? And his point was that lacrosse and chess and Scrabble don't have any single *thing* in common, but they have some common patterns or they share

some overlaps like competition or seeking certain types of goals. They have things in common in much the same way that members of a family resemble one another. The things we call games all share at least some aspects which are similar even if no single two games are alike in every respect.

And I found that very helpful in thinking about leadership because, as you know, one of the things I wrestled with from the beginning in the book is how many different kinds of activities are described with the name leadership, everything from the chief of a homeless community or a volunteer leader on a desert island to the head of an empire. We call them all leaders. The warlords in Afghanistan or a gang leader in New York or a Cub Scout troop master, we call them all leaders.

How can we use the term leader to describe all of these? Yet we do. So I boil this down, in the best instance I think, to my definition of leadership. Leaders define or clarify goals for a group of individuals and bring together the energies of members of those groups to pursue them. That statement of defining or clarifying goals and bringing or mobilizing energies together to pursue them is true of all the types of leaders that I suggested even though they use very different methods and they set very different goals. The goals of a Cub Scoutmaster are totally different from those of an Afghanistan warlord, but they're both setting goals and they're both mobilizing energies to pursue them. So that's an example of a family resemblance across activities that otherwise seem very different.

Thank you. Early in the book you made a statement that I found very interesting. You wrote “we should avoid either idolizing or demonizing our leaders if we are to understand what they do

in society and how leadership might be exercised effectively and responsibly.” I think we do this a lot in our society. Can you give any specific examples of how doing this has really prevented us from understanding?

This is one of those places where I had current events in mind. But I also drew on my training in French history and political philosophy because before the French Revolution, a lot of Frenchmen tended to idolize their kings. They thought their monarchs were the source of all earthly good. They could heal illnesses. They brought beneficence to the land. We were in Egypt in early January, before the revolution there, and I noted how the Pharaohs historically were regarded as the source of food. They were the source of everything. That would be literally idolizing, making these people gods. Sometimes leaders are regarded that way in many different cultures.

In the U.S., the tendency is more likely to be the opposite. We demonize our leaders in the sense of regarding them with suspicion or as the sources of harm to us if they’re trying to do things that we don’t like or if we don’t like the way they’re going about their business. It’s not as though everybody demonizes our leaders or that we all demonize every leader, but there’s a sense on the part of some people in the current world—not just in the United States of America—that politics is messy or even evil. There’s a sense that most people who go into politics are motivated solely by the desire for power or the desire to get rich. This pervasive attitude involves thinking that these leaders are probably not morally good people, after all, and therefore you look for the flaws in a leader and say, see I told you so, rather than trying to see why some of them may in fact be acting out of

very good motives, really wanting to try to make the community better.

They’re still ordinary human beings and we’re not likely to idolize them but I was also thinking that even in a country like ours, there’s a lot of ceremony and pomp that surrounds our leaders—whether it’s the twenty-one gun salutes or “Hail to the Chief” or the ways in which we see the President as a person apart. Even in a democracy like ours where the leaders are heavily criticized, there can be a little bit of a sense of idolization too. So both these things are present in lots of different types of societies.

And when we make those judgments either way about our leaders, I think it pulls us in emotionally so that we can’t really understand or judge logically.

I think that’s true. It’s a shortcut. You don’t really set out to say alright this is a complicated human being in a very difficult and very complicated job, how can I understand as many of those different dimensions as possible. We rarely think that way. It’s much easier to say this is a really good guy or this is a guy who I really don’t like. It’s just easier to put people into cubbyholes like that. We do that in many parts of our lives but I think we often do it with leaders.

This leads us nicely into the next question. You discussed many amazing leaders throughout your book. Who would you say have been your top three favorite historical leaders to study and learn about?

I think my set might be surprising. It’s not as though they’re always the ones I admire the most. The way you asked the question, “Which are my favorites to study and write about?” I would answer with

examples that I choose partly because they are interesting, partly because I admire what they accomplished but partly because I’m just fascinated by the way they went about their work. The first is Nelson Mandela, whom I do admire a great deal. Next Franklin Roosevelt, because he was such a fascinating leader and although I admire him too, he was a more mixed human being in some ways than Nelson Mandela. Mandela is also a mixed human being, but he did so many good things in a very difficult situation. Roosevelt’s record was a little more mixed. He was basically a very strong leader but was a very complicated politician. I’m trying to figure out how he accomplished his goals through some pretty convoluted strategies. [Chuckles] It’s quite fascinating.

The third is Queen Elizabeth the First of England. I really became fascinated with how she approached power in her very difficult situation. She was a young woman coming to the throne without a lot of allies in a tremendously divided country, in terms of religion, and under a good deal of threat from Europe across the Channel. How she maneuvered her way through this, how she both acted as a woman and used some of her feminine qualities to accomplish some of her goals, but in other ways was very consciously a king and acting as a monarch in the traditional kingly way. I found her a fascinating leader. So those three would be my answer.

In your book you also mentioned some negative examples of leadership. Some authors have suggested that those who influence negatively should not be called leaders. You write that for an activity to be truly counted as leadership, the accomplishment of goals—a foundational

element—must include followers as willing individuals.

Yes. I do believe that. I think it partly depends on what you mean by willing individuals, but what I was trying to do was to say that even a Hitler, however evil his goals, has to be considered a leader by my definition in that he was defining and clarifying goals for the German people and mobilizing the energies of the people to pursue them. However horrific those goals were and however distasteful it is to think of the Germans pursuing those goals, he was providing leadership and they were willing, many of them.

And so what I'm trying to do by that distinction is to rule out leadership of a slave driver or a galley slave master who is whipping people at their posts. For activities like that, the human being gets reduced to a machine and the people are not in any sense willing except through fear of the consequences of disobeying. I don't think that counts as leadership. That's domination. That's enslavement. So I was trying to draw a line there not so much in terms of the qualities of the motives or the praiseworthiness of the activities but in terms of the willing involvement of the followers. I'm drawing this from Max Weber, whom I have used a lot in the book; he said specifically that leadership must involve at least some willing followers, and I think he's right. That to me is a more useful bright line distinction point than saying leaders must be doing good things. I think leaders sometimes do bad things and so do followers, but that doesn't mean that they therefore cease being leaders.

I agree. If people are following them and they're influencing, even if it's bad, it is some form of leading.

It's not that all those who appear

to be in the position of "followers"—all the citizens of Germany in 1930—must be sharing the goals or carrying forward the dictates of the leader—Hitler; however, some of them at least must do so willingly for his leadership to be effective. And in other contexts, it's not that followers must always share all the specific goals that are defined by the leader in the sense that they would have independently chosen those goals. Sometimes people do share the goals, as on a desert island when everybody wants to be saved and everybody wants to survive; but think of my example in the book of a young worker in a Chinese factory in the twentieth century or an English millworker in the nineteenth who comes in from the farm in order to make money to send back to her family. She doesn't care about making boots for people in London or sneakers for American teenagers. She cares about the money the factory will allow her to make to send home and so she's a willing individual in following the foreman as a leader but it's not as though she independently said, "Wow, what I really want to do with my life is make sneakers for somebody in Los Angeles."

So that's part of it. People may choose to participate because they see their own self-interest in following the goal the leader has set, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they think wow, hunky-dory, that's exactly what I want to do with my life. So that's another way of thinking about the willingness factor here.

You wrote that one of the main responsibilities of a leader is to help followers develop their talents as leaders. In your experience, do you believe there are differences between men and women or between people in various cultures with the commitment or interest as leaders

toward helping followers develop their talents as leaders?

I'll give you a guarded answer. It should be more likely that persons in certain cultures, cultures where nurturing is regarded as a good thing rather than strict, rigid hierarchy and authoritarian separation, will see nurturing as their appropriate responsibility. And it may well be that women, who are in many cultures taught to be more nurturing, might be more likely to engage in these activities. But, as you know from my chapter on gender, I basically would remind all of us that women are individuals and differ from one another just as much as men do. Some women are nurturing and some women are not. For example, Margaret Thatcher was anything but nurturing. And, she's not alone in this. There are women who are just as tough and just as "take no prisoners" in their leadership styles as men and some men who are very good mentors and very nurturing of their followers as well. So it may be a matter of overlapping bell curves, where there may be more women who tend to be nurturing but that doesn't mean that women are always nurturing and men are never nurturing and vice versa. I think it is, in the end, an individual thing which has at least as much to do with culture as it does with gender.

Your book discusses the influence of gender on how one uses power. Can you talk about this?

Right. Well as you know, I resist the idea that gender is always determinative of how you will be a leader, of how you will use power. I think it is one factor along with situation, along with training, along with experience of various kinds, along with the challenges you face, along with the type of organization. Gender does contribute to it in many instances but it can contribute in

a number of ways. For example, again to refer to Margaret Thatcher; for her, gender was relevant, but it was mainly relevant as something to be avoided as a stereotype. She really didn't want to be typecast as a woman leader. She wanted to be seen to be as at least as strong as any of the men in her cabinet. She was as tough as anybody and tougher than most. So for her, gender was relevant because people saw her as physically a female. Of course she couldn't make that not true, but she was determined to have it be not relevant at all in terms of how she actually used power.

Yet for some women, gender may be more relevant in terms of how one uses power. If you've been brought up in a context where you are rewarded for being nurturing and supportive, you may well regard these as good and important attributes of your personality and helpful in almost any situation. It's likely that you will bring them with you into a situation of leadership, but that certainly isn't always true of women and particularly women in very top leadership posts.

When you have to make decisions about life and death for thousands or millions of people, or really

tough resource allocation decisions and decisions about hiring and firing people who are going to be contributing to the fortunes of a nation, you don't have a lot of time to think in a nurturing and supportive way. You can do it sometimes, on a day to day basis with people around you, but more often the organization and the situation and the demands of the job are going to dictate what you can do. Your rhetoric may be nurturing, your goals, and your hopes may be nurturing, but on a day to day basis, having power at the top of an enormous organization brings its own demands and is going to shape the behavior of a leader whether he or she is a woman or a man.

I'm also aware—as increasingly all of us are aware—that democracy is more complicated than it may first seem. It's not simply a matter of everybody having the vote, although that's important. It's also a question of how the leaders behave, how the followers behave towards their leaders, what kinds of climate these people find themselves in, in terms of resources internally and internationally. Democracy is a form of organization that can allow people to flourish or it can lead to demagoguery and violence and internal strife.

I agree with you on that. In fact, I've been quoted as saying that "everything is not always about gender."

Exactly. It's a fascinating dimension. Gender certainly needs to be better understood but it's much too easy to regard it as determinative of everything.

I've conducted many interviews with women governors, women university presidents, and women leaders in various sectors and

from a variety of cultures. You made a statement in your book that supports one of my findings. You wrote, there is a "struggle that powerful female leaders admit they have throughout their journeys with insecurity and lack of confidence." Do you think men struggle as much as women with that lack of confidence and insecurity and maybe just don't talk about it?

Well there's a good deal of evidence that women in our culture, and probably women in almost every culture, are less likely to have high self-confidence than men for a variety of reasons. We've been looking at that with undergraduate women even at very fine universities. So women in general, I think, find that their confidence isn't necessarily encouraged as much by those around them as men. There are always exceptions, women who are regarded as being really strong and encouraged in everything they do, but more likely a man will have his confidence bolstered from the time he is a boy and a woman will find her life more complicated than that. One of the examples in my book is Katharine Graham the publisher of the *Washington Post* who was very open about her problems with lack of confidence.

I would expect that there might be men who also have problems with insecurity and who don't talk about it because it's not supposed to be a male thing to do, to admit that you aren't perfect or aren't really strong and tough all the way through. I've known men, a few men at least, well enough to know that they can have some areas of insecurity about what they're doing and are not as self-confident as they would like to be, but it's much less likely that a man will talk about it, and that's

interesting in itself. I hadn't thought about it, but it is more okay for a woman to admit that she has some problems with insecurity, I guess. On the other hand, you might say, well some women would die before they would admit it because they know it's a stereotype about women. A lot of these things are very complex about gender.

They definitely are. You spent quite a bit of time in one of your chapters on judgment. Why do you believe it is such an important topic to discuss?

I think there are three reasons. First of all, I do believe what I said at the beginning of that section of the book, which is that judgment is the single most important quality that a leader brings to almost any situation. Being able to make quick decisions or thoughtful decisions about the aspects of a situation, to look around and see where the next threat or opportunity is coming from, to have a sense of timing and know when you should move and when you should hold on, make good judgments about the people that you want around you. There are just so many ways in which people either tend to come up right in such choices or blunder and make mistakes; and I do believe this is partly "natural." I think of my own grandkids; some of them are naturally thoughtful and you would trust their judgment in a situation of crisis and others, who are equally wonderful and loveable and bright, just sort of wander around creatively all over the place and you wouldn't trust their judgment in a crisis. So I think it's partly natural and it's partly learned but whatever combination it is, being able to make the kinds of choices, see the kinds of paths and pitfalls that good judgment allows you to do is, to me, an essential quality of leadership.

So the first reason I emphasize judgment is because I do see it as so central. The second reason is because it really is of particular interest to political theorists and, after all, one of my motives for writing the book was to discuss leadership from the perspective of a political philosopher. This is one topic within the leadership experience that political theorists have talked a lot about, from Aristotle to the present. Well, not a lot, that's wrong, but at least some have touched on it. And, so that's another reason why I wanted to get into it. Whether it was Aristotle or Hobbes or Hannah Arendt or Max Weber or whoever, they've said really interesting things.

I guess the final reason is because it's a challenge. [Chuckle] It's really hard to pin down what is going on when you're exercising judgment and it's also very hard to disentangle good judgment from good results. [Chuckle] We see the outcome that we like and we think, "Oh, that person must have had really good judgment," but that cannot be exactly the same thing because there's the matter of luck, there's the matter of opportunity, there's the matter of who else helped you, and so on. So there do have to be some distinctions between good judgment and good outcomes and this finally goes back to the point about assessing our leaders. One of the things we want to know in advance, if possible, is how good is their judgment? How likely are they to make the right call in an emergency, in a tough situation, in an unprecedented situation? Because we're all going to rely a great deal on that.

You also discussed other important personal characteristics of leaders, and you did so in a very unique way. You focused on three pairs of words that, at a glance, seem to be opposites yet you presented them as

complimentary. Tell us a little bit about these pairs of leadership characteristics and why you decided to focus on these three.

[Chuckle]. That's a very good question. Frankly, one reason I did it was as a writing device. Here I was writing a chapter on qualities that can be useful in leadership—and that chapter could have been a long book in itself—yet I was also trying to make the point that traits are not in themselves definitive of leadership in isolation. So I was trying to emphasize the importance of certain qualities or characteristics, but not make it sound as though all leaders have these traits. So it was a tricky chapter to write and I didn't want it to take over the book. I had to decide which other kinds of qualifications I would spend time on, meaning there were also things I didn't have time to discuss—stamina or a sense of humor, for instance.

And here, once again, I was guided by Max Weber. Two of my pairs are drawn from his wonderful essay, "Politics as a Vocation." He talks about passion and proportion, and he says specifically these are two things that don't always, and maybe not often, go together. A leader should be passionate about something and care deeply about it, but also have enough distance from it to make some reflective, careful judgments about it and not just follow your fanatical tendencies. And I think Weber is absolutely right about that. Leaders need to care about something and they cannot be in it simply for personal glory or making money or whatever the narrow selfish goal might be. You need to care about something to take on the work of a leader, and "passion" is a sort of shorthand for that, but you also need to have enough distance from the job, from the cause, from yourself, from other people, that you can make some fairly cool judgments instead

of just being carried along by your passion. That pair for Weber was an obvious set of complementary things that might seem opposites.

The first pair is pure Weber. In the second pair—empathy and detachment—I’m building on Weber. One of the things often said about leaders is they really need to be empathetic with the people that they’re leading. They need to care about the people. And, I agree with that, but I also believe you have to have some kind of detachment from the people that you’re leading. You cannot get so caught up in their personal woes and fortunes and pluses and minuses that you subordinate the good of the organization or the good of the association or the goals you’re trying to pursue to the personal needs or quirks of the individuals that you’re working with who are following you. So I think empathy is important, but detachment, another way of talking about proportion, is also important.

The last pair, courage and moderation, was my way of doing a kind of rhetorical flourish, of saying I’m going to talk about these pairs. And I did come to see that courage and moderation are often seen as opposites because courage is sort of brashly saying I’m going to move into the fray and moderation is sort of being balanced in all things. But when you think about it more deeply, courage can be exercised by people who are not boldly moving ahead but are showing the courage to stay put when everybody is trying to push them to take action. Courage can be taking a lonely stand when everybody else is losing their heads. Similarly, moderation is certainly different from the brash moving ahead but it has qualities of strength that we sometimes don’t notice.

With your educational background, I suspect the chapter

on democracy may have been one of your most enjoyable chapters to write. I don’t believe there is much written specifically on making leadership compatible with democracy, so I found that chapter particularly fascinating.

I chose to write the chapter about democracy because it is such an important dimension of our political experience today. There are so many people who say democracy is the best form of government. As Churchill says, all the other forms are worse. Today some people believe that democracy is going to take over the world, that it’s our responsibility to bring democracy to everyone. And, in many ways, I sympathize with that impulse, but I’m also aware—as increasingly all of us are aware—that democracy is more complicated than it may first seem. It’s not simply a matter of everybody having the vote, although that’s important. It’s also a question of how the leaders behave, how the followers behave towards their leaders, what kinds of climate these people find themselves in, in terms of resources internally and internationally. Democracy is a form of organization that can allow people to flourish or it can lead to demagoguery and violence and internal strife.

We have to recognize that there are consequences if we truly believe that members of a democracy are equal political citizens. Insofar as this is part of the definition of a democracy, that we all share in determining the political outcome with some degree of rough equality, then by definition, leadership is going to pose a tension within democracy. Leaders have more influence and they’re asked to accomplish more and make more powerful decisions. So it’s the tension between leadership and democracy—understood as requiring political equality—that

really fascinated me. But I chose this topic also because democracy is the dominant form of government of our time. In the past, it might have been more important to write about monarchy or aristocracy, if you lived in a society where those were the dominant forms of governments, but for us it’s democracy. So, I wanted to understand more about how leadership works in a democracy, both about how it supports democracy and how it may threaten democracy.

Did you have any major ahas while writing that chapter, or were these things you’ve been thinking about for years?

This was one of the most difficult chapters to write and my thinking evolved as I was writing it. I guess one of the most complicated parts was figuring out what it means “to rule and be ruled in turn,” which is another suggestive Aristotelian phrase. In other words, to say that in a healthy democracy somebody who becomes a leader and has the disproportionate power and influence that comes with that should only do so for a set period of time, and with limitations on the number of perquisites he can amass and pass on to his family.

But this means that there is a tension between some aspects of democracy and human nature. People like to hold onto power. People like to amass perks and pass them on to their kids. We see that happening all the time. So how do you create a framework in which the leaders will indeed take power and have influence, so that they can get the work of governing done effectively, but only for a period of time, and then go back to being an ordinary citizen? How do people move from being citizen followers, to being leaders, and then back to being

citizen followers, and doing that in sequence over the course of their lives and over the course of the government? If that could be accomplished, you wouldn't have the problem with the tension between leadership and democracy. But, as I said, it's difficult because that goes against the grain of human nature in many ways.

In chapter six, "How Do Character, Ethics and Leadership Interact," you wrestled with issues between and among leadership, power, ethics, and character. You shared some great examples like Mandela and Lincoln, and also discussed the difficulty many leaders have in walking that line between having power and remaining ethical. Did some of the perspectives you share come from your own experiences?

That's a very thoughtful question. As a university president, I didn't face a lot of issues that were threats to my morality, but there were certainly issues where I felt I had to make tradeoffs and had to choose the lesser of two evils. Not at the level that a president of a nation state might have to do. I never had to send anybody into war or create a situation in which some members of the community are giving up an enormous amount and others are gaining, but I did certainly face situations where there didn't seem to be any single good outcome and every outcome came with downsides as well as advantages. Some people would be more advantaged or satisfied with the answer than others, whichever side of the decision I came down on in the end; that's what it means to decide. You simply have to try to find the best answer and move forward because you don't have the option, as a leader, of just washing your hands and saying sorry I can't

make this decision. Non-decisions are also decisions, in their own way.

Of course you don't have this option in your daily life either. You have to make decisions. You have to take responsibility.

But the word responsibility was the one that kept coming back to me again and again. The political leader's responsibilities for his or her followers, for the good of the whole organization, are definitive of the kinds of challenges that come with ethical difficulties here. But in the same way, other people who have responsibilities for other human beings, whether it is parents or school superintendents or whatever, also have tougher choices than they might for themselves as individuals. One of my favorite

examples is the very familiar one of the German citizen who was hiding a Jewish family in his house and when the Nazis come and knock on the door and he's asked do you have any Jews here and he says no, at some level he's performing an immoral act because he's telling a lie, but most of us would say he's doing the right thing because the costs of telling the truth are so much more profound. But he wouldn't have had to make that kind of tough moral choice if he hadn't had the responsibility for the Jews. So if you magnify that to the level of a nation

state, you've got responsibilities for so many different people and some of the responsibilities are actually in conflict because you can't always achieve good things for everybody at the same time. So these are tough decisions. It's easy to dismiss them saying, well leaders have dirty hands because they make all these difficult ethical decisions, but you *have* to make the decisions, and at some level, your followers *want* you to do so, to protect them or advance their interests. And, there's no way in which you can do it, and have it all come out smelling like roses.

My favorite example is Churchill with the French fleet. When France fell to the Nazis in 1940, Churchill had to make a

Judgment is the single most important quality that a leader brings to almost any situation. Being able to make quick decisions or thoughtful decisions about the aspects of a situation... There are just so many ways in which people either tend to come up right in such choices or blunder and make mistakes; and I do believe this is partly "natural".... It's really hard to pin down exactly what is going on when you're exercising good judgment and it's also very hard to disentangle good judgment from good results.

decision about whether to bomb the French fleet in Algiers. These ships were carrying thousands of sailors who had been the closest allies of the English only a week or so before, but since the French authorities refused to scuttle the ships or sail them to neutral waters, in the end he had to bomb those ships to prevent one of the largest fleets in the world from falling into German hands. That was a terrible decision. Churchill said that agonizing about that decision was the time in his life when he lost the most sleep. But he had to make a decision. That's the kind of thing

that leads people to say, well he's immoral, he decided to bomb the French boats. But it would have been equally immoral, to let the French fleet become a part of the Nazi armament in the Mediterranean, threaten the dominance of the British Navy and the US Navy, and take many more lives of Allied soldiers and sailors. So political leaders, especially, have to make tough decisions that are larger in scope and sometimes more profound in their consequences than ordinary individuals face. And since these decisions are very rarely ones that can be made with an obvious optimal outcome for everybody, this leads so many people to think that leaders are often sort of dirty or immoral

I think that when a leader stops wrestling with those issues is the time you need to start worrying.

Yes. That's absolutely true. For a leader who just thinks this is easy to do and goes to bed and sleeps well that night.... I think it was very important that Churchill found it agonizing.

You have many unique statements in your book that provide some great food for thought. For example, you wrote, "...but in the end, no leader can dwell too often on her deficiencies if she is to have the self-confidence and focus to get on with the work." It seems to me that many leaders continue to focus more on fixing weaknesses than on strengthening and developing their talents and natural gifts.

Yes. I've observed people and also I could find myself at certain points worrying about some problem, some aspects of my personality that I wished were different, but I realized that you just don't have time to brood on things like that. You

do the best you can. To paraphrase a familiar saying, "You come to leadership with the character that you have." You try to avoid having your character be perverted by some of the situations that you might face and if possible to be strengthened, but you can't spend all your time bemoaning the facts. For example, if you're not a particularly well organized person, even if you wish you were better organized, you're not going to change your life in a fundamental way at the age of forty or fifty. So, you should recognize that you need a really good executive assistant or whatever it may be.

Leaders of large organizations have so many things on their plates. They don't have time to brood about things that they cannot change or second guess themselves in terms of going back over a decision they've made over and over again and thinking, well, maybe I should have made it differently. You just don't have time to do that, and it takes energy away from the things you ought to be spending your life doing at that next stage.

Well said. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share as we wrap up?

We didn't talk much about the relationships between leaders and followers, but one of the main points in the chapter on leaders and followers is the reciprocity of leaders and their *closest* subordinates or their *closest* lieutenants and how important this is to a leader. I think that's an aspect of leadership that's not sufficiently well studied. People talk about "the relationships" between leaders and followers as though all followers were alike. What I try to do is to look at it as a series of concentric circles so your relationships with the people who are closest to you, your vice-presidents, your deans, your closest

subordinates, your colleagues, are different from your "relationships," I would actually use the term "connections," with followers who are much more distant, the people who work in a factory in Nebraska when your headquarters is in New York, or whatever, people whom you may not ever meet. They are your followers. They are essential to the work, but your relationship or your connection with them is different.

So, the point for the people with whom you are closest, it's not just "feedback" that you get from interacting with them or hearing about their views, it's "dialogue." In fact it's what I, as a philosopher, would call "dialectic." You build a better synthesis from having something you put forward be the thesis, having the reaction from other people be the antithesis and then working together to get a better answer than any of you could have gotten alone. So it's not just a feedback loop. It's more like a dialogue or dialectic where you get to a better and a different place through the conversation, through the answers, through assimilating the feedback and adjusting your behavior. And this relates to your question about what new insights I gained. I became much more sensitive to the subtle nuanced dimensions of the connections between leaders and their followers than I ever had before I wrote the book. I never spent much time thinking about that.

Excellent! Nan, thank you so much for your time and insightful responses.

I wish you all the best and I thank you again for some very interesting questions.