

**LEADERSHIP AS A WAY OF BEING
AMBASSADOR JAMES A JOSEPH
INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATION
DENVER, COLORADO
OCTOBER 25, 2012**

(This address contains material excerpted from a book by Ambassador Joseph to be published by the Duke University Press and should not be quoted without attribution)

Let me first congratulate the ILA for bringing us together at this unique moment when the need for effective leaders has never been more critical to the wellbeing of people across the globe. I want also to congratulate each of you for your contributions to both developing a new leadership culture and highlighting the need for a new leadership paradigm that can help bridge boundaries in a world that is integrating at fragmenting at the same time.

Almost fifty years ago when I was organizing the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, our search for leadership was a search for leaders who called us to a higher purpose, inspired us, elevated us and appealed to our better nature. At the beginning of the 21st century, just as my colleagues and I launched a binational center for leadership and public values, we saw the emergence of a very different concept of leadership. A high profile and increasingly influential group of people seemed to be in search of leaders in whose image they saw themselves; someone who looked like them, acted like them and thought like them, if they thought at all. This romanticizing of ordinariness appeared to have lost some of its steam as the decade came to a close, but it is clear not just here in the United States, but in many other places as well, that our public life is still plagued by the “dumbing down” of even the public discourse about leadership.

To make matters worse, we are meeting at a moment in which the mood of our time has been described by psychologists as one of free-floating anxiety. There have been periods like this in many of your countries before. But here in the United States, the period after 9/11 was such a moment and the period after the assassinations of Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy was such a moment

Yet, today’s anxiety is not the result of one event, but a confluence of events. It runs the gamut from anxiety about the almost free fall of an interdependent world economy to anxiety about what violent conflicts are doing to our soul as a people; from anxiety about whether a new meanness has emerged that seeks to de-legitimize those with whom we differ to anxiety about whether the increasing tendency to use the public square to promote private interests will lead to an eclipse of the very idea of a public good. We are so anxious that we are anxious about being anxious.

So what are the implications for leadership studies, leadership research, leadership centers and the many manifestations of our commitment to improving the quality of leadership for the future? When many of our colleagues think of training or preparing leaders to cope with times like these, they tend to emphasize what leaders need to know and what leaders need to do. My focus has been on how leaders need to be, so when my colleagues and I developed the United States – Southern Africa Center for Leadership and Public Values we developed a curriculum and chose a pedagogy that focused on leadership as a way of being. We were not the first to think

of leadership in this way, but we were early in the development of a program that put flesh and bones on the concept. It was a program that sought from the outset to use Nelson Mandela as a prototype and to cultivate the values that made him one of the most respected and revered leaders of the modern era.

You will have an opportunity to hear more about that program from a panel that follows this session. I want simply to share a few insights gained from my own work with President Mandela as he sought to build a non-racial democracy at the Southern tip of the African continent where a system of separate development had been institutionalized into a pigmentocracy. Rights and privileges were determined according to color and culture. The idea of separate development was really a form of intentional under development of a people.

As the United States Ambassador, I had a front row seat as Mandela brought different values and a different vision to the quest for national community. Heads of State and royalty from around the world beat a path to his door for advice and counsel on the great issues of the day and of course, for some, a photo op so they could prove to their constituents that they had once been in the presence of this global icon. The irony is that after twenty seven years of incarceration Mandela went from political prisoner to president. He was in prison while the world economy was becoming interdependent. He was in prison while we were developing the Internet. He was in prison while we were becoming addicted to the cell phone. He was in prison while we were being seduced by the notion that experience trumps wisdom and judgment. But he came out of prison, took over the leadership of his party and his country and never missed a beat because for him leadership was a way of being, rather than simply the mastery of a set of specialized functions, management competencies or public experiences.

Mandela's attractiveness and influence came from the power of his personality, the elegance of his humanity, the wisdom of his judgment, the loftiness of his ideals, the calmness of his temperament and the power of his life story. He emerged from prison at a time when effective leadership was portrayed by many as the ability to exercise hard power, often the ability to bluff, buy or bully one's way into influence. Even the projection of state power beyond national borders had come to be seen largely as the domain of what Arthur Schlesinger called the "warrior caste."

Yet, long before Joseph Nye wrote his first book on soft power, Mandela was warning that if we did not solve problems among nations through the use of our brains we would eventually have to solve them through the use of our blood. One of the primary qualities that enabled him to be more effective than others was his capacity to seduce when coercion was neither desirable nor possible. Much of the respect for him came from his ability to listen, to learn from others and to show respect for their traditions while maintaining equal respect for his own. He was known as a skilled negotiator who won many concessions during the development of the new democracy because of his knowledge of the history and culture of his adversaries. Some observers called it a classic case of knowing your enemy well enough to charm them into respecting you. He could draw on lessons from key historical moments to illustrate why his proposals made sense in light of the history of the population groups who had also struggled against domination.

Before starting the leadership center, I also spoke with other leaders in the United States and other parts of the world about how best to meet the leadership challenges of the future. Some spoke of a need for a new civil servant who understands that bureaucracies can be both efficient and humane. Others spoke of the

importance of political leaders who seek power to disperse it rather than simply dominate it. Some talked about the need for business leaders who understand that ethics is good business; that running a morally sensitive corporation can contribute directly to the bottom line. Others talked about the need for leaders in civil society who understand that they are custodians of values as well as resources.

As I reflected on the leaders with whom I have worked and my own leadership experience in business, government and civil society, I concluded that leadership as a way of being has four essential elements. Daniel Goleman has emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence and I agree that leadership is more art than science. I have been a manager and I have been a leader. As a manager I prized order, but as a leader I had to be willing to risk chaos. Yet while my grounding in what Goleman called emotional intelligence has been critical, I found in Mandela and some of the other effective leaders I have known three other elements that have caused me to think of leadership as fundamentally a way of being

Moral Intelligence

Emotional intelligence must be accompanied by moral intelligence. One of the greatest challenges leaders face in applying ethics to our aggregate existence is how to think about, how to talk about and how to apply values to our work in public and private institutions without getting caught up in the politics of virtue or the parochialism of dogma. I cannot over emphasize what a grave mistake it would be to allow questions regarding the appropriate role of ethics in our aggregate existence to remain primarily the domain of moralists interested only in the private behavior of individuals.

Reinhold Niebuhr, the great moral theologian who in 1932 wrote the book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, could have been speaking directly to our own times when he warned of the difficulty of applying the moral sentiments of individuals to the moral imperatives of groups. He went on to argue that while we know a lot about what is right and what is to be revered in individual behavior, we have made relatively little progress in applying morality to the problems of our aggregate existence, whether national, economic, racial or organizational.

Far too much of our discourse about ethics in public life is about the micro-ethics of our individual existence, the private virtues that build character. My focus in the program we developed has been on the macro-ethics of our aggregate existence, the public values that build community. It is not that I am uninterested in the cultivation of private virtue. It is simply that religion does a great job of proclaiming moral absolutes while effective leaders must often deal with moral ambiguities.

There are many who question whether it is possible to identify moral prescriptions or standards for our public life that would bridge culture, context and the many new complexities. In other words, they ask, is it possible to identify a set of common values, a set of precepts so fundamental that they dissolve borders, transcend races, outlast cultural traditions and transcend the boundaries that the writers of sacred texts and the proponents of secular philosophies have created to protect cultural identities.

My friend Rush Kidder, who passed away recently, travelled the world in search of an answer to that question. He concluded that it was indeed possible and published a book on the subject. Others point to the universality of the so-called Golden Rule. Consider these examples:

Christianity “Whatever you want done to you, do also to others.”

Islam: “No one of you is a believer until he loves for his neighbor what he loves for himself.”

Judaism: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. This is the entire law; all the rest is commentary.”

Buddhism: “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.”

Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty; do not onto others what you would not have them do unto you.”

Confucianism: What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”

Bahia: “And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou chooses for thyself.”

Yoruba Proverb (Nigeria): “One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby should first try it on himself to see how it hurts.”

It is clear from these excerpts that it is indeed possible to bridge the moral divide and affirm a set of principles that transcend national, cultural and religious borders. Regardless of the reason for the renewed emphasis on values, it is increasingly obvious that the need for a moral thermostat is not confined to any one group or locale. Moral intelligence encompasses both what people should demand of their leaders and what their leaders should demand of them.

Social Intelligence

Effective leadership in moments like these also requires a very special form of social intelligence that appreciates and affirms the dignity of difference. Some leaders look at difference and want to homogenize it to fit their comfort zone. Mandela, on the other hand, set out to demonstrate that diversity need not divide, that pluralism rightly understood and rightly practiced is a benefit and not a burden, and that the fear of difference is a fear of the future.

Howard Thurman, the black mystic, poet and theologian, who was a mentor to Martin Luther King, demonstrated the kind of social intelligence I have in mind when he said “I want to be me without making it difficult for you to be you.”

Can you imagine how different our world would be if more of us were able to say I want to be me without making it difficult for you to be you? Can you imagine how different my own nation would be if more Americans were able to say “I want to be an American without making it difficult for an Asian to be an Asian, an African to be an African or a Latina to be a Latina.” Can you imagine how different many of our communities would be if more Christians were able to say “I want to be a Christian without making it difficult for a Jew to be a Jew, a Muslim to be a Muslim or a Buddhist to be a Buddhist.”

I am persuaded that social intelligence helps leaders to become “entrepreneurs of identity.” Their success hinges on an ability to turn “me” and “you” into us. The Mandela era introduced a new form of diversity that was considered essential to an orderly and compassionate democracy. But the principles of pluralism must go beyond democracy and diversity to include demographics and diversity. Public conversations about diversity at conferences always seem to begin with the grand and almost obligatory assertion that diversity is more than race and, in so doing, the discussion is often about everything else but the richness of racial diversity. Let me be clear then; race still matters. This is not a post-racial society, and how we deal with diversity can be a benefit or a burden.

It has been my experience that many very good people make very bad mistakes in assuming that since their own motives are good they could not possibly be a part of the problem. The truth is, however, that racial inequalities occur and are often produced and reproduced without the intention of doing so and even without reference to race. Some observers call this “lassie-faire racism.”

Cultivating social intelligence must also emphasize the role of context and culture in shaping leadership styles, strategies and even paradigms. I learned very early that my effectiveness in social movements, for example, required a very different form of leadership from the authoritarian style that worked so well in the military as a twenty one year old officer fresh out of the Army Reserve Officers Training Corps. My first leadership assignment was based on the power of position. I served as the leader of a medical detachment in an infantry brigade where my leadership assignment was called a command and I was called a commanding officer. It was a paradigm of leadership that emphasized the coercive power of the leader who received orders from someone higher in the ranks and passed them on to subordinates. The order was followed because of the threat of court martial or some other forms of punishment. Yet, I learned over time that it was preferable for the soldiers in my unit to follow me because they wanted to rather than simply because they had to.

My second experience of authoritarian leadership some years later was as an officer in a large transnational business corporation. The people in my division did not elect me as their leader. I was recruited and appointed by the Chairman, but by virtue of my position I had the power to reward performance. I learned something that has remained with me throughout the years and in widely different leadership roles. It is the awareness that an organization is what it rewards. It is not so much what it says in its mission statement, its strategic plan or its code of conduct as it is what it rewards its people for being. If the company is committed to gender equality, for example, this commitment must be expressed through the performance review process and must be in some way tied to the compensation system.

The worse mistake leaders who gain their influence by virtue of their position can make is to assume that the military model of authoritarian leaderships works in all contexts. In the 1960s, I helped organize and lead the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. I found the collegial model more appropriate and, indeed, more effective than the military-manufacturing model that worked so well in bureaucracies and business. The collegiate model, based not so much on power as persuasion, is now being re-discovered and reaffirmed by the new young leaders who are on the forefront of an intergenerational transfer of leadership.

The collegial leader needs consensus in order to act, but the most effective leader is the one who is able to shape consensus rather than simply wait for consensus to emerge. I have found that whether I work through formal bureaucracies, informal networks or self-managed teams that form, operate, dissolve and reform, my influence comes from the fact that my primary objective is always to develop, energize or liberate the leadership potential in others. It is like the sculptor who defines his work as simply chipping away the excess stone to allow the statue within to come out.

There is no better example of the role of context in shaping leadership styles and strategies than the response to a disaster. I found in my work as chair of the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation that there are at least four elements or stages involved - relief, recovery, reform and renewal - and each requires either different leaders or different capabilities in dealing with the widely different circumstances involved.

The first stage is relief, the time when the disaster is most dramatic, the public attention most pervasive and the public response most immediate. Survival is at stake and there is an outpouring of public support to provide relief from suffering and to maintain order. As New Orleans demonstrated, an authoritarian leader who can act quickly, and often with little consultation, is needed to save lives and deal with other emergencies.

The next stage in the disaster continuum is recovery, taking stock of what has happened, working together to return both private and public life to normalcy and reinforcing the need for prevention and mitigation of future disasters. The focus of the first stage is almost exclusively on people, on lives to be saved. The second stage leads to a concern with rebuilding vast infrastructures to mitigate the disaster and to allow people to return to some degree of normalcy. The kind of leadership required is collaborative and collegial; especially the ability to persuade public agencies and private non-governmental organizations that recovery requires a different resolve and often the use of different resources. At the relief stage on the Gulf Coast, the public responded with billions of dollars in charitable giving. They were responding to the tragic images on television and in newspapers of people in desperate situations. At the recovery stage, disaster victims are at the mercy of government agencies and private contractors each with their own regulatory frameworks and practices. The primary support is provided by public dollars.

The third stage, reform, shifts the crisis response paradigm not just to risk reduction, but to using the crisis as an opportunity to improve the conditions of those who always bear the brunt of disasters—the poor. Support is needed to sustain the public’s attention to what needs to be done in the longer term, to ensure that the best ideas and the best experts are available to those responsible for recovery and reform and to ensure that those not normally included in public policy deliberation can have a voice.

The fourth stage of a disaster is one that is rarely emphasized and certainly rarely practiced. It is renewal. Over the years, from my days of organizing in the civil rights movement to my experience of the intensity of the engagement of many leaders in the aftermath of hurricanes, floods, oil spills and other disasters, I have found that some very good leaders reach burnout. They tend to think of personal renewal as selfish when they really need to step back occasionally in order to serve others better.

This inability to step back is best illustrated by the story of a man walking in the woods who comes up on a logger cutting down trees. As he stops to greet him, he asks how his work is going. The logger replies “Not so well. I was doing so much better this morning, but this afternoon I cannot cut down nearly as many trees.” The passerby replies “Why don’t you stop and sharpen the saw.” The logger says “Oh, I can’t do that. I have too many trees to cut.” No leadership program should be considered effective unless it emphasizes the need to occasionally stop and sharpen the saw.

Spiritual Intelligence

The final element of leadership as a way of being is spiritual intelligence. And here I refer to something that transcends the divide often posed by organized religion. Religion is for many a set of coherent answers to the existential problems of humankind while spiritual intelligence is not just the capacity to find meaning in mystery, but a quality of the human spirit that helps cultivate openness to the unknown, the unexpected and the unexplored. Religion is more closely tied to doctrines and sacred traditions than what I am calling spiritual intelligence, but both may help develop a sense that we are a part of something bigger and more mysterious than the self.

A friend of mine describes spirituality as a sort of privileged access to one’s own soul. That makes a lot of sense to me because I have learned much over the years about the importance of being in touch with the inner self and at ease with my own strengths and weaknesses. I have found that I am happiest and most at harmony with myself and others when I practice compassion, forgiveness, tolerance and patience. I

have found inspiration also from others with whom I have felt a deepened sense of presence. I have not always had to retreat from the noisy sounds of either the streets or the workplace because stillness does not always mean silence. For some, it requires detachment from secondary attractions. Yet, it has been my experience that it can also come from a short “break away” moment, from the magical sound of the ocean, the mystical seduction of a song, the singing of a bird or simply the rustling of the wind.

Most leadership programs are grounded in the intellect. They use the word spirit with regularity, but they rarely deal with the soul of leadership. In our program, we look at leadership as a product of what is happening at the core of the true self, not just where you locate insight and imagination but in the ability to find meaning in mystery and to see the sacred in everyday life.

We emphasize spiritual intelligence and argue for the cultivation of our spiritual nature for two reasons: 1) In a badly divided world, the effective leader must be an agent of reconciliation; 2) In this period of free-floating anxiety, cynicism and mistrust of institutions, the effective leader must be a purveyor of hope. I learned much in South Africa about reconciliation, not just overcoming the alienation between groups, but conflicting images of the past as well.

Let me thus conclude with a word about the importance of the leader as a purveyor of hope. And here I have in mind something very different from optimism. Hope theology and hope psychology both argue that optimism adopts the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better. Hope, on the other hand, enacts the stance of the participant who actively struggles against the evidence in order to make things better.

For a long time, hope has been considered an emotion, and, therefore, ignored, discounted or simply dismissed, as an essential element of leadership. But psychology is now being joined by other disciplines in seeking to develop a cognitive based theory of hope and leadership. The basic premise of those who study what they describe as hope theory is that hope is comprised not only of emotion, but thinking as well. They are now trying to understand the role of hope in sustaining innovation; the relationship of hope levels to stress, commitment and performance; even the impact of hope in business organizations on profits, job satisfaction and retention rates. Leaders with spiritual intelligence are better able to persuade those they influence or actively lead that even in moments of difficulty there are reasons to believe that an alternative future is indeed possible.

Hope provides a good metaphor for understanding the role and importance of spiritual intelligence. But it is the kind of hope that Vaclav Havel had in mind when he said, “I am not an optimist because I do not believe that everything ends well. I am not a pessimist because I do not believe that everything ends badly, but I could not accomplish anything if I did not have hope within me; for the gift of hope is as big a gift as the gift of life itself.” So if you remember only one thing I have said this morning, I hope it is this. When you develop or train leaders who are purveyors of hope, the gift you provide is as big a gift as the gift of life itself.

(Ambassador James A. Joseph is professor emeritus and director of the United States – Southern Africa Center for leadership and Public Values at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. He has served in senior executive or advisory positions for four U.S. presidents, including Deputy Secretary of the Interior for President Carter and U.S. Ambassador to South Africa for President Clinton)