

“Based on this year’s fourth-grade reading scores,’ observes Paul Schwartz, a Coalition principal in residence of the U.S. Department of Education, ‘California is already planning the number of new prison cells it will need in the next century,’” (Cushman, 1998, vol. 14, #3).

This quote was derived from an article written by Kathleen Cushman and paints a picture of the education system today and the way society basically sets students up for failure. Rather than seeing the low reading scores and helping out by sending in tutors and equipping children with the resources they need to succeed later on, the government sees slow learning and is ready to weed out the weak. Often as human instinct we act upon the rule of survival of the fittest, but society is inflicting injury in order to create those weak which have to be left behind with no hope of ever being successful. This is most definitely unfair to children, who at this stage in life are dreaming of being doctors, firemen, dancers, etc.

Darling Hammond, author of “Securing the Right to Learn: Policy and Practice for Powerful Teaching and Learning,” describes America’s pattern of not providing students with the adequate environment and tools to develop skills necessary for the work force as a ‘school-to-prison pipeline.’

These negative practices lead to overpopulated prisons and a decline of resources which could be put to better uses. These issues are discussed in Victor Miceli’s article, “Prison Crises in California,” (<http://www.pe.com>). When it comes to the subject of prison populations, the death penalty, and America’s tax dollars there is much debate at hand, and with obvious reason because many struggle between the betterment of the country as a whole and human ethics.

Not only are we losing several valuable workers, we are losing many potential leaders who could be changing this exact habit of society and the education system. These potential leaders are needed every day in a society of people who are desperate for direction and purpose to their monotonous lives. There is need for leaders like Dick Nettell (Leadership challenge, Kouzes & Posner, ch. 1, 2007,) who make jobs as dull and tedious as telemarketing fun and fulfilling for others. That is, after, all what people want; they want leaders who are forward-looking, inspiring, competent, and most of all honest (ch.2, 2007.) I know honesty is something that I look for people I look to as leaders. If I cannot trust someone how are they supposed to lead me anywhere?

There are very few people that I trust. When I think of trust I look for people who do not just say but do. I have dealt with issues in this area many times; people tell me they are going to do something, I get my hopes up, and then those hopes are completely crushed when they do not keep their word. I really lose my faith in people who do this and have a hard time relying on them or going to them with problems in the future. Even with my own father; I love him very much, but he often does not keep his word, so I do not know whether to believe him or not. That is especially tough when you want to look up to someone. Everybody has at least one person who they would like to look up to.

To be quite honest, I do not know what a real leader is like. I have heard about leaders, I have read about leaders, even had others tell me that someone is a leader to them. It is easy to pin point characteristics that an idyllic leader may have; trustworthiness, integrity, confidence, and care for those he or she is leading, plans and hope, always growing and improving, etc. Have I, however, seen exemplifiers of these traits? Unfortunately, I have not. I have seen glimmers of these in people; they are, sooner or later, devoured by a cruel society and the spirit of pessimism.

One of my favorite bible stories is of Esther. She was a girl who unexpectedly became queen. She was nervous and humble and when she found out her whole family and culture was in danger of being killed and destroyed she over-came nerves and stood up proudly to protect her family. To me, that is what leadership is; being able to overcome fears and sadness and things that seem too big for us. There are many people in my life who I have looked up to and they seem bold, smart, and strong, but one little thing gets to them and they let it eat at them and eat at them until they have given up.

William Shakespeare had this to say of leadership, "Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them," (act II, scene V, Twelfth Night). I agree with Shakespeare to a very large degree. There are some that are born great, with personalities worth a thousand watts of energy. It is what they do with that greatness that sets them up for leadership. There are individuals who break the mold of the expected leader. My sister and I are a perfect example.

My sister was born with freckles and smiling eyes that a blind person could not miss; when she walks into a room people gather toward her. People come to her for solace, information, and advice. She is a born leader. What will she lead? Who will she lead? Those answers are still unknown, even to her, but I am confident that she is a leader and I hope that the burdens of the world will not get to her.

I, on the other hand, was born with a quiet voice and a reluctant spirit. Life experiences have been hard on me though, and my compassionate heart has been beaten up quite a bit. I see hurt and void and I want to change that. I have had many people tell me that I am very wise for my age and I want to use that wisdom to inspire thought in people. I have overcome my trials and I want to help others that are struggling through the same things.

I do not believe in manifest destiny or anything of the sort. I definitely believe that the title of leader must be one that is earned. But there are many who are born with great potential to achieve leadership positions and father change.

If I never see someone else move beyond short comings and discouragement and become a leader in my eyes, I hope that I see myself do so.

In Monday's edition of Las Cruces Sun News Amanda L. Husson writes about improvements on the building of Lynn Middle School in "Lynn Middle School celebrates 50 years". The school which has been running for 50 years has had repairs in the making since 1986, including lighting, flooring and recent plans to make renovations to the school's gym. The article states that along with the physical changes have come changes in attitudinal aspects. Quotes from students that attend Lynn Middle School exemplify that change by saying how they have seen changes in the teachers and how students actually want to learn.

More important than the renovations done to the building are the changes seen in the teachers, and hearing that from the students is what matters. This is a perfect example of what Fred J. Rodriguez says in "Futuristic Leadership in a Global Community." He says, "There is a growing consensus among educators and other professionals that the design and structure of education must change fundamentally if we are to compete successfully in a global community." It is in this change in which the vision begins to be molded.

From that first molding of the vision, leaders should take a moment to step back and ask themselves, "Is this really what I want for the future? Will it help others?" This is most definitely the way that leaders or anyone aspiring to be a leader should act, as also stated in "Futuristic Leadership in a Global Community, "Furthermore, CEPA promotes the idea that candidates aspiring for leadership roles measure themselves by the vision of the future."

That second question, "Will it help others?" is exactly what leading in a global community is all about. With all the technologies that are available today someone a million miles away can respond to anything within seconds. How is that convenience utilized best? By using it to connect persons and peoples together for a greater good. Leaders today have such an advantage with so much in their reach; surely the great leaders of the past would have loved to have these technologies at hand.

The video on going the extra degree shown in class was definitely inspiring. With all the opportunities the world has to offer how can leaders continue to resist going all the way to 212 degrees? Going that extra degree means gathering others who share your vision and are willing to stand by you and empowering them to further the vision. In the article, What's Trust Got to Do With It? by Fred J. Rodriguez, he states, "Empowerment as a philosophy and set of behavioral practices means allowing individuals to be in charge of their own career destinies, while meeting and exceeding the institutional and personal goals through a shared vision."

After creating a vision for the future it is then when the optimistic and confident support of others is needed. A Latin proverb says, "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link," therefore having anyone on the team who is pessimistic could delay any growth and maybe even destroy the vision all together. Also, if there is any stock put into this proverb, equal power and strength should be given to all members if the vision is to succeed. Otherwise, the leader is disempowering his or her followers and making the chain weak from the beginning. This is probably a big fault in the education system. Teachers often look down on their students and send them the message that they are not capable of learning and growing. At that point the education system becomes weakened rather than being built up.

When there is a need, it is not just one person who is in need, there are several more than just that one. This is why the ideas of having a vision for the future and empowering others by knowing that they too are in need and share that vision work together well. When these two ideas are blended it is then that the chain becomes the strongest. Soon after, only change can follow.