



A PROGRAM OF THE FORD FOUNDATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ADVOCACY INSTITUTE AND THE ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

EDITORIAL MEMORANDUM

In Post-9/11 America, Leadership isn't Dead, it Abounds – but it's a *different* kind of leadership

*"Leadership is such a gripping subject
that once it is given center stage
it draws attention away from everything else."*

—John W. Gardner

Who are our leaders? What shapes them? How do they lead? Are they portrayed accurately in the media? Do we really understand community leadership?

Sometimes when a great wave passes beneath a ship, the passengers cannot feel it. But the wave changes the sea beneath them and transforms the land ahead.

"We're undergoing a big shift in the way people conceptualize leadership, even though many of the pioneers don't think of what they're doing as leadership because they're still measuring themselves by older definitions," according to Sonia Ospina, associate professor of public administration at New York University and Ellen Schall, Martin Cherkasky Professor of Health Policy and Management, also at NYU. Ospina and Schall are among a small number of academic researchers studying how Americans perceive and conduct community leadership. As partners of the Leadership for a Changing World program, they have launched a major study of grassroots leaders who have not received much media attention but have managed to transform their own communities.

"There is a sense among some in our country today that we are lacking inspirational leaders," according to Ospina and Schall. "Yet a closer look reveals that all over the nation groups of concerned citizens are working together, often at the local level, to solve tough social problems. These are the new leaders in America today."

Leadership for a Changing World, an awards program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU, seeks to recognize these leaders during this crucial time in our history.

Nonetheless, the myth of leaderless America persists.

For more information about the program, or for interviews, please contact Deborah Walter at dlwaltr@aol.com or (908) 522-1677

LEADERSHIP FOR A CHANGING WORLD

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The tragedies of Sept. 11 reminded us that our real heroes are not in the movies, but in our neighborhoods and precincts. Similarly, Sept. 11 reminded us of the importance of political leadership. If those lessons are to last we must now take a closer look at the leaders and leadership groups who do democracy's work. Absent that deeper discussion, many Americans will continue to believe that only celebrities qualify as leaders, or that leaders somehow appear magically — summoned by fate, endowed with charisma.

Even now, when asked to define leadership, Americans speak in hesitant platitudes about the personality characteristics of leaders. "A leader must have courage." "A leader should have charisma." Even many members of the media continue to view leadership as a set of mysterious properties embodied in the Great Man or Great Woman. Why is this?

For decades, political and management leadership literature focused on individual traits, styles, and behaviors that characterize the leader who works within a traditional, hierarchical system – dictating the solutions to everyone else's problems. Media and politicians have amplified this oddly undemocratic way of viewing leadership.

Additionally, they have confused community leadership with the daily acts of good citizens. For example, the "thousand points of light" metaphor, which suggests that if each of us does our part to volunteer, to mentor, to adopt a school, then everything will be fine. But true systemic change requires something far more powerful than stars in the sky or candles in the wind, however pretty those images may be.

Because of this powerful, pervasive and incomplete framing of leadership, few Americans believe that they, or anyone else, measures up. Therefore, the assumption goes, American must lack leaders.

Looking for leadership in all the wrong places

The myth is not new.

Our literature is replete with such aphorisms as, "A true leader always keeps an element of surprise up his sleeve, which others cannot grasp but which keeps his public excited and breathless." That's the way Charles de Gaulle, the president and Great Man of France defined leadership. Genghis Khan described leadership as "man's greatest good fortune... to chase and defeat his enemy, seize his total possessions, leave his married women weeping and wailing, ride his gelding." Even kinder versions of the Great Man as Leader approach tend to be negative, and patronizing. "A great man shows his greatness by the way he treats little men," wrote Thomas Carlyle, the 19th Century Scottish historian and sociological writer.

In the 1830s, many Americans mourned the passing of the founding generation – Jefferson, Franklin and all the others – and suggested (in a refrain familiar today) that the nation "would never see their like again," says Michael Schudson, University of California sociologist and author of "The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life."

Europeans also took a dim view of American leadership. In 1888, British ambassador James Bryce published his famous treatise, 'Why Great Men Are Not Chosen Presidents.'" As Bryce

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saw it, America lacked a strong civil service class or a European-style aristocratic tradition, which drew men of wealth and leisure to politics. Rather, Americans were recruited into political leadership through what Bryce considered corrupt party politics. Nonetheless, James Bryce – and his fellow aristocrats – didn’t anticipate the strength and vitality of American leadership in the century to come, or the failures of European leadership.

Nearly a century later, in the wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate, social critics once again argued that the country was suffering a leadership drought. In 1975, political theorist Benjamin Barber declared that 1945 had, in fact, been the pivotal year when modern American leadership began to erode. "There are today no leaders, only heads of factions; there is no leadership of ideas, only a competition of ideologies; there is no consensus, only an unstable balance of opposing interests," Barber claimed.

This charge, according to Schudson, “might have been written (and probably was) in any decade of our history.”

Toward an alternative vision of leadership

New evidence suggests that confidence in leadership is back – or that leadership has been here all along, unrecognized.

According to a Harris Confidence Index published in February 2001, public faith in leadership in all sectors of society was on a downward spiral throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties, reaching an all-time low of 42 percent in 1997. Then, in 1998, the Index jumped 12 points to 54 in 1998 and in 1999 to 60 percent, before falling slightly to 59 percent in 2000 and 55 percent in 2001. Nonetheless the confidence in leaders has not been this high for three consecutive years since the early 1970s.

“The tragedies of Sept. 11, and the subsequent U.S. response, may have added to this confidence,” according to Kathleen D. Sheekey, president and CEO of the Advocacy Institute. As a partner of the Leadership for a Changing World program, the Advocacy Institute conducts intensive outreach efforts, which has yielded 4400 nominations of community leaders in the first two years of the program. Americans do recognize and praise leadership in the public emergency services sector, but they continue to see lack of leadership is in the areas of intransigent social problems. “Nonetheless, a close look reveals an ongoing transformation in the way Americans think about community leadership – one that is gathering momentum,” adds Sheekey.

Even during the three decades when confidence in American leadership was at its lowest, an alternative vision of leadership was already coming into focus.

In the 1960s, John W. Gardner began to write about leadership in a profoundly different way — one that examined the symbiotic relationship among members of a community and its leadership. At its best, he believed, leadership is not embodied by a charismatic individual, but by networks or ordinary people doing extraordinary work for their communities. “Collaboration is messy, frustrating, and indispensable,” according to Gardner “There’s no magical leadership

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structure — just people and relationships.” He believed that the *process* of community leadership should be better understood.

He never suggested that building community leadership was easy. “All citizens should have the opportunity to be active, but all will not respond,” Gardner once wrote. “Those who do respond carry the burden of our free society. I call them the Responsibles. They exist in every segment of the community—ethnic groups, labor unions, neighborhood associations, businesses—but they rarely form an effective network of responsibility because they don’t know one another across the segments. They must find each other, learn to communicate, and find common ground. Then they can function as the keepers of the long-term agenda.”

Until his death this year, Gardner — former member of President Johnson’s cabinet, founder of Common Cause and Independent Sector, and member of the Leadership for a Changing World advisory board — made the pursuit of this alternative form of leadership his life’s work.

Other thinkers have also articulated a different approach to community leadership.

Political scientist James MacGregor Burns introduced the idea of “transforming leadership” which occurs when “one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.” Burns dismissed charisma as a concept that collapses under close analysis, and that leadership is not confined to politics – but is expressed by so-called ordinary people in their own communities.

Joseph C. Rost, a professor at the University of San Diego asserted that the study of leadership in the 20th century has been dominated by industrial thinking, framing leadership as “management oriented...goal-achievement-dominated, self-interested and individualistic in outlook, male-oriented, utilitarian and materialistic in ethical perspective, rationalistic, technocratic, linear, quantitative and scientific in language and methodology.”

Yet, Rost offered a strikingly different list of emerging leadership values for the post-industrial 21st century, among them: “collaboration, common good, global concern, diversity and pluralism in structures and participation, client orientation, civic virtues, freedom of expression in all organizations, critical dialogue, qualitative language and methodologies, substantive justice, and consensus-oriented policy-making process”

Some might dismiss such leadership values as hopelessly idealistic. But not Wilfred H. Drath, who, with the Center for Creative Leadership, focuses on practical business leadership. A member of the Leadership for a Changing World advisory board, Drath argues that business will soon find such values more effective in an increasingly diverse and interdependent global economy. And, he says, business could learn a thing or two from the grassroots social change agencies practicing the new, collaborative leadership.

But what *precisely* does this leadership look like? Are we replacing one set of platitudes with another?

As exciting as some of the alternative theory is, the literature remains thin. In 1999, Schudson chaired the University of Pennsylvania’s National Commission on Culture, Society and

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Community's leadership subcommittee. The experience was illuminating, he says, not because of what was brought to light, but by what remained in the shadows. Studying the copious literature on leadership, he found it strangely incomplete. “We raised more questions than we answered,” he says. Frustrated with the thinness of the research, the commission disbanded.

Helping to fill this gap is one goal of Leadership for a Changing World, a partnership of the Ford Foundation, the Advocacy Institute and New York University. LCW recognizes rewards outstanding community leaders and leadership groups. This year, LCW is working with the first 20 award recipients of the Leadership for a Changing World award; in October, another 20 winners will be announced. Working with these leaders — as co-researchers — LCW is exploring the nature and processes of community leadership.

Among the LCW winners, who suggest very different approaches to leadership:

- Bill Rauch, director of Cornerstone Theater, leads through theater. He believes that theater is the most collaborative of art forms, and can be, as he puts it, “a rehearsal for changing the world.” Cornerstone brings live theater to communities across the country, casting local residents alongside a small band of professional actors and adapting classical and original plays to the local setting. Every community in which his company has worked has been divided, often along racial lines. The plays happen in malls, in barns, in closed factories. This unique leadership method brings together police and gang members, ranchers and gays, people of all races and economic backgrounds. In the process, whole communities have been changed.
- Cassandra Shaylor and Cynthia Chandler, co-directors of Justice Now, in Oakland, have created the first legal teaching center in the United States that is focused solely on the rights of women prisoners — forging a new community of legal advocates, a network of lawyers, law students, community organizers and women in prison. The program reaches about 1,000 women a year. Justice Now co-sponsored the first legislative hearing on incarcerated women ever held inside a prison. The testimony of prisoners led to the introduction of two bills in the state legislature to improve health care for women prisoners – and the process affirmed women prisoners who had never thought of themselves as leaders, but indeed became leaders.
- Salvador Reza, born in Chihuahua, Mexico and the son of a bracero worker, is coordinator of Tonatierra Community Development Institute in Phoenix. Using an intriguing set of leadership skills — some based on Aztec traditions — he mobilized immigrant taco vendors to fight a city ordinance that would have made small food carts illegal, threatening the livelihoods of hundreds of people. Reza skillfully brought together groups on different sides of the issue — predominantly white neighborhood associations, the city’s restaurant owners, Latino community and business activists and a top civil rights attorney — to build a broad coalition in support of the stands. The coalition won passage of a new law that permits the stands to operate under regulations that meet neighborhood concerns.

Like other leaders across the nation, the 20 winners of the Leadership for a Changing World award (their contact information is attached) are using and developing leadership methods and

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tools that are only now getting the kind of attention and study they deserve. Such leaders are abundant; some of them are working in your own community. But often, their techniques are little understood.

“Exactly who are these leaders?” Schall and Ospina ask. “How do they come to tackle social problems? With whom do they work and how are such groups formed? In what ways are these leaders different from the national heroes we usually think of as leaders? These are some of the questions that triggered the need to undertake new research on leadership.”

In the post-September 11 era, such questions are more important than ever. Not long before he died, Gardner said, "I see extraordinary creativity at the grassroots. I see new modes of collaboration and conflict resolution, new ways of bringing social agencies, private foundations, neighborhood people, business and government to the same table. There's a new world out there." Indeed, it's time to chart the new world of leadership.

How can media help?

Media can help by challenging the public's assumptions about leadership, by starting a community dialogue about the quality and methods of your local leaders. Some suggestions:

- Identify five unrecognized leaders in your community who deserve to be honored.
- Write editorials or columns exploring the changing nature of leadership.
- Create an ongoing feature on community leadership in your editorial pages, local news or feature sections.
- Conduct interviews with the Leadership for a Changing World award winners, particularly those working in your region.
- Nominate local leaders for the Leadership for a Changing World award.

Please feel free to quote from this editorial memorandum in your editorials or columns. We can also provide you with op-ed pieces about leadership.

For more and profiles of the current awardees, please see the Leadership for a Changing World Web site, at <http://www.leadershipforchange.org>.

Or, contact Deborah Walter at (908) 522-1677 or dlwaltr@aol.com who can also put you in touch with a number of experts on leadership, as well as our awardees.

Attached: New Leaders, New Values: an article for the Ford Foundation Report
Contact list of LCW winners

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