

# The Nature and Uses of Creative Leadership<sup>1</sup>

Considered from the Point of View of Modern Psychology and Pedagogy

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THE problem of leadership is to the fore today because of the recognized need in industry, first, of animating those who direct and supervise with a co-operative rather than an autocratic attitude and technique and, second, because of the need of securing in those led a positive and creative motivation. Leadership is the note because of a new outlook on the way in which human power is generated, focused and sustained—an outlook which means an animating spirit on the part alike of leader and led different from that between "boss" and "underlings," and nearer to that of the captain and members of a football team.

All at once, in a rather widespread way, it is dawning on close students of American business administration that our industrial army, has been an army of mercenaries—paid soldiers, working only for hire, rather than a volunteer army of citizens fighting for a fatherland.

We are here to discuss leadership, then, because we realize (1) that it is a hidden asset of unsuspected value, (2) that its discovery, development and application to industrial life might work new wonders on the side of positive morale, (3) that leadership properly conceived can supply a clue to the technique of bringing into being harmonious group action. And since harmonious group action is an outstanding need in industry, and since some kind of group action is typical, whatever is calculated to bring groups into new vitality, new power and new zeal can be of incalculable benefit.

*Definition:* The problem of definition presents some verbal difficulties, perhaps. Yet I doubt if any of us would seriously disagree about the identity of the thing in action. Leadership is ability to lead. Leading means that others follow.

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The fact of others following indicates action secured, presumably in some desired direction. Ability to lead is ability to get people to act (mentally or physically) toward an objective. *Leadership is the name for that combination of qualities by the possession of which one is able to get something done by others chiefly because through his influence they become willing to do it.* It is ability to secure willing action on behalf of an established purpose. The elements, first, of influencing people so that their own desires harmonize with those of the leader and, second, of a definite objective, seem both to be essential. I am going to characterize this as *creative leadership* to differentiate it from the kind of influencing which any executive command may lead to. The distinguishing element, I submit, is the creation or direction of positive desire in the led. Something over and above mere consent is implied. It is an actual taking unto oneself as one's very own the purpose of the leader. It is further implied that the creative leader and his constituency may together evolve new reaches of purpose, the realizing of which will most effectively bring to fulfillment the desires of all concerned.

A qualification is, perhaps, wise here. There has for a long time been leadership in industry under conditions of greater or less compulsion due to economic pressure. Leadership thus exercised is now being found to have great limitations as those led have become less and less subject to severe forms of pressure and as the desire for a sense of freedom has grown in the community. Again, there has been and is an increasing amount of leadership securing a sort of resigned following, a passive consent. This probably represents an advance over the attitude found in the compulsory cases and its great extension in industry in the immediate future will, in fact, be an advance. This might be called a leadership of the half-

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hearted. Yet, I believe we are justified, as we try to get to the bottom of our subject, in trying to see the finest manifestation which leadership can and might take—a leadership of the whole-hearted and active-minded; and it is this best type which I call creative leadership.

Although the colloquial uses of the word leadership are many—such as political, religious, military and social leadership—for our purposes we are thinking of people who are responsible for directing industrial activities and for the effectiveness of the labor of those spoken of as their subordinates. We are concerned with the contacts of company presidents, superintendents, factory managers, department heads, foremen and all others who have directive responsibilities.

## Who Are Leaders?

Does this definition then imply that every executive is a leader? Are there not some leaders who are not acknowledged directing heads in their group or organization? And are not a great many people leaders, at least occasionally and to a degree?

Surely every executive is a leader of sorts, and the purpose of our deliberation here today is to begin to find out if it is not possible to make a good and creative leader out of every executive.

Surely, too, there are many unacknowledged leaders who have to work more or less through the titular leaders. That there is a separate technique by which this indirect leadership is exercised I suggest as worth future study.

Also, defining leadership thus, opportunities for exercising it do come to almost everyone on occasion. It is one of the merits of this creative emphasis in the leadership concept that the status of the leader is taken out of the realm of the miraculous and the unusual. Rather the emphasis is upon trying to extend as widely as possible that combination of normal human qualities which makes leaders effective.

## The Problem Outlined

Our definition seems now to suggest a variety of special questions on which there will be more detailed treatment in subsequent addresses. This first paper of the conference can perhaps be of most service if I open the subject to scientific and inductive attack by offering a number of ten-

tative assertions—some of them conjectural—which may stimulate others to new hypotheses and testings which will increase the total of our knowledge.

It is important to make clear, first, why it is that leadership may be discussed productively today: to show why the subject is well beyond the generalizing and sermonizing stage.

We are next interested to know where human desires come from, how those desires affect purposes, and how those purposes can be directed. We want to know if any generalizations can be made about the relative possibilities of influencing people with different kinds of purposes; about the qualifications for leadership; whether these qualifications are all innate or are partly innate and partly acquired; whether the acquired aspects can be developed and strengthened by training and if so by what kind of training and whether potential leadership can be identified in advance. Also, there are a number of special aspects of the leader's work, a discussion of which should help to enrich our conception of leadership and our awareness of the technical details required for its practical fulfillment.

Finally, there are certain dangers in leadership. There is such a thing as too much leadership both for the leader and the led.

I shall now briefly touch upon these several points.

## Why Is Leadership Important?

The fundamental reason why leadership can now be talked about with some assurance that it will yield truly new and productive results in industrial conduct is because a *new conception of human nature is becoming articulate* in modern, eclectic psychology. I do not say that individual managers have become interested in leadership because they know that there is a new psychology. But unquestionably the tendency to be consciously concerned about the subject has been stimulated by the fertilizing of students' thinking about management in the light of the current conception of human nature.

The quickest way to make vivid this new understanding of people is to contrast it with notions tacitly held in the past. The older conceptions of personality were essentially passive. One conceived of pouring ideas and feelings into