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Leadership as a Lighthouse

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IN THIS ARTICLE, I would like to contemplate on leadership and present my own insights on leadership in two dimensions using a lighthouse metaphor supported by some of science-based theories. This leadership analogy is a helpful tool to design better strategies when leading in challenging times, and describes leadership principles as they relate to a lighthouse that provides light, hope and safety to the people we lead. Moreover, it stands tall and rock solid during even the worst storms. The first dimension of leadership like a lighthouse refers to ourselves and the second one is the leadership like a lighthouse to others.

Great leaders are like a lighthouse to themselves at the first place, because, as Dr. Med Klaus Dieter Platsch (2015) said in his speech in a congress in Graz, *"Let us all put theory aside and connect to the pool of wisdom that we are all connected to."* What actually do I mean by stating that we are the light inside? According to Dr. Bruce Lipton, the author of *The Biology of Belief* and a world-know expert in Quantum Biophysics: *"The point is we are made out of atoms and molecules. Fact: our bodies by definition are emitting light and absorbing light. Yes. We are emitting light because all of our atoms are generating energy fields that are radiating out from us. Everything that's made out of matter is also radiating energy fields. This is not a new understanding. The Asians have a dealing with Feng Shui for a thousand years here."*

Based on the new science, Epi-Genetics, we are very powerful in creating and unfolding the lives we lead and we can become leaders to ourselves by clearing some of the issues like thinking patterns or belief system to show up the light. *"Light is energy. It also happens to be divine. It is in your DNA and has the powerful ability to heal, create, manifest, sustain and express you. At times it is not working because it has been forgotten, like when you are totally down on yourself or being very judgmental."* (Daikeler 2012, 137). *"Sometime we have to lose our minds to reach deeply into our senses."* (Nielsen Joos). This sentence is also true nowadays, when we are getting

out of our minds and starting to feel again, connecting more to our hearts than sensing with the mind. Letting go means as well stepping outside of our safety board.

From my own life and professional experience, it turns out that many leaders are interested in self-development, coaching, mentoring or facilitating change, but despite their declaration to change, they would rather mostly change others and the world around them. Sometimes changing the world around us is possible to some extent, for example through the change of a product/service, promoting, innovating or creative discoveries. But the change based on unrealistic expectations, that is changing other people's attitudes, fail in most of the cases. The attitude expressed by preventing others from creating own ideas or values generates conflict or resistance and instead of self-development it becomes a projection of one's own needs - an anti-development.

An affirmative: *"Other people need to change. If they will get better, my business will change for better as well"* expresses the expectation that results in becoming dependent on other people's decisions – which we cannot influence or can influence insignificantly.

Only activating own resources, ideas, creativeness prevents us from giving away the accountability and blaming others for our own failures. By "others" I mean anonymous people, institutions or viruses, as is the case now with COVID-19. The main side effect of such attitude is a temporary tension release. When it comes to leadership, the first homework to do is to encourage people to take ownership. Great questions to be asked can be the following: *"What can you do in this situation?"*, *"What is your influence on this?"*, *"What will you start with?"*, *"How do you like to feel on the finish line?"*.

As a business trainer, coach and sociologist by education, I observe in today's business world, that the contemporary leader is more and more self-aware and expresses him/herself better. *"In open societies with higher education level – and in consequence higher self-awareness, it is very hard to send young people to war, antagonize each other or push them towards goals that are against their personal values. In this sense, we are far away from ideological or business hegemony."* (Bennewicz 2017, 69).

At a time of current crisis (economic, financial, emotional, mental and spiritual) where long-term effects are still unknown, self-development is an interesting offer especially in uncertain situations. All kind of innovation, changes, reinventions, discoveries and modifications have been brought to life because of scarcity, not because of stability. Crisis forces acting, but acting based on firefighting is just a short-term leadership strategy. The only long-term strategy is to become the lighthouse – first to ourselves and then to others – by taking responsibility for our own lives.

While contemplating on the second dimension of leadership and using the lighthouse analogy I would like to explain what does it mean to be the lighthouse leader? Today leaders have another important tasks – make sure that the business stays on track by illuminating the path to others, assuring that they are on the right course and that the decisions they are making are sound, building confidence that the course they are on is safe, reliable, with no crashes ahead.

"Research has shown that there is a clear consistency between spiritual values and practices, and leadership effectiveness and that values that have long been considered spiritual ideals, such as integrity, honesty, and humility, have a positive influence on leadership success. This suggests that satisfying these spiritual needs in the workplace positively influences human health and psychological well-being, and forms the foundation for both workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership." (Fry & Egel 2017).

To elaborate more on this observation and to guide you through the way why I perceive the leadership today as a lighthouse for others I have interviewed Mr. Olin O. Oedekoven, Ph.D., the President and CEO of Peregrine Global Services – a business that provides thought-partner solutions to develop values-based

leaders and improve the quality of higher education throughout the world. Dr. Olin O. Oedekoven has over 35 years of leadership experience at all organizational levels from first-line leader through strategic leadership and is a graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College.

I have posted several questions to Dr. Olin Oedekoven in research on the first dimension, in which leadership is perceived like a lighthouse to others, understanding the condition of today's leadership and finding the light to share with the world.

Daria Lewandowska: "If I used the lighthouse metaphor in the leadership context today, what would that mean to you?"

Dr. Olin O. Oedekoven: "A lighthouse is emblematic for leadership on at least two levels. First, the lighthouse shines a light on ourselves so that we can better understand ourselves, our environment, and how we see others. The light of the lighthouse includes our personal values and knowledge, the BE and KNOW dimensions of leadership.

Second, the lighthouse gives direction to others based on how our light shines, the DO dimension of leadership. The light from the lighthouse, exemplifies how we influence others by putting our values and knowledge into action. It is how we influence others to achieve common goals. Just as the lighthouse guides ships to safe passage, so too should our lighthouse guide others with our values exemplified through our actions safely along their leadership journey. The lighthouse is fixed, just as our values and attributes of leadership must be immovable. The lighthouse shines, just as our values and attributes must shine towards others. The lighthouse gives direction, just as our leadership actions of values exemplified must give direction for others to follow. The lighthouse represents physical safety, just as our values exemplified should create physical, emotional, and spiritual safety for others. The lighthouse serves a purpose greater than itself, just as our leadership must serve a greater purpose than just ourselves. The lighthouse shines continuously in good weather and bad, just as our values must never waiver, even if it is stormy and the waters are turbulent.

The lighthouse gives direction to each of us by helping to define who we are; the lighthouse also gives direction for others to guide them in their leadership journey. Time for you to be a lighthouse?"

Daria Lewandowska: "What does it mean to you that leadership is a choice/a decision and not a position nor rank?"

Dr. Olin O. Oedekoven: "To be a leader, you must BE your values; KNOW your people and technical schools; and DO leadership by living your values and applying your skills. Leadership is about how you respond towards others, and yourself. Leadership is about influencing through the examples you set. Leadership is about unlocking the potential in others to obtain commonly understood goals. It's about integrity, honesty, trust, and respect. Based on these characteristics and definitions of leadership, to be a leader is not restricted to positions on an organizational charge whereby you have direct reports. Rather, supervision is a subset of leadership. To be a good supervisor, one must be a good leader. But to be a good leader, one does not have to be a supervisor."

Daria Lewandowska: "Sometimes leaders themselves are the problem. Why is that? What is your perspective on this?"

Dr. Olin O. Oedekoven: "First, it's hard to see yourself truly as others see you. Each of us has a unique self-image and that self-image can be very different from how others see you. It helps sometimes to have a 360-degree evaluation to understand how others perceive you and understand you. It's only from the

perspective of others do we obtain a true understanding of ourselves.

Second, sometimes bad behaviors get reinforced in the workplace because they obtain short-term results. Yell at your team to get something done, they get it done, and then the mistaken belief develops that it's good to yell at your team members. Fear is never an effective approach to leadership.

Third, none of us is perfect. Each of us has blind spots and gaps. How we mitigate these blind spots and gaps is what helps define you as a leader."

Daria Lewandowska: "What is the most important daily practice that leaders can follow today?"

Dr. Olin O. Oedekoven: "Reflection, that is to reflect on what went well and what didn't go as well, and then work to continuously improve. Don't beat yourself up, but rather simply reflect on your effectiveness and then adjust your actions and behaviors that better address your goal. Leadership is a consistent and constant process of self and organizational improvement."

Daria Lewandowska: "What is your vision on leadership today?"

Dr. Olin O. Oedekoven: "All of us are in unique positions and circumstances. A common vision may not be the best answer. Rather, each of us needs to develop a vision that best represents the long-term goal. For me personally given my role as a leader at Peregrine Global Services, my vision is to build capacity by leveraging diverse talents to make a difference in our world."

Daria Lewandowska: "How good leaders could make people feel safe? What is your own experience on leading people in the times of recession and real-life examples? What inspires you the most in Simon Sinek's short video on "Why good leaders make you feel safe"?"

Dr. Olin O. Oedekoven: "I certainly agree with Simon Sinek in this video in that it is important for a leader to help keep their team safe. Safety include several dimensions: physical, financial, social, spiritual, and psychological. Leaders must provide a safe working environment so that leaders are not harmed and able to perform, something we are dealing with currently with the Global Pandemic. Leaders must provide appropriate compensation so that people can live their lives and feel that the work they do is valued. Leaders must provide a framework were people are safe to interact, communicate, collaboration, and coordinate with others. Leaders must respect differences and realize that there are many right answers. Leaders must ensure that team members do not live in fear, can express themselves freely, and to attempt and sometimes fail without reprisals. Safety is truly important for the totality of the organization and the success it may obtain.

Leading when things go well is relatively easy. Leading when things don't go as well is when leaders are truly defined. In the military, I lost Soldiers in combat operations and the hardest thing for me was to present the flag to that Soldier's family at the funeral. It was hard, but it was also inspirational. It taught me the value of life and the impact that our lives have on others, both known and unknown. It taught me that there is life outside the organization and that each of matters. When I'm down, I sometimes reflect on those moments at those funerals and I draw inspiration from them in that what each of us does each and every day has impact. What we do matters and that the life of a leader is to help ensure that others see that they matter too."

This important interview has provided greater value to my life and hopefully to other leaders. It has offered a wonderful foundation for genuine leadership, in particular so important in “VUCA¹” environment we are all living today when it is important not to give orders but to keep everyone focused on the end goal. So, concentrate on growth, be effective in what you do, live your values, reflect on yourself, know your people and make them feel safe.

In a nutshell, when you replace your fears with creativity and cherish the growth mindset you will never be disappointed. Create a vision where followers will experience a sense of calling so that their lives have more meaning and establish an organizational culture based on the values of belonging, understanding and appreciation. If you have not YET arrived there as a lighthouse leader, do not give up. You are on the path of improving through practice. You can grow and improve in your leadership abilities every day.



¹ VUCA - is an acronym that stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, a combination of qualities that, taken together, characterize the nature of some difficult conditions and situations. The term is also sometimes said to stand for the adjectives: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

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LEADERSHIP IS LIKE AN AMEBA; a constantly evolving phenomenon that endures through technological upheavals, globalization, booms and recessions. Leadership is questioned in the turbulences of the world, where it takes shape into new isms and theses. It is a child of its time and environment; it seeks its shape by following societal twists and developments, but it also pushes the development of society and working life in new directions. Genuine leadership is not based on titles or position in hierarchies, but its core is built on human elements. Values, feelings, encounters, and responsibility for self-leadership are always the cornerstones of true leadership, regardless of times and situations.

THIS PUBLICATION CONSISTS of articles by students, teaching professionals and partner experts of Laurea University of Applied Sciences, in which leadership is examined from a wide variety of environments and perspectives. Each article opens a window to a unique landscape of leadership, and inspires you to look at leaders, followers and work communities in a fresh way.