

Value -Based Leadership Principles: Importance in the Modern Technical Education

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Abstract

This paper aims to reiterate the importance of values in leadership development and the importance of value education in technical institutions. Technical institutions have a role to play in not only providing quality technical education but also to make students aware of the value systems so that they could demonstrate value-based leadership in their professional life. Few qualities that are essential for value-based leadership are discussed in the paper and it is proposed that they need to be instilled in students who are studying at technical institutions.

Introduction

Leadership is indispensable in any sphere of human endeavor. In every profession leadership is required to provide guidance and direction. We also can't conceive of leaders without followers in practice. Whether we look it from an organizational perspective or social perspective, both leaders and followers co-exist. The way society has shaped up problem of true leadership has emerged as self-interest has become the dominating factor. Today, leaders focus more on the powers associated with leadership instead of responsibilities which need to be performed with power as means to achieve that. Reflection from the society is pointing that leaders are more interested in fattening their bank balance, abusing power for self-aggrandizement, and seeking materialistic pleasures. Where are the leaders who are willing to make a significant and positive contribution to people's lives and to the world in general? True leadership we argue is not about meeting one's own interests but to strive for achieving the greater good of the society, making a positive impact through engaging the various 'actors' or 'stakeholders' to play their role most effectively coming out of their self-interest. This is indeed the essence of any true leadership as laid out in Bhagavada Gita which says 'work without expectations and self-interests.'

Today we find lack of emotional sensibility and responsibility among leaders in the workplace. Goleman (1997) mentions that emotional intelligence is one of the important quality that help people in general and leaders in particular to succeed at work and relationships. A leader's emotional intelligence plays a key role in the overall performance of any family, organization, society or a country (Goleman et al., 2001). Even in our ancient

Indian folklores, the importance of emotions and their role in making a great king (leader) running the state (society) effectively are well reflected, whether it is the Jataka tales or the Hitopadesha.

Since time immemorial it has been prescribed for leaders to have patience rather than impatience, genuinity rather than superficiality, compassion rather than neglect and apathy for the sufferings and problems of others and also it is prescribed that leader should be broad minded rather than narrow minded, detached rather than attached to the ego, self-content rather than prone to fall victim to temptations of one's senses.

When one becomes a leader, people are more than willing to trust him. In that state leader can either contribute towards the benefit to those people's lives, or he can become the cause for their pain and anguish. Leadership is not a bed of roses. If that is the idea, then leader is living in a fools paradise. In modern times, the three basic motives for leadership are the desire for power, achievement, and affiliation (Manning and Curtins, 2002). But true leadership is about to have a sense of responsibility and to serve others (stakeholders, society, etc). A good leader is a person who attracts people's confidence and enthuses people with loyalty and faithfulness because of their relationship, whether the relationship is immediate or extended (Radhanath Swami, 2011).

A real leader is in a spirit of service. And, in order to be an authentic leader one must have knowledge to intellectually and practically discern the right from wrong. Moral discernment is absolutely important not just for leaders in management but also for the technological innovators of tomorrow.

The values required for moral discernment shouldn't just be an exclusive prerogative of the management professionals but also of the technological innovators. For example, nuclear energy is the outcome of technological advancement. But it is the value of the creator that whether he or she will use the technology to convert nuclear energy tapped into other sources for human advancement or would apply it to create devastating power of the nuclear weapons which will constantly pose a threat to human existence world over.

National Institute of Technology (NIT), Warangal is one of the institutes of national importance in technical education under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Formerly known as the Regional Engineering College, Warangal, it was the first among 17 Regional Engineering Colleges established in India. The institute awards Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees in engineering and technology, and master's and doctoral degrees in basic sciences and management. Totally the institute offers eight undergraduate programmes in engineering, thirty post graduate programmes in engineering, sciences and management and it totally has about 4500 students within the

campus. NIT Warangal has established a Centre for Value Education Club with a purpose to impart the value lessons from Indian culture to the students along with moral and basic values during their stay in the campus. So, that they become responsible technical professionals.

One of the main reasons for starting the centre is that in the present day modernization, many of the young generation who are pursuing professional degrees in the field of engineering and technology are utterly confused and have a distorted view about the importance of values in life. The result is obvious. They are spoiling their lifestyles due to lack of understanding of the mind-body and soul of healthy living. Hence, through the centre for value education club, the students of this premier institute are being trained in the areas of personality development along with managing their mind, time, stress and importantly their lives. After completing their education, students join organizations of repute or start their own ventures and it is necessary that values are imbibed in them during their education so that their technical knowledge and values help not only the organizations they serve but also contribute positively to the society.

Foundation of Leadership

The foundation of a building, although externally cannot be seen, is the basic part of the building that gives it strength and holds it up always. Simultaneously, our mind will be stable when it has a strong spiritual and ethical foundation. Storms may come, reversals may arise, but if we as leaders have that foundation of inner fulfillment, we deal with it with a very clear understanding and practical mind, and it will not be able to deviate us from our “true” north. So, it is very important that we need to befriend our minds because as the Gita says a controlled mind is your greatest friend for life, and an uncontrolled mind, your greatest enemy. If we can befriend our mind, we can win any battle that life has for us, but if we cannot control our mind and our senses, we may not even overcome the most trivial hurdle in life and will always remain 'defeated'. Then life would be an 'existence' but not 'living'.

So, we may question that how we can develop the real foundation of our true qualities that make us a real leader. From academic text books, one may learn and memorize what are the qualities of leadership and one may try to practice and apply them in their own lives. But textbooks only teach us the technicalities which can help make the “façade” attractive but without values there is no foundation. It's like making a beautiful house on sand which will look good but will never be strong enough to withstand nature's onslaughts. Hence, we should build these qualities (technology or technical capabilities for engineers, competencies for managers, etc) on a strong foundation of principles: a foundation of integrity, values and ethics. Then, no matter what comes in our life, we will not compromise with our value principles. When the foundation of our values in life is in harmony with the

laws of nature, we will live in harmony with our eternal nature. It is certainly possible with spiritual practices, by which we experience and realize the truth, by which we have a philosophy, a science, to justify, to convince ourselves to carry on with patience rather than impatience, with compassion rather than apathy to other's sufferings, with integrity rather than compromising for some temporary gain, with forgiveness rather than grudge.

Good leadership qualities include patience, trustworthy, compassion, compromise, apathy towards others and broad mindedness along with detachment towards ego and temptations. One should live with integrity and learn to forgive rather than hold grudges. One would have heard all these things, which is the basis of leadership. However, unless one builds a strong and real foundation to build these values upon, one will not be able to withstand the temptations and the pressures of this world.

Many times, great people who are in elite positions, who could really have led the world in incredible ways, have ruined their lives by just giving into temptations. Just because of one little temptation, one's career, reputation and life gets ruined. In Indian folklore, Ravana was a great scholar who had the knowledge of Vedas and scriptures and it was because of his immense knowledge he gained immortality as the story goes. But it was lack of a strong foundation like compassion, empathy and control over one's mind and senses, that he had to see the doomsday because eventually the person is filled with grudges, hatred and jealousy. Similarly, even leaders who possess good qualities eventually have to see the doomsday because their qualities are not standing on strong foundations or the pillars of value.

In practice, if one has a grudge against someone or when you hate someone, one will find that the whole experience is burning your heart; it's burning your consciousness; it's painful, it's contaminating. But as soon as you are able to forgive, you are liberated from that. Forgiveness is actually a beautiful, holistic experience for the heart. But how do we experience this? Unless we have a philosophy of life by which we understand what is the truth, who we are, and what is truly meaningful, fulfilling and worth striving for in our lives, and what is worth of giving to others in our lives, it's difficult for anyone to experience it. Self-realization and enlightenment are the basis of a life of real prosperity. Such a life is a life of meaningfulness, of fulfillment; it's a life of love.

If we don't learn how to love in our life, then everything else we do is empty and superficial. Because the heart wants love; the heart doesn't want money, the heart doesn't want beautiful women or handsome men. The heart is looking for love, but attaining that love is not a sentimental disposition - it's a science and it has a philosophy also. So, the most critical technique for proper living is to understand the nature of the self, nature of who we are, nature of karma, how we are responsible for all that what we do, what we speak etc. Therefore, to understand the goal of life, of what we really want to strive for – that is the truth

that should be the foundation of our lives to become good leaders.

By analyzing the present day modern technical education system in developing countries like India, the author proposes six basic and essential leadership qualities on the basis of oriental wisdom that must be inculcated in the students who are pursuing technical education like engineering. The essential qualities are Character, Self confidence, Self discipline, Tolerance, Forgiveness and Positive attitude.

D) Character

As per the Heritage Dictionary, character is defined as the combination of one's qualities and behavior that distinguishes from him or her from others. In practice, one's character determines his / her potential, skills and leadership qualities in the family, society, organization or country. In general, we recognize the good character in a person through his qualities like integrity, competence, love and care, vision, honesty, inspiration, etc. According to the Sankhya philosophy, human character is a mix of 'Sattva', 'Rajas' and 'Tamas' tendencies. 'Sattva' tendency in a person's character is reflected in the person's purity of thought, deeds and intentions; one who is in harmony with 'prakriti' or the environment. Such tendencies are generally believed to be exhibited by the 'Wise' one who has a positive influence on the societal consciousness. 'Rajas' is generally reflected by people having passion to succeed or winning. It is the source of inner drive or motivation in humans. People who have the passion to succeed in material pursuits are high in 'Rajas'. People who neither have 'Sattva' (righteousness) or 'Rajas' (passion) are said to be doomed in 'Tamas' which is reflected in a person's ignorance of reality or his/her lack of control over the senses. 'Tamas' generally leads to hedonistic pursuits and lack of initiative or indulgence in negative activities which hampers the existing consciousness of the society.

According to discourses of Bhagavada Gita, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna that a true leader possesses 'Sattva' character i.e., righteousness, harmony with nature, inspirational and virtuous. The one with 'Sattva' character will always strive for self-realization or 'atmagyan' about the absolute truth and knowledge and will share this knowledge for the benefit of humankind. However, the leaders in the mode of 'Rajas' only think passionately of winning the self-created rat race where leaders only start focusing on achieving the ends without any concern about the righteousness of the means adopted. A truly successful leader is able to strike a balance between the Sattva and Rajas tendencies. As Chanakya reminds in his legendary text on politico-economics, the Arthashastra, that a King (leader) must be a 'Rajarishi' or Wise king who should not only think of the welfare of his state or kingdom but also the expansion of his empire. To achieve these objectives of welfare and expansion concurrently, a King (leader) must possess both wisdom and passion. Finally in the mode of 'tamas', the leader is ignorant of the reality, lacks the capability to discern between right and

wrong and is only concerned about achieving his own self-interests. Such tendencies lead to corruption which if not checked at the right time may lead to a highly disorganized society where there is no value for justice. According to Bhattacharjee (2011):

“The major reason for failure of organizations is due to the sudden imbalance created in the Satva – Rajas guna (character). This can happen because of two reasons:

- (i) *Unethical practices like favoritism, financial misrepresentation, etc may lead to sudden degeneration of “Sattvic” guna within the organizational culture. This may lead to emergence of “Tamasic” tendencies and can break the delicate balance between “Sattva-Rajas” gunas.*
- (ii) *Too much ambition, passion, bitter competition within an organization as well as any industry may lead to greed and selfishness. The Rajas may exceedingly dominate the Sattvic (Sattva) gunas or tendencies which will lead to making wrong organizational decisions at various levels. Again, we have a misbalance in the Sattva-Rajas gunas leading to organizational failure”*

Finally, the Bhagavada Gita –

*Sattvat sanjayate jnanam rajaso lobha eva ca
Pramada-mohau tamaso bhavato jnanam eva ca”*

- (Ch 14, Ver 17, Bhagavadgita, translated by Radhakrishnan, 1993)

which means that it is from ethical & moral conduct comes wisdom (sattva); passion leads to greed (Rajas); ignorance and inactivity (Tamas) leads to illusion. Hence, every effort should be made to train the young generation to inculcate the 'Sattva' tendencies and to strike the right balance between Sattva and Rajas because they are going to be the workforce and leaders of the organizations tomorrow.

II) Self Confidence

It is a well-known fact that the self-confidence is a very essential ingredient for success in any field of life. Without such confidence we are afraid to take risks, and we don't have the courage to explore higher horizons while performing our deeds within this world. Real self-confidence is not based on our achievement or our successes in this world but it is based on the fulfillment of who we are, what our purpose is, and what we represent to ourselves, to our families, and to the world around us.

If a person has such self-confidence, then he can generate faith and confidence in others. For anyone to get this jewel of self-confidence, the association (the people with whom the leader associates) is very important. If we associate with people who sincerely strive to live by the

spiritual ideals, who sincerely try to cultivate faith in the highest truths, who don't hypocritically sell their values off for the cheap distinctions of the world, that association will elevate us to higher levels of consciousness. In that association, when we hear about the histories of great personalities and their qualities, it gives us confidence and we would look forward towards setting valuable examples for others to follow. And a true leader is one who leads by example.

Self-confidence originates at a heart that has faith in the higher consciousness. Such a faith will bring us to the eternally liberated state of divine love, and this is the root of joy, happiness as well as success in life. This is indeed the true art of self-confidence.

III) Self discipline

In general people have been trained to do things because they fear some authority, not because they follow any moral principles. A child was trained to do certain activities in the designed manner because he / she fear either the parent or teacher or any older sibling. Similarly, an adult may do certain things because he/ she fears someone – may be spouse, boss, policeman or any other authority and mostly not because he/she follows any specific principles. As per Bhagavad Gita, every work should be guided by principles. Work without expectations and work guided by principles. A story goes that – two people were cutting stones. A passerby asked one of them: What are you doing? One of the stone-cutters replied – “Can't you see, I am cutting stones” and then again became engaged in cutting. Another passerby came and asked the other stone cutter – “What are you doing my friend?” The other stone-cutter replied – “I am building a church”. Clearly both the stone-cutters were cutting stones but the second one knew what he was making. Self-discipline can only come if the person understands himself, is aware of the values, introspects himself with respect to the existing values and then recalibrates himself to align to those values.

Lack of self-discipline will create the soft ground where person may only become a self-proclaimed leader but never the one embraced by his peers or the society at large. Such a person also will not have control over his / her senses and so 'tamas' tendencies will start dominating the general character. The person will indulge in negative activities or inactivity and would not be able to contribute in any way towards his / her family or societal well-being.

People like to adore great people, and people like to become great in their own way. But what actually is greatness? Is greatness only about having material abundance? The answer is certainly no. In this world, even smugglers, extortionists, black marketers, gamblers, etc are millionaires or billionaires. A person who lives the values, maintains self-discipline, and contributes positively to the society at large remains 'alive' in the memories of the society. We never see statues of hooligans or smugglers or people who made money using wrong

ways but we see statues, public parks, roads, etc in the name of great personalities who have achieved and conquered the hearts of the public through their self-discipline, contribution towards the society and their good deeds. They have lived the values which are always been taught in various ways, either through scriptures or ancient folklores.

IV) Art of Tolerance

We are living in a world of dualities. It's a challenge to adjust one's consciousness and maintain integrity while tolerating dualities. A coin has two sides – head side and tail side. If you want one side, you must automatically accept the other; they are inseparable. Bhagavad Gita describes how distress is inseparable from happiness; or success and failure are inseparable as “the non-permanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed”.

Values are eternal, transcendental. A person who focuses on the eternal values emerges as a leader who is ready to face any uncertainty that comes the way and is readily going to embrace any complexities, whether posed by the work in hand or the life. In practice, technologists or professionals have to face many questions where they don't have a clear textbook solution to. Then it is their tolerance that keeps them anchored and their self-confidence that provides them the courage to accept those uncertainties and come up with their innovation solutions.

A person without self-discipline and tolerance is a lost 'soul' who will never have the internal compass in place and so will be utterly confused. Life, both professional and personal, will be highly disorganized for such a person. According to the universal principle of all spiritual paths, this one line succinctly describes what greatness is: “One's greatness has to be estimated by one's ability to tolerate the most provoking situations”. This is something very important to be understood by all human beings.

V) Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a quality that is absolutely crucial for our peace of mind or any peace and harmony within this world because in today's age there is rampant inclination for quarrel and hypocrisy. If we cannot forgive, then there is no possibility of any relationships surviving on any level – whether it is husband and wife, friendship or neighbors, between castes, academic groups, states and nations. It is because of our unforgiving nature that we lose our near and dear ones, it is because of lack of forgiveness that we do not have compassion towards nature, it is because of lack of forgiveness that we nurture ill feelings, anger and

jealousy for others. Studies have consistently shown the immense negative impact of envy at workplace on the overall performance of the team. Today, in most organizations, employees work in teams, they work as a unit. In such a work structure, even the slightest form of 'envy' or 'intolerance' will lead to 'lack of forgiveness' and any team will never be able to achieve any of its objectives and would only operate as a highly disorganized group of envious individuals who are working within their self-created silos trapped in their mental cages. Today, many of our youth who could significantly contribute towards the society at large and to their workplaces in particular are trapped in their mental cages created by anger, hatred, jealousy, etc.

VI) Positive Attitude

Human intelligence is properly utilized when, in whatever situations that come upon us, instead of simply reacting we make an intelligent choice of what is actually the highest virtue that we can achieve. The Holy Scripture Bible says “Knock and the door will open”. Every situation is an opportunity. It is said, “When opportunity knocks most people complain about the noise”. Vision is to see the invisible, to see the positive possibilities in every situation that comes upon us.

One person says “Look at this rosebush, it is full of thorns”. He keeps on grumbling about the thorns on the rose bush. Another person rejoices, “Look at this thorn bush, it has a rose in it”. They are seeing the same thing, but are they are not responding to the same thing. So, according to our state of consciousness, we have certain attitudes, and we will perceive reality according to our acquired attitudes. What attitude we choose to adapt to a situation is what will determine our consciousness and our whole perception of the world.

Modern psychologists approach the attitudes of human beings based on the idea that a human being is a biological and mental being. Therefore they psychologically try to help people to have a positive attitude accordingly, to help people with their physical and emotional conditions. This may be helpful, but it will remain incomplete if they do not understand the spiritual dimension of life. Bhagavad Gita, 1986 describes that there are eight basic elements in a human – five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether) and three subtle elements (mind, intelligence and ego). Besides these elements there is a superior nature, which is the spirit soul, the conscious life force within all living beings. The soul, atma, is satchitananda, eternal, full of knowledge and full of bliss. A really good leader does not see anything as totally bad. He knows about the bad. He does not just hide from it; he is conscious about it. However, he looks for the good opportunity even in the bad situations.

Importance of Meditation in Value based Leadership

Meditation comes in various forms and styles. Ancient Indian sage Patanjali gave the first comprehensive doctrine for the practice of meditation to control our mind and senses. 'Yoga' as it normally termed literally means 'unification'. Anything that unifies the body, mind and soul with the universe is yoga or meditation. In Bhagavata Gita, Samkhya Yoga teaches us the importance of balancing the 'satva', 'rajas' and 'tams' tendencies. It further states that meditation is not about giving up activities but it is about being engaged in one's work with a meditative mind. In order to create wise leaders of tomorrow, meditation should be made an integral part of every value education structure or any curriculum.

Today world's leading professional institutions like MIT, Stanford, Harvard, Georgia Tech, etc have implemented some form of meditative practices in their curriculum because to effectively manage the stress in today's fast and competitive workplace, focus and controlling your mind is indispensable. In his book, Making your Mind your Best friend, Baba Shuddhaanandaa (2003) says –

“If you are seeking and searching for a true friend who would be by your side when you are in danger, a friend who will understand your true need, then know your mind which listens to you. Know your mind which is disciplined through yoga, meditation, prayer, and spiritual practice. Know that which allows your mind to be in Divine contemplation, to be anchored in the Divine. That kind of mind is your true friend. That kind of mind sustains you through the turbulence and vagaries of life. It doesn't allow you to drop downward because you are suddenly faced with a dire situation.”

Conclusion

In the present paper, efforts were made to describe the six important value based leadership qualities, viz. character, self confidence, self discipline, art of tolerance, forgiveness, and positive attitude. These six qualities if followed will lay a good foundation in the life of students in the technical institutions and would act as guiding force in making them responsible citizens and value-based techno-leaders.

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