



AT LAST REPORT

In March, 1995, William Rees-Mogg, editor of *The Times of London*, reported the “Simultaneous collapse in the quality of world leadership,” adding, “It must be more than a coincidence.” Remarkably, he was looking in the right place, with the right expectations, but through the wrong lens. Eight years earlier, John W. Gardner had exposed “leadership” as a fraud perpetrated by managers to cast a veil of mystery over their mundane activities and to brand themselves as seers and visionaries: “More than four decades of objective research have not produced clear answers... about leadership.” Wrong place, wrong expectations, right lens.

But, as the Bard said, “Ambition o’erleaps itself,” and, sure enough, by the year 2000 the idea of leadership had mutated into four equally dissipative strains of nonsense: “organizational *skills*,” “behavioral *styles*,” “bromidic *principles*,” and something called a “*mysterious combination*” (of personal attributes). Over 500 books, thousands of articles, incalculable seminars and classes plumbed the shallow depths and came up empty. More research was needed. By the year 2020, we were looking in the wrong place, with wrong expectations, through a distorted lens. “Leader” had become a one-word oxymoron.

There is more than a cognate connection between leaders and education. The relationship is substantial, implicit. *Laedan* (OE) means “to go before;” *educare* (L), “to lead out.” The question is, “From what, to what?” Eptictitus, a Greek slave, answered both in one simple statement, “Only the educated are free.” For him,

Likely, Eptictitus knew Aristotle’s definition of freedom: “The prerogative of exercising one’s full powers.” Freedom is not an end; that would be hedonism. It is not license; that would be immunity. Rather, it is the life pursuit of noble purpose. Anything else is a bondage of its own making.

Education meets democracy in the middle of freedom. Thomas Jefferson found them mutually inclusive: “An educated citizenry is indispensable to the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated....” Uneducated people cannot be governed. Ignorant people will not be led. So they are controlled by force; cajoled by gratification; or rewarded by diminished prospect.

By definition, educators are leaders. It was providential that education was made the responsibility of the states; and, probably more fortuitous than intentional, that the states organized into districts, political jurisdictions, but with a definitive nod toward community. It is only in community that leaders arise – or, rather, are chosen. Leaders are not hired; they cannot be imported. “Leader” is not a job description or position. Leaders are called by those who deem them worthy of being followed because they embody their own ideals.

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Regrettably, in the majority of school districts, those educators who otherwise would be leaders are stymied, even exorcised, by superintendents still lost in the delusions of “leadership.” However, in those districts whose superintendents understand and personify *strategos*, and who are themselves *stratego*i, leaders thrive throughout the entire system – regardless of “position,” “rank,” “classification,” or “job.”

If the Honorable Rees-Mogg were still with us, and still searching for leaders, I would recommend that he look in the right place – that is, *our* schools. Here he would find the real leaders of our communities, the nation, and, indeed, the world. Only here could he see and understand the right expectations – leaders, who build futures based on possibility, not probability or prediction; leaders, who give more than they receive and are fulfilled because of it; leaders, who risk success and who are not afraid of failure; leaders, whose charisma is imputed to them by those whom they champion.

Most importantly, he would learn to see through the right lens – the moral universe, in which absolutes trump artifacts; the Seven Cardinal Virtues constitute character; the Golden Rule is the standard of conduct; and that which is natural, good, and true is not compromised.

If you think all this is Cambrian hype, or worse, treacle cooked up by one too soon gone soft in the head, look in on any of our Cambrian districts, any time, and file your report as soon as you can. There is a deadline, you know.

WJC



Since 1977, Dr. William J. Cook and his Associates have facilitated strategic plans for 1,450 systems of education and trained more than 16,000 facilitators of strategic planning. His book, Strategic Planning for America’s Schools, introduced strategic planning to education. Today it is still used as a text in graduate schools throughout the nation.

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