

## **THE MAKING OF A LEADER**

**Dr Harry Phillips, FACE**

**Parliamentary Fellow (Education), Parliament of Western Australia**

**Honorary Professor: Edith Cowan University**

**Adjunct Professor: Curtin University of Technology**

**Address to Advancing Leaders Series 2008**

**Curtin University, Graduate School of Business,**

**38 Murray Street,**

**Perth, Western Australia.**

**7 August 2008 @ 9.30 a.m.**

Leadership is the task of organising group efforts towards particular ends. A detailed definition regards leadership as:

A position within a society which is defined by the ability of the incumbent to guide and structure the collective behaviour patterns of some or all of its members. It is at all times relational, interpersonal, and it is based upon the inequality of influence between the leader as the influencing agent and the followers as the objects of his [or her] efforts to cue their behaviour so that it will conform to his [or her] persona objectives.<sup>1</sup>

In essence, with shades of Max Webers' famous definition of politics, leadership has something to do with persuading or inducing people to do or accept something that they would not otherwise have thought of doing or accepting had it not been proposed to them. It is generally thought that leadership is desirable property although dangers can also emerge.<sup>2</sup> I contend it is an attribute or set of attributes which can be learnt or acquired.

Among the *virtues of leadership* are the following:

- It mobilizes and inspires people who may otherwise be inert and directionless;
- It may promote unity and encourage members of a group to pull in the same direction;
- It may strengthen organizations by establishing a hierarchy of responsibility and roles.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Graham Maddox (1996), *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice*, third edition, Melbourne: Longman, p. 446.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Heywood (2002), *Politics*, second edition, New York: Palgrave, p.348.

The *dangers of leadership* include the following:

- It may concentrate power, and can thus lead to corruption and tyranny; hence the democratic demand that leadership be checked by accountability measures;
- It may engender subservience and deference, thereby discouraging people from taking responsibility for their own lives;
- It may narrow debate and argument, because of its emphasis on ideas flowing down from the top, rather than up from the bottom.<sup>3</sup>

Although leadership is an ancient topic it is not often studied in its own right. Approaches to the study of leadership are many and varied with a surprising lack of disciplinary focus.<sup>4</sup> One of the most common approaches is the listing of attributes which are desired for effective leadership. This leads to tabulations including such terms as competence, integrity, strength, determination, decisiveness and shrewdness, as well as sensitivity. Other works classify leaders as maintainers, protectors and initiators and there are various theories of leadership as a *personal gift*, as a *sociological* phenomenon, as an *organisational* necessity and as a *political skill*.<sup>5</sup>

In this address some attention will be given to the attainment of the political offices of Prime Minister and Premier and some focus will be given to an informal exercise of leadership, namely the promotion of civic education—a personal crusade that begun from the privilege of doing a civics course at school as far back as 1957.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Andrew Heywood (2002), *Politics*, second edition, New York: Palgrave, p.348

<sup>4</sup> Graham Maddox (1996), *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice*, third edition, Melbourne: Longman, p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Heywood (2002), *Politics*, second edition, New York: Palgrave, p.349.

Whilst drawing on some of the textbook chapters on political leadership the observations on political leadership are coloured by some 15 years of commenting on political leaders in Western Australian (and some national) politics. At the Western Australian level the comments are buttressed by personal knowledge of the actors. Personally my approach is governed by the Aristotelian ‘golden mean’.

The thesis reads that in Australia to achieve political leadership status of Prime Minister and Premier, it is virtually necessary to be ‘mainstream’. This is particularly the case with the nation’s absolute majority type lower house electoral laws. This pre-requisite would not necessarily prevail under multi-member proportional representation. Compulsory enrolment and compulsory voting, and its management, needs to be considered. Party pre-selection procedures are also important. That is a gigantic hurdle for those who have aspirations for political leadership within a nation where ‘parachuting’ is not institutionalized.

## **POLITICAL MAINSTREAM**

- Being political ‘mainstream’ in society. This means ‘congruence’ with many sociological variables. Although, not necessarily in order, these include:
  - (i) Language (including accent and mode of expression),
  - (ii) Ethnicity,
  - (ii) Religion,
  - (iii) Location/region,

- (iv) Gender\* (under-utilisation; Governorship;Minsteries;Shadow Ministeries)
  - (v) Interests (particularly sport even if superficial), football but beware of your leanings and ‘macholand’. Tennis is the great ‘neutral’ sport.
  - (vi) Value system (including family),
  - (vii) Ideological symmetry with the political culture. Convey a faith in democracy, support for private business and private sector, egalitarian life-style. The State though is still seen as W.K Hancock once said ‘the state is to provide minimum services for the greatest happiness of the greatest number’.
- Personal skills or attributes include:
    - (i) Being articulate,
    - (ii) Having policy command across the portfolios of the government,
    - (iii) Well ‘educated’, nowadays formally, particularly law and the humanities,
    - (iv) Media skills for television and radio with more employment of the best medium for the individual,
    - (v) Being deemed a ‘good citizen’ or person, with perceived integrity, (and sense of humour).
    - (vi) Appropriate dress sense,
    - (vii) Physique-Different for men than women.
    - (viii) Health/fitness-well-being.

- (ix) Age (to avoid the too young or too old label) when attempting to win office. John Howard should have retired in March 2006) on his ten year anniversary of his prime-minister. Laurie Oakes.
- (x) Parliamentary and political experience (the longer the better),
- (xi) Capacity to create and maintain a profile, (Patron-Elizabeth Constable),
- (xii) Contemporary command of the news and trends in the nation and world.
- (xiii) Capacity to read (not follow) the polls and focus groups (public/private).  
At present they are not corresponding to expected pattern.
- (xiv) Capacity to win or be close in the 'Preferred Prime Minister or Premier' stakes. This is the combined public's view which is expressed in *Newspolls*. Nobody has established its components.

#### LEADERSHIP: OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT

Outside the formal structures of Parliament the credentials for leadership are different. It can be postulated that the demographic factors are much less critical. The skills and attributes are more significant but vary for each context.

In this brief the focus is upon my leadership in the context of promoting the ideal of better civic, citizenship and political education. This tradition can be traced back to Aristotle in ancient times. This is an advantage to link the cause of civics to the history of Western political thought. In Western Australia it has had its advocates and then detractors who held sway for a generation of citizens in this state, particularly after World War 11.

It is contended that leadership in civic education has at least four key dimensions. Firstly, as an advocate of this ideal it is necessary to strive to accord with the model of a 'good citizen'. Secondary, it is deemed advantageous to have relevant qualifications with publications and this be accompanied by knowledge of the organizational structure and key actors in the field. Finally, effective strategies have to be formulated and maintained over the short and long run.

#### The 'Good Citizen' or Person (or Integrity)

From my point of view the promotion of civic education poses the formidable challenge of requiring its advocates to adhere to a model of being a 'good citizen'. A perceived failure to reach such a notion or standard has the likely impact of undermining the quality of leadership in this domain. It is claimed that the 'good citizen' pre-requisite is also very important in broader political leadership as shortcomings in this regard reduce the possibility of achieving desired outcomes.

#### Personal Credentials in the Field

As I see it, another important requirement in the promotion of civic education is the need to have personal credentials in the field. This advisedly means suitable formal qualifications, a history of successful teaching in the area and membership of the professional associations which have such a focus. The conduct of research and writing of supportive texts and materials in the domain is also important. As in politics it is

helpful to have a profile to assist the promotion of the cause. This profile, often more readily gained in a related area such as political commentary, has to be exercised on opportune occasions in the media. Moreover, some opportunities emanate from this profile. An instance was the invitation to speak in March 2008, for a 10 minute period, to 1, 200 Hale boys about recollections of the West Perth Hale School site-now the Constitutional Centre. In this address I emphasised the Hale motto of 'Duty' and Schools commitment to Civics and Citizenship. This became the dominant theme for subsequent addresses by other School and Community leaders.

In a career sense the brand of championing a cause leads to problems of falling between the discipline gap. In my case it leads to an observation from 'significant others' that one is not a political scientist and one of is not a professional educator. There also exists the grave danger of being regarded as a zealot and hence it is easy to face the prospect of not being listened to on an issue.

#### Knowledge of the organisational structure and its key actors

A major advantage is knowledge of the organizational structure and its key 'actors'. In civic education this means an understanding of the Commonwealth and State education bureaucracies, the role of the various civic agencies and the content of the civic and citizenship syllabuses in each jurisdiction. At the same time the legitimate demands of other curriculum areas such as numeracy and literacy, science and other social sciences have to be accommodated or support for the civic education cause won't be suitably ranked.

### Persistent Promotion

Finally, effective strategies have to be devised to maintain the continual promotion of the cause. A failure to maintain this ‘pressure’ will mean that the objective slides from the public agenda. Submissions to parliamentary and governmental inquiries, the creation of suitable agencies such as the Constitutional Centre in Western Australia, civic’s role in Parliament and the Electoral Commissions and its inclusion in Curriculum Council courses and Education Department syllabuses are all required. Of late this has meant a role in the revamping of the Politics and Law Syllabus for the Tertiary Entrance Examination. Many of the next round of submissions will include the adoption of a Preamble to the Western Australian Constitution and a consolidation of its documents. A revamped Australian Constitutional Documents is also a goal but it is presently being complicated with a Preamble proposal to recognise ‘Indigenous Peoples’. A better reading of the 2020 Conference would have been advantageous.

In summary leadership is about getting things done. In politics it requires an understanding of the socio-political context or political culture in which an actor operates. Certain skills or attributes will enhance leadership performance. Outside the formal political structure a different range of considerations need to be addressed. The demographic variables are less significant but the skill and attributes have to be exercised with the benefit of the knowledge of the political system. Ultimately, too, successors have to be trained to assume the necessary leadership role in the historic field of civic education. That is being given consideration.

**SPEAKING PLAN**  
**THE MAKING OF A LEADER**

- Appreciation
- Definition of a Leader
- Virtues of Leadership
- Dangers of Leadership
- Neglected Field-Perspective to be taken
- Political Leadership (in the Australian Polity): Attributes
- Leadership in Civic Education
  - Good Citizen
  - Personal Credentials
  - Knowledge of Organisational Structure (Key Actors)
  - Persistent Promotion