



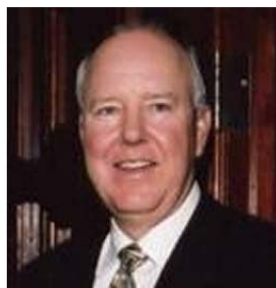
solutions that transform

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Gleanings

by Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.

John Ashcroft on Leadership



KeyNote is a new periodical, published by Regent University that articulates themes of significance to our society. For example, the first edition of *KeyNote* featured former attorney general, and now distinguished professor at Regent University, John Ashcroft's comments on "Leadership in a Time of Crisis." He noted three qualities of leaders:

1. Leaders are learners.
2. Leaders redefine the possible.
3. Leaders pursue principle rather than popularity.

As I reflected on Professor Ashcroft's astute comments, I was impressed that these qualities are key leadership characteristics not only in a time of crisis, but all the time. So here are my thoughts on these three leadership qualities.

Our dynamic society needs leaders who are lifelong students. Lifelong learners are never satisfied with the level of their understanding. They have an insatiable quest for a better understanding of reality. This perspective is rooted in the truth that we are all limited in our ability to see reality, and part of the process of understanding reality is the study of God's creation and God's handbook, the Bible. Sadly, most people fail the test of leadership at this point, because they do not want to commit the time and energy required to be lifelong students of God's revelation. True leaders are men and women who are continually growing in their understanding of reality.

Leaders redefine the possible. This characteristic is about vision. Without vision, no person or organization knows where it is going. Sadly, a lack of vision is all too common. The vision of many pseudo-leaders extends no further than the next month or quarter. Decisions are made based on short-term goals with little thought given to the long-term consequences. The levee system in New Orleans is a prime example. A friend of mine recently humorously commented that planning has benefits for the future but procrastination has benefits today. Leaders are not procrastinators, but most people are procrastinators.

Finally, leaders pursue principle rather than popularity. My first thought was that this quality rules out all the politicians—right? Perhaps that is an oversimplification, and certainly we do have some politicians who pursue principle. Nevertheless, the human condition is such that most people prefer to be liked; it is indeed more fun than being disliked.

We amuse ourselves by referring to the politically partisan federal government in Washington where politicians many times make decisions based on getting reelected. The only principle at work in these situations is self-preservation, hardly a noble principle. True leaders don't worry about getting elected. They are more concerned about principles of truth, honesty, and integrity than about popularity. Sadly, principles and popularity sometimes seem to be mutually exclusive. Perhaps this says something about the American people who elect the politicians based on a popular vote. If the American people more often sought to elect people of principle, we would have more politicians who are true leaders.

Personally, I want to follow leaders who are learners, who have long-term vision, and who are guided by principle. If our government and our businesses had men and women with these qualities, we would indeed move forward and create a better place for all.

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