Transformational Leadership: A Personal Reflection

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"One of the current and most popular approaches to leadership that has been the focus of much research since the early 1980's is the transformational approach (Northouse, 2016, p. 161)." Some of the most famous individuals in history are transformational in one form or another. "Transformational leadership is part of the "New Leadership" paradigm (Bryman, 1992), which gives more attention to the charismatic and affective elements of leadership (Northouse, 2016, p. 161)." It's one among many leadership styles. In fact, transformational leaders have been written about for thousands of years and have both praised (Christ and Buddha) and cursed (Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan).

> In a content analysis of articles published in *Leadership Quarterly*, Lowe and Gardner (2001) found that one-third of the research was about transformational or charismatic leadership. Similarly, Antonakis (2012) found that the number of papers and citations in the field has grown at an increasing rate, not only in traditional areas like management and social psychology, but in other disciplines such as nursing, education, and industrial engineering. (Northouse, 2016, p. 161)

Transformational leadership is seen on all continents, is practiced in many contexts. For example, entrepreneurs must function as transformational leaders to transform a small business into a large one.

> Bass and Riggio (2006) suggested that transformational leadership's popularity might be due to its emphasis on intrinsic motivation and follower development, which fits the needs of today's work groups, who want to be inspired and empowered to succeed in times of uncertainty. Clearly, many scholars are studying transformational leadership, and it occupies a central place in leadership research. (Northouse, 2016, p. 161)

It must be said, however, that few managers or CEO's are transformational. Most like the status quo and want to keep it that way.

"As its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2016, p. 161)." It is concerned with:

- Emotions

- Values

- Ethics

- Standards

- Long-term Goals

It includes:

- Assessing followers' motives

- Satisfying their needs

- Treating them as full human beings

"Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership (Northouse, 2016, p. 161)."

A personal story where I learned lessons about myself, other people, leadership, and life in general, insight that is unique to me, happened on September 11, 2001. 9/11 was the worst attack on the United States in history. I found myself trapped in the basement of our apartment building across from One World Trade Center buried in soot, rubble, and debris with twelve people including two of my three children not knowing if we were going to live or die, waiting for every second to be blown up by a bomb. I realized as a leader you need to be able to seize the opportunity to make things better under the stress of adversity. By applying transformational

leadership theory, I engaged with the group in the basement and created a connection that raised the level of motivation and morality in both myself and the group. I was attentive to the needs and motives of the group and tried to help the group reach their full potential of survival in an organized and calm manner. I placed the adults in a circle and the children in a circle inside ours. On my right was a professional man covered in soot sitting next to me without shoes, shirt, tie, or jacket on, just dress socks, dress pants and an undershirt. He had not spoken, at all, not one word for over an hour. I asked him if he was okay, he shared he ran down eighty flights of stairs, did not know where he was, and didn't know how he got where he was. I shared with him where he was and he didn't speak after that. The woman next to him was in shock. She repeated non-stop "Today was my day off, today was my day off, today was my day off…" I asked her nanny sitting next to her what the woman meant. The woman worked at Cantor Fitzgerald. Cantor Fitzgerald's corporate headquarters and New York City office was in the same building where my event planning business was located. My business was on the 79th floor, and Cantor Fitzgerald was on the 101st to the 105th floors of One World Trade Center, 2 to 6 floors above the impact zone of a hijacked airliner. Not one person survived that day at Cantor Fitzgerald. Two weeks earlier the woman had her second child. She was with her nanny who was from the island of Jamaica in the Caribbean, toddler, and two-week old infant. She worked one day on and one day off at Cantor Fitzgerald on the top floors of One World Trade Center, 9/11 was her day off. I suggested we ration and share all food and drinks. The nanny had a bag of cheerios she placed in the middle. Next to the woman's nanny was a French couple with two children who recently moved into our apartment hi-rise building. The children did not speak English, they had French children's books the French woman offered to read in English to the group of children. Next to the French couple was my housekeeper, Meena. Meena was from India, she

lived with her three daughters in Queens. Meena had a bottle of water she placed in the middle.

For a brief miraculous moment I had cell phone reception; shared with the group I would make

the first call for two minutes, pass the phone to my right to the business man who was in shock

and not speaking to make a two-minute call then he pass the cell phone to the next person, the

woman who was also in shock repeating non-stop today was my day off, which she would then

pass the phone to her nanny, and so forth until the phone lost reception. Everyone called a loved

one to say goodbye. We had six children and seven adults in total hovered in a circle in a dark

basement across the street from the imploding World Trade Center towers waiting to die while

we heard loud booms that sounded like large bombs going off, feeling the shaking and rumbling

ground, and becoming covered in more soot coming through the shattered apartment building but

kept united, organized, and calm. Two hours later we were rescued by NYC Firemen. We were

the last group of people to be found alive, the firemen placed gas masks on us, dug and cleared a

path out to the West Side Highway to escape. I feel this experience demonstrates my innovative

transformational leadership skills. I learned how to cope under pressure, bring together strangers

from different backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures where English for some was not their first

language, and inspire them to work calmly together. As a final thought, from one of my favorite

quotes, "You manage things; you lead people." -Grace Murray Hopper, U.S. Navy Rear Admiral

This story points to my vision as a leader, I raised the hopes and demands of the

displaced group, and, in the process, was changed myself. Others might benefit from hearing

my story; they might be inspired or transformed, maybe help if they find themselves in an

adverse situation amongst a group that needs leadership.

For decades, leadership theories have been the source of numerous studies. In reality as

well as in practice many have tried to define what allows authentic leaders to stand apart from

the mass. Hence, there are many theories on leadership as there are philosophers, researchers,

and professors that have studied and ultimately published their leadership theory. Theories are

commonly categorized by which aspect is believed to define the leader the most. The most

widespread ones are:

1. Great Man Theory (the 1840s)

2. Trait Theory (the 1930s – 1940s)

3. Behavioral Theories with associated theories (the 1940s – 1950s):

    a. The Managerial Grid Model/Leadership Grid

    b. Role Theory

4. Contingency Theories with associated theories (the 1960s):

    a. Fiedler's contingency theory

    b. Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory

    c. Path-goal theory

    d. Vroom-Yetton-Jago decision-making model of leadership

    e. Cognitive Resource Theory

    f. Strategic Contingencies Theory

5. Transactional Leadership Theories with associated theory 1970s):

    a. Leader-member Exchange (LMX)

6. Transformational Leadership Theories with associated theories (the 1970s):

    a. Burns Transformational Leadership Theory

    b. Bass Transformational Leadership Theory

    c. Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Participation Inventory

The type of leader I strive to be is to raise the consciousness in individuals and to get them to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of others - organizational innovation – create a culture in which employees feel empowered and encouraged to freely discuss and try new things, a transformational leader. By understanding and adapting to the needs and motives of followers, I strive to inspire followers to accomplish great things. I also strive to be recognized as a change agent, a good role model, and to continue to create and articulate a clear vision for groups, teams, and organizations by empowering followers to meet higher standards. And continue to act in ways that make others want to trust, and give meaning to organizational life.

The information I have learned at University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) in leadership class has impacted my leadership abilities, helping me to create change, become a stronger role model for followers, and develop a set of moral values and a self-determined sense of identity. I have also learned (Northouse, 2016):

1. To become more confident, competent, articulate, and express strong ideas.

2. To listen more to followers, and not be intolerant of opposing viewpoints.

3. How to develop a spirit of cooperation between myself and followers whereby followers want to emulate my transformational leadership style because they learn to trust and believe in the ideas for which I stand.

4. To create a clearer vision from collective interests of various individuals and units in a team, group, or organization. This vision is the focal point for transformational leadership. It gives myself and the team, group, or organization a conceptual map for where we are headed; it gives meaning and clarifies the team, group, or organization's identity. Furthermore, the vision gives followers a sense of identity within the team, group, or organization and a sense of self-efficacy.

5. To become more of a social architect. Meaning that I make clear the emerging values and norms of the team, group, or organization. I involve myself in the culture of the team, group, or organization and help shape its meaning. Whereby, confirming with the people that they know their roles and understand how they contribute to the greater purposes of the team, group, or organization. Transformational leaders are out front in interpreting and shaping for organizations the shared meanings that exist within them.

6. To become the most effective at working with people, building trust and fostering collaboration with others. Encouraging others and celebrating their accomplishments, resulting in people feeling better about themselves and their contributions to the greater common good.

The people who have had a significant impact on my life has been God, my husband, my children, my parents, my extended family, friends, co-workers, clients, professors, mentors, and famous transformational leaders. They have grounded me in inspirational motivation, where I talk optimistically about the future. Also, they have grounded me in individualized considerations whereby I strive to help others develop their strengths.

The hardships I have faced and overcome have been many. From early childhood to adulthood, I have faced severe hardships, great adversity, and multiple near-death experiences which I have survived, overcome and thrived. The greatest blessings in my life are the grace of God, my supportive husband, my healthy babies who are all successful adults, my parents, extended family, friends, clients, my health and well-being, nature, and animals.

It doesn't much matter what we say we believe, our real beliefs are revealed by how we act. We can lie with our words but we cannot lie with our actions. You don't even have to tell people what you believe because you can show them. And people watch what we do much more

than they listen to what we say. So, what do your actions tell people about who you are and what you believe? And how congruent are the things you say you believe in alignment with the things you actually do? It is a moment of truth, a sobering reality check, and a sometimes-uneasy accountability when we are asked to reconcile what we say and what we do. In fact, my pastor once told me that if you want to know what someone really believes in, don't even bother asking them. All you have to do is look at their calendar and their checkbook because what we spend our time and our money on is what we believe in the most. I personally really believe that people are good and want to help those in need, but sometimes things happen where you might find yourself in a situation that you can't seem to get out of, it can be a long-term issue or something that happens in an instant. For example, on 9/11 I was trapped in a basement with a nanny, housekeeper, two business men, a stay-at-home mom, a business woman, and children. Two of the three business people were in shock, one was not speaking, just staring into space, and one repeated a five-word sentence over and over for two hours. I took charge, organized the group into a team amongst the horrific chaos and turmoil, made a plan, talked optimistically about the future, helped others to develop their strengths, and motivated them to work together in a group. I provided a general way of thinking that emphasized ideas, inspiration, innovations, and individual concerns. I was aware of how my own behavior related to the needs of the group and the changing dynamics within the group, proving my transformational leadership style.

The ideas that make my heart skip a beat as there are people in the world who in the past (e.g., Jesus, Mohandas Gandhi, Dale Carnegie), present (e.g., Jack Welch, Tony Robbins), and future have, are, and will be raising the hopes and demands of people, and in the process, change themselves – hope is in the future. What I know about life now that I wish I had known in high school is if you can't define it, you cannot know it. If you don't know it, you cannot do it. The

one best piece of advice I could give to a person is to never stop learning. A life lesson I would like to pass on to my children is to live life to the fullest and follow your passion. If I only had one year left to live, I would spend it traveling the world to places I have yet visited, getting to know more people, cultures, and helping those in need along the way.

The reason I am telling this story is I am concerned with improving the performance of people and developing people to their fullest potential. I have set out to empower people and nurture them in change. As I consider my future career goals and leadership opportunities, my goal is to perform well beyond what is expected, to be a more effective leader with better work outcomes, and move followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them all the while motivated to transcend my own self-interests for the good of the group or organization. In summary, my goals are to initiate, develop, and carry out significant changes in people, groups, teams, and organizations.

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