



Building Leadership in the Community

Leadership development keeps new people coming to the table to support progress for the community.

Building Leadership In The Community

INTRODUCTION

The best way to develop as a leader is to lead. As the popular slogan says, just do it. It's true that you will make mistakes, but mistakes are part of the learning experience. With mistakes comes some criticism. However, as former President Theodore Roosevelt noted in one of his many famous speeches, "It is not the critic who counts" – particularly when that critic is sitting on the sidelines instead of being actively involved. This suggests we pay less attention to those critics who have not personally stepped forward to serve in community leadership roles.

The best way to get others involved in community leadership roles is to ask them; then provide a structure where those leaders can contribute, learn, and grow. Thus, there are two perspectives of leadership development. One is through the eyes of an individual who wants to improve his or her leadership skills. The other perspective is from the viewpoint of the community – specifically how to develop more and better community leaders. However, communities are just groups of individuals who have common ties and interests. In the end, it's individuals who work on leadership development – both for themselves and for their community. This module applies to both perspectives. The reader must continue to ask both, "How does this apply to me as an individual leader?" and, "How does this apply to my community and its leaders?" In many cases, the answers will be the same.

Relevance

Although we may not consciously think about leadership and ethics on a daily basis, we are generally quick to spot their absence. Sometimes it is because we hear or read about situations that developed because of poor leadership or ethical lapses. Sometimes it is because we encounter situations where we just know that things would be better if effective and ethical leaders were present and involved. Leadership is the act of leading, that is, providing direction and motivation to others to collectively achieve some mutual objective. Leadership is important because community objectives cannot be accomplished by any one individual.

Ethics are the adherence to the values and norms of society overall. Ethics are important because they represent the broader societal values and rules with which each person is expected to comply.

A Typical Scenario

By all accounts, “Loganville” is thriving. Significant progress has been seen in the past decade on a large variety of community projects – including improvements in the street and highway infrastructure, additional after-school youth opportunities, a revitalized downtown retail district, and so on. Loganville is in great shape – except for one concern.

The same core group of community leaders has been responsible for all of the improvements mentioned above. There are two downsides to this obvious success. First, this core group has been so successful that others in the community have become complacent. They see no need to get involved with a new issue because the core group will take care of it. In essence, the community leadership pipeline has dried up because the core group has been so efficient.

At the same time, the core group of community leaders is getting tired. Successful projects take as much of a toll on leaders as troubled projects. It takes a lot of personal energy to navigate through all of the obstacles that always seem to pop up.

The core group looks around for the next wave of community residents to assume some of the leadership responsibilities, but it finds no one ready, willing, and able to help. What does it do now?

Organization

This module first discusses leadership and then leadership development. A simple model is used to describe the four major steps in the community leadership development process. After the leadership development discussion, the topic of ethics is examined in more detail. Finally, a list of resources is provided where one can go to find more information about leadership and ethics.

LEADERSHIP

A Comprehensive Definition of Leadership

A logical place to begin a discussion on leadership is to ask the obvious question – What is leadership? One approach is to look at some books to see how they define leadership. That’s where the difficulty begins. Figuratively, there is an ocean of leadership books. A recent search of a popular online book company using the keyword “leadership” yielded more than 210,000 entries. That’s a lot of leadership books! While it’s not likely that there are 210,000+ different definitions of what constitutes leadership, more definitions can easily be listed. It seems everyone has a favorite. One comprehensive definition is:

Leadership is a process through which people (e.g., team members) are influenced in some way to accomplish goals, generally group goals.

Note the three key words in this leadership definition – **people, influence, and goals**. **People** are important because they provide the resources and talent necessary to achieve the goals. Sometimes, thought or opinion leaders are considered leaders. Regardless, the first key word clearly indicates that people are a critical component in the leadership process. Generally these people also share some common, e.g., they are on the same committee or are working toward the same objective.

The second key word in the leadership definition is **influence**. Influence is the ability of one person to cause a change in the behavior of another person. The concept of power is central to the definition of leadership. In fact, the terms “power” and “influence” sometimes are used interchangeably. So, in essence, the leadership process involves the use of power.

Goal is the third key word in the leadership definition. These goals represent the expected result of the leadership. This is the objective that the group wants to accomplish. A member of a dysfunctional team may quip that the team accomplishes its goals in spite of its leader. While it may be true that the formally designated team leader may not be the one actually providing the leadership, some form of leadership is still involved.

This definition is somewhat generic in that it applies to many different leadership situations. With a little tweaking, the definition becomes more specific to community leadership – community leadership is a process through which **people** (e.g., community members) are **influenced** in some way to accomplish community **goals**. The next question is, “What do these community leaders look like?”

What Do Leaders Look Like?

Numerous opinions exist about what's important in determining who will be leaders and how those leaders should go about leading. Not surprisingly, many opinions are based on the astonishing number of leadership books available. Fortunately, the answers to a couple of questions can help sort through these leadership opinions to see some of the basic principles.

Question 1 – Leader Traits or Leader Behaviors?

The first question is, “Do you believe that leadership is a function of a person's traits and characteristics or a person's behaviors?” This question focuses on the leader as a person. At one extreme, this question could imply that leaders have certain traits and characteristics that are genetic. If that were true, then leadership capability can be determined at birth. Indeed, at one time in our history, gender and other physical characteristics were believed (erroneously) to be a primary determinant of leadership ability. At the other extreme, this first question implies that a person can perform as a leader merely by behaving in a particular way.

Actually, leaders utilize both key traits and behaviors. Some of these characteristics used in describing leaders are in the following list. (Note that this is not an exhaustive list.)

Example Leader Traits

- resilience
- energy
- self confidence/esteem
- decisiveness
- personal integrity/honesty
- enthusiasm
- persistence/tenacity

Example Leader Behaviors

- communications skills (including listening)
- technical knowledge (that is, the leader knows what he/she is talking about?)
- interpersonal skills (that is, the ability to effectively interact with others)
- *envisioning* the future

It's true that traits are generally formed very early in life, and behaviors are learned later. Some individuals seem to portray a leadership persona at an early age. It's also true that individuals can develop or strengthen desirable leadership traits later through determination and practice. For example, a potential leader who lacks self-confidence or decisiveness can develop those traits. It takes desire, coaching, and small successes to lead to bigger accomplishments.

The good news is that leadership skills can be developed through a combination of desire, training, and practice. The key is an interest and desire to improve. Leaders can improve their effectiveness through training and experience. The training can be formal (e.g., classroom training) or informal (e.g., self-study or mentoring). Although some individuals seem to be “natural born leaders,” most of us develop leadership skills the old fashioned way – through work, study, and the help of others.

Question 2 – Always the Same Approach or Variable Based on the Situation?

The second question is, “Do you believe leadership is consistent (universal) across every situation, or should leadership vary based on different situations (situational)?” This second question also involves a range. At one extreme, it suggests leaders always look and behave in the same, consistent ways. However, in some scenarios it would be detrimental for the leader to always have the same reactions. This suggests that the leader should exhibit different traits, skills, and behaviors – based on the current situation.

For example, a doctor might be empathetic while gathering a patient’s medical history by calmly asking questions to coax more information from the patient. While this approach might be effective during an initial office visit, it probably would not work in an emergency room crisis. **So the leader’s use of traits and behaviors might vary according to the context or situation.**

On the other hand, effective leaders do exhibit some consistency across situations. This helps meet the followers’ expectations of some predictability in the leader’s behavior. For example, if the leader typically solicits input prior to a decision, then followers expect to be a part of that process. While this input process is understandably abbreviated when decisions must be made immediately, followers will become confused if a leader unexpectedly acts autocratically. While effective leader responses vary according to the situation, some aspects of those responses should remain consistent (or universal).

Other Considerations

Some people include additional leadership questions in the attempt to classify leaders. For example, what is the primary role of the leader? In addition to accomplishing objectives, the leader could assume other roles such as teacher (particularly in developing other leaders). One particular role gaining recognition is that of the leader as a servant or steward. Although this is most easily identified in governmental organizations (as in public servant), the concept applies broadly. The servant leader functions to serve others – the broader community or organization. Servant leaders tend to be inclusive, empathetic, open, and concerned about the development of others. In the context of servant leadership, the leader is a steward of resources and responsibilities.

Another related leadership question addresses whether a leader influences others through transactions or transformations. In a transactional setting, there is an exchange of sorts. The leader provides something of value to a follower in exchange for work toward the group's goals.

The "something of value" could be as simple as a sincere "thank you." On the other hand, transformational leadership relies on motivating all involved to rise to a higher plain instead of being motivated merely by a transactional exchange. For example, a person could be motivated to work toward a higher cause without any hope of receiving something of value, even recognition or a thank you. The achievement of the higher objective is a sufficient reward. This is particularly relevant when leading volunteers.

The Role of Power in Leadership

Simply stated, power is the influence that one person has over another. Recall that one of the key words in the definition of leadership is influence. **Therefore, leadership involves the use of power (or influence).** Power itself is not necessarily bad. It is the context and manner in which that influence is exerted that can lead to the negative connotation.

Not surprisingly, leaders have several sources of power. First, any person in a formally designated leadership role exerts Legitimate Power. This is present whenever a follower's (e.g., committee member) actions are based on the belief that the leader has a legitimate right to influence and that the follower has an obligation to accept that influence. An example is a committee member accepting assignments from the committee chair.

Another common source of power is Reward Power. This is present when a follower's actions are based on the belief that the leader will provide rewards if expectations are met. These rewards can be both tangible and intangible. They can be as simple as a sincere "thank you".

Some community leaders attract followers because of their personal records of leadership successes. People just want to be affiliated with the leader because of who the leader is. In this case, that leader has what is called Referent Power. There are other sources of power (or influence), such as being an expert in some topic where people seek your opinion, or having the ability to cause compliance through some form of coercion. However, the legitimate, reward, and referent sources of power are the most typical for community leaders. Also, a leader generally uses more than one of these sources of power at a time.

Leadership and power are intertwined. Power, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad. However, the improper use of power generally results in unethical leader

behavior. The relationship between ethics and leadership is discussed in a later section.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Community leadership development involves both individuals and the community as a whole. Some individuals seem more naturally inclined toward leadership roles. These are the obvious leaders. Other individuals have leadership potential, but may not be as obvious. Your community needs both. The key question is, “What can your community do to identify, develop, and utilize all of its current and potential leaders?”

How does your community R.A.T.E. at leadership development? That is, how good is your community at:

- **R**ecruiting ... leaders and potential leaders?
- **A**ssessing ... those leaders to determine how to best utilize their skills for both individual and community success?
- **T**eaching ... those leaders how to become more effective?
- **E**ngaging ... those leaders in leadership assignments?

Recruiting Leaders

The first step is to identify and recruit leaders and potential leaders. The obvious place to start is with the leaders of existing committees, task forces, advisory groups, commissions, etc. Are any of these leaders ready for broader leadership responsibilities? The next obvious place to look is at the members of those committees, task forces, advisory groups, boards, commissions, etc. Who among them might be willing to step into a leadership role?

In some cases, potential leaders may not think of themselves as leaders. Most people have a mental image of what a leader looks like, and some people conclude that they don't fit that image. In this case, their mental image of leaders may be too narrow. As discussed in the previous section, leadership involves influence and there are many different sources of influence or power. In this context, most people are capable of leading in the right situation.

In other cases, potential leaders may recognize their potential but haven't stepped forward simply because they haven't been asked. In fact, a key role of every existing community leader should be to identify individuals who are capable of serving as a community leader.

Two pieces of information are useful – a list of available leaders and another of anticipated leadership needs. These do not have to be maintained formally... Leader capabilities may range from novice (e.g., for individuals who are

interested in serving, but don't have any leadership experience, per se) to experienced. Similarly, anticipated leadership needs may range from relatively simple, short-term leadership assignments to very complex and often lengthy assignments.

Collectively, the community maintains both of these lists and attempts to match people to assignments in such a way that the individuals grow as leaders and the community benefits. Every one of today's experienced community leaders started at some point as a novice. Traditional organizations often conduct a periodic "leadership scan" to identify leaders. Unfortunately, communities are collections of organizations – some traditional and some ad hoc. Further, generally no central list of community leaders exists. However, an alternative is to have a preferred community leadership development program in which everyone is encouraged to participate. This program should bring in participation as diverse and inclusive as possible. Over time, the list of participants can serve as a surrogate for the leadership scan. Additional discussion about community leadership programs is in the **Teaching Leaders** section.

Assessing Leaders

In community settings, leadership assessment is primarily an individual task. It is important for individuals to understand their strengths and weaknesses to improve as leaders. Multiple leadership forms are available to be used for self-assessment. As a starting point, the list of leadership traits and behaviors discussed earlier can be used.

It is also useful to incorporate the views of others into the assessment of leaders. After all, we "see" different aspects based on our own backgrounds and relationship to the leader being assessed. These so-called 360° Assessments typically include input from the leader being assessed, the leader's superior, the leader's subordinates (or team members), and the leader's peers or colleagues. These various assessments are typically superimposed to create a composite view of the leader. These multiple-input assessments are particularly focused on any major differences between the leader's assessment of him/herself and the input from others. Montgomery Van Wart includes a 360° survey instrument in the appendix of his book, *Dynamics of Leadership in Public Service*.

Although the assessment of leadership strengths and weaknesses is primarily an individual task, the community can take some actions to facilitate these assessments. One way is to develop a description of a "model" leader for your community. This "model" is based on a composite of the various views regarding the traits and behaviors of effective and ethical leaders for your community. Leadership is situational, so while a generic leader description can be used as a starting point; it is helpful to modify it to reflect the particular needs of your community. This model or written description can form the basis for both a

leader's self-assessment and feedback to that leader from others. In essence, this could be a 360° assessment. The results can have two uses: the leader can identify areas where he or she needs to improve, and the community may see strengths in the leader that can be used in a role-model context for other developing leaders.

Teaching Leaders

There are four basic approaches to “teaching” leadership – experience, self study, formal study, and mentoring. Regardless of the approach, the “curriculum” should include specific leadership skills (like those listed in the leadership traits/behaviors discussion.) Some skills, like team building, are best learned in group settings. The community should provide opportunities for its leaders to utilize as many of these approaches as possible.

Experience

Leaders learn best by leading. Structured experience is perhaps the most powerful leadership educational process. An old saying professes that leadership is an art, not a science. While some techniques can be learned in a traditional educational setting, it's not possible to master leadership in a classroom environment. There are just too many variables.

Also, not all leadership assignments are equally complex and challenging. Novice leaders can be placed in less challenging roles. The objective is to provide sufficient “stretch” and growth without having so much complexity that the novice leader is likely to fail.

Self-study

This second category involves activities that depend primarily on one's interest and initiative. The information provided in this module is one of many sources of leadership material that can be read and studied at one's own pace. More importantly, individuals can read some of the many books and web information publicly available.

A variation of this self-study approach is for several individuals to occasionally meet to discuss leadership and exchange leadership experiences. This approach allows leaders to learn from the experiences of others. It also provides a support network for new community leaders.

Your community can do a couple of things to facilitate self-study for individuals to learn and develop as community leaders. One is to maintain a list of relevant materials that others have found particularly useful in leadership self-study. The list of references in this module can be a starting point for your community's list. The second beneficial action is to recognize and encourage ad hoc groups of individuals who are using self-study to improve leadership skills. This can be

done by making the individuals aware of the others' activities and perhaps even provide a meeting space.

Formal Study

The third category of leadership development represents formal training and education classes, including workshops. Individuals can find these in many places – including classes in local community colleges and universities, dedicated training programs provided by organizations for selected audiences, and publicly available leadership seminars and workshops. Some of these can be expensive.

Many communities have local leadership development programs, ranging from a one week intensive “class” to monthly meetings over a twelve-month period. A common name for these programs is “Leadership (insert the name of your community here)”. These programs generally include a community project as a part of the curriculum. The program coordination can be provided by either a government/agency or another community group (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce). There are also statewide programs. Examples include the Leadership Louisiana Program (offered by the Council for a Better Louisiana) and the Community Leadership and Economic Development Program (offered by the Cooperative Extension Service and LSU Agriculture Center). Further discussion of some programs from other states is found in the “What Have Other Communities Done?” section.

Mentoring

Mentoring is another practice that leaders can use to improve. A mentor is typically someone who has more experience and is willing to share that in a one-on-one setting. In this mentoring context, the “student” is often called a protégé or mentee. The mentor can serve as a sounding board, provide constructive criticism, and offer specific advice or knowledge to help the leader grow. An effective mentoring relationship can last for years or even decades.

Also, community leadership mentoring programs are relatively inexpensive to establish and maintain. A mentor can work with more than one protégé. The primary effort (timewise) is setting up the initial mentor-protégé relationships. Experience shows that protégés generally want to select their mentor (as opposed to having one “assigned”). The community must have some minimal infrastructure to maintain overall awareness of the program and to facilitate the initial mentor-protégé discussion.

Engaging Leaders

The fourth step of leadership development is to just start. Get prospective leaders engaged in leading. Assign them roles that properly challenge them as leaders.. If not challenged enough, the leader will not continue to develop and

may even grow tired. If too challenged, the leader may become burned-out prematurely. In any case, expect new leaders to make mistakes. Recall the quote by Theodore Roosevelt. Provide effective feedback to leaders through mentors and other respected individuals. Help the new community leader distinguish between constructive criticism and general complaints.

One educational principle is that adult learners typically want to understand why a topic is being taught before they invest the energy and emotion in learning it. Engaging leaders as a part of the overall leadership development process addresses this “why” question directly. Learning by doing is powerful.

Does the R.A.T.E. Model Need Another “R”?

So far, by using the R.A.T.E. model, a community should be able to **R**ecruit leaders, **A**ssess their leadership strengths and areas for improvement, **T**each them through a variety of leadership learning opportunities to further increase their leadership effectiveness, and **E**ngage them in leadership assignments with the right amount of challenge. What is missing? Well, if the community doesn’t have some sort of **R**enewal effort for leaders, they will eventually burn out and lose effectiveness. This can lead to the “Typical Scenario” described in the Introduction.

Whether a second “R” is added to the R.A.T.E. model name is not important. What is important is to recognize that engaged, dedicated community leaders have thresholds at which they can begin to burn out. Recovery from a burn-out situation can be lengthy, so a much better approach is to ensure some form of a personal renewal process is included in the overall Leadership Development Program.

What Have Other Communities Done for Leadership Development?

One comprehensive view is in *A Best Practices Scan: Regional Leadership Development Initiatives* published by The Alliance for Regional Stewardship in February 2002. This document is available at its website: http://www.regionalstewardship.org/Documents/LeadershipDev_BestPract.pdf. In this report, a community/regional leadership development program has up to four major categories of activities: (1) focus on developing the leadership skills of the participants; (2) discuss the community (or region) at large, including the current issues it faces; (3) build team skills; and (4) identify opportunities for self-reflection and growth as an individual leader. A community (or region) can choose some or all of these to emphasize in its leadership development program.

This document also summarizes ten key dimensions of a community leadership development program. Some of these include:

- the emphasis of the program – i.e., which of the four major categories of activities will be the focus of the leadership development program?

- the target participants – i.e., who are the targeted audiences that the community would like to attract to its leadership development program?
- the role of outside personnel – i.e., will the speakers/presenters be from the local community, or will some outside people be employed to conduct particular sessions?
- the expectations for participants following completion of the program – i.e., how will the “graduates” be engaged in actual community projects? (Note: This engagement can begin during the leadership development program. It doesn’t have to wait for the “graduation.”)

It also describes different regional leadership development programs across the United States for the following ten communities: (1) Regional Leadership Institute/Atlanta; (2) Charlotte Region/Lee Institute; (3) Sierra Leadership Seminar; (4) Leadership St. Louis; (5) Institute for Civic Leadership/Portland, Maine; (6) Central Oklahoma Leadership Institute; (7) Kansas City Metropolitan Leadership Forum; (8) Houston American Leadership Forum; (9) Denver Community Leadership Program; and (10) IDEAL Program/Central Valley, California.

Many non-governmental organizations focus on leadership development. As one example, Coro is a nonprofit organization devoted to the development of community leaders. Over 10,000 participants have completed Coro programs. The IDEAL Program/Central Valley, California, regional leadership development program mentioned above utilized Coro trainers. In addition, Focus St. Louis (the parent organization of Leadership St. Louis, also mentioned above) partnered with Coro for some programs. More information about Coro programs can be found at <http://www.coro.org/>.

Another example of organizations that focus on community leadership development is The Community Leadership Association (CLA). The CLA is affiliated with the Fanning Institute at the University of Georgia. Its available resources include program guides, complete curricula (video, handouts, etc.), and seminars. Information about CLA programs can be accessed by going to <http://www.communityleadership.org/overview/overview.html>, and clicking on the Leadership Development link.

One final consideration for community leadership development programs involves funding sources. The options include public funds, private donations, grants, and program registration fees/tuition. Many programs use a combination of these.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

Is there anything unique about leadership in a community and economic development setting? Well, the three components of the leadership definition are still intact. **People** are involved, most likely as volunteers. **Influence** is still involved. The volunteers are generally motivated to improve or strengthen the community. That influence and motivation is probably a result of both the volunteers' self-motivation and the effectiveness of the committee or task force leader. And **goals** are still involved. After all, the committee or task force wants to accomplish something. All of the sources of influence (power) discussed earlier are available with perhaps the exception of coercive power. There are rewards from community service – both tangible and intangible. The committee or task force chair should have legitimate power, almost by definition. Depending on the specific leader, referent power and/or expert power may also be present.

So, it seems that community leadership is not that different from leadership in other settings. However, community leaders encounter some unique challenges that don't arise in many other leadership contexts. For example, one primary difficulty of leadership in a community and economic development setting is the same as in other volunteer environments – volunteers vote with their feet. That is, volunteers can simply resign from the committee or task force if they feel its leadership is ineffective. The community leader must understand how to keep volunteers motivated and focused on the ultimate objective of community improvement.

Another challenge encountered by community leaders is the “fishbowl” environment associated with the public and political venues. The overall number and relative availability of the different journalistic media continues to increase. This, coupled with the heightened expectation for transparent leadership, can increase the complexity faced by community leaders (both elected and appointed).

All organizations face the challenges of identifying and recruiting “new blood” to infuse its current leadership with new perspectives and energy. Communities encounter additional difficulties in this regard. First, leader identification and recruitment generally have geographic constraints. That is, it is usually restricted to leaders and potential leaders already in the community. Second, the existing community leaders may not be willing to share or hand off the power associated with their positions. No easy, generic solution exists for situations like this. However, a good starting point is to affirm that everyone is striving for the same

community goals. If so, then it becomes a discussion about “how” to achieve those goals, not “what” they should be.

Finally, communities can face unique challenges like high poverty, racial tensions, and declining populations. Such issues have both generic characteristics and unique issues related to the local community. There is no universal solution. However, numerous examples of community and regional issues and their solutions can be found in the book *Civic Revolutionaries* by Douglas Henton, John Melville, and Kim Walesh. The authors developed a general model, called the Civic Revolutionary Cycle, that has three major components: (1) discover as much about the issue and frame a compelling case for change; (2) decide a course of action; and (3) drive the necessary change by mobilizing allies. Ultimately, each community must focus on its overall community development objectives to work through the constraints it faces.

ETHICS

For Starters – Two Hypothetical Situations

Situation A

Suppose for a moment that you were recently appointed to lead a committee charged with preparing and hosting a community picnic to celebrate the retirement of some street improvement bonds that were funded by a special sales tax. The picnic is being funded by private donations. The primary expense is for food.

A fellow committee member and you are responsible for the food procurement, primarily at local grocery stores. After the shopping is completed, you and your fellow committee member discover that one of the grocery stores significantly undercharged you because of an error entering the total number of items.

You have several options. One is to do nothing – just assume the difference is another contribution by the grocery store. Another option is to return to the store and pay the remaining amount owed. However, one complicating factor is that you’ve already spent the additional funds on a special dessert. A third option is to return the not-paid-for items to the grocery store and just cut back on the food available for the community picnic.

What do you do? Does the amount of the “significant undercharge” affect your decision? What if you had done the grocery shopping by yourself,

and therefore you were the only one who knew about the undercharge? Does that change your decision?

Situation B

Now assume a very similar scenario, except your fellow committee member is the only one who did the shopping. The total amount of food obtained by the fellow committee member seems significantly more than you expected based on the amount of money spent. When asked about this, the committee member jokingly replied that an opportunity arose to “bypass the whole cashier payment process” for some of the food, and that it’s like the grocery store just made an extra “contribution” to the picnic. The implication is that some form of shoplifting/stealing was involved. What do you do?

General Questions

- Does it matter that Situation A involved an unintentional error, but that the problem in Situation B was the result of purposeful behavior?
- Where is your dollar threshold at which you cannot just “look the other way”?
- Is your threshold impacted by how well you know the other person involved?
- What is the “right” action in each of the situations?
- Would others agree that your proposed actions are “right”?

These are not easy questions to answer. A person can generally think of many mitigating factors to make the answers conform to his or her intended actions. And since actions have a larger influence on others than words, leaders must be aware of how their actions are interpreted. An old adage says the true test of a leader is how people act when the leader is not present. Another test of leadership is to look around and see if anyone is following. Similarly, one true test of a person’s ethics and character is reflected in what he or she does when no one else is present.

Definitions and Perspectives

Similar to the discussion about leadership, it’s useful to begin with definitions. Ethics represent a system of principles or rules that distinguish between right and wrong. This definition seems both concrete and ambiguous at the same time. After all, what if two reasonable people don’t have the same views of what constitutes right and wrong?

This definition also involves two perspectives. The macro perspective focuses on the establishment and maintenance of an ethical environment. It includes the actions a community takes to formalize its expectations for ethical behavior and

the consequences for not meeting those expectations. The micro perspective focuses on the actions of individuals.

The two hypothetical situations discussed earlier were framed from the micro perspective. But both the macro and micro perspectives are linked. The collective actions of community leaders become the de facto system of principles or rules that distinguish which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. It's what we do, not what we say.

The subject of ethics has become a common refrain in Louisiana political discussions, particularly during and after the 2007 gubernatorial election discussions. One particular statistic frequently cited is that Louisiana ranks 46th overall in the national BGA Integrity Index. This index is published every five years by the Better Government Association (BGA). The last report was published in 2002, and it can be viewed at www.bettergov.org. While this BGA Integrity Index focuses on laws in five different areas (e.g., conflict of interest disclosure laws), the overall rankings are also used by some to assess the ethical environment in a broader context.

The State of Georgia has addressed the broader context of an ethical government environment through a Certified City of Ethics Program. This program was a result of an Ethics Task Force established by the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) in 1998. Five principles form the basis for the program:

- “Serve others, not ourselves”;
- “Use resources with efficiency and economy”;
- “Treat all people fairly”;
- “Use the power of our position for the well being of our constituents”; and
- “Create an environment of honesty, openness, and integrity”.

To become a “Certified City of Ethics,” a Georgia city must do two things – adopt a resolution endorsing the five principles and establish an ordinance that meets the minimum GMA standards. The ordinance must define what is and is not acceptable activities (by elected officials) and outline the process to address alleged infractions of the ordinance. More information on the Certified City of Ethics Program can be found on the GMA website www.gmanet.com and in the 2005 revision of the GMA publication *Ethics in Government: Charting the Right Course*.

By mid-2006, 187 Georgia cities had completed the process to become a GMA Certified City of Ethics.:

The BGA Integrity Index set the stage for a discussion of ethics in the broader context, and the GMA Certified City of Ethics Program describes one approach for providing an ethics infrastructure at the local government level.

As mentioned earlier, the micro view of ethics relates to an individual's perspective. The Ethics Resource Center (ERC) links individual actions to the broader context of organizational ethics. In 2006, the Ethics Resource Center published *Critical Elements of an Organizational Ethical Culture*. This document is available at the ERC website (www.ethics.org). Although the publication is focused on business organizations, its findings are equally applicable to individuals in nonprofit and governmental settings. One of the key findings was that the actions of individuals (both managers and co-workers) in the workplace have a significant impact on the overall ethical culture. In particular, the report cited three actions that have a particularly large effect:

- “Setting a good example”;
- “Keeping promises and commitments”; and
- “Supporting others in adhering to ethics standards”.

There is a link between the actions of effective leaders and those of ethical leaders. The ERC website establishes the leadership-ethics link more directly: “Leadership matters. **No effort to address ethics and compliance will succeed without the commitment and role modeling of executive leadership.** Ethics programs should ‘set the tone from the top’.”

Often, individuals face choices with obvious right and wrong connotations. These are generally easy choices to make. It's the subtle distinctions where one might lapse. Decisions perceived to be on the unethical side of this fine line can undermine the leader's effectiveness.

Recall the earlier discussion about power and influence. Ethical leaders can use each of the sources of power. Instances may even arise where the potential of withholding rewards is a proper method of influence. Unfortunately, unethical leaders can also use each of the five sources of power. The difference lies in the leader's intent. The unethical leader exerts influence for self-serving purposes instead of for the benefit of the group.

CONCLUSION

First, anyone has the capacity to become a community leader. To accomplish objectives, leaders influence followers in a positive manner to work toward those objectives. Fortunately, the skills (both traits and behaviors) that effective leaders use are learned skills. Individuals develop their leadership skills through a variety of methods, including formal and informal study. But the primary way individuals learn to become effective leaders is by leading. Effective leaders use self-

assessment and input from others to identify both strengths (which can be leveraged) and areas for improvement. Effective leaders make mistakes, but they learn from them and improve as they go forward. This experiential aspect cannot be overemphasized. Effective leadership cannot be a result of study alone.

What happened to "Loganville," described at the beginning of this module? First, and not surprisingly, "Loganville" is a composite of many different communities. However, Douglas Henton, John Melville, and Kim Walesh discuss several actual communities with similar situations in their book, *Civic Revolutionaries*. One of these communities was Richmond, Va. Its focused leadership transition effort identified a broad range of sources for potential leaders, including grassroots leaders and local entrepreneurs. It used a "big-tent" approach that included both the old and new generations of community leaders.

In the end, community leaders step forward because they want community improvements that they cannot accomplish on their own. Effective community leaders harness the enthusiasm, skills, and time of volunteers to create a better community.

One last comment – **really effective community leaders also see the development of additional community volunteers as a part of their overall responsibility.** Existing leaders must foster the perception that emerging leaders are both accepted and encouraged. This is the true legacy of an effective leader.

APPENDIX

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