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Leadership lessons learnt from classics

Abstract

Leadership is an innate quality. Autobiographies and biographies, literary figures and characters are considered to be for teaching leadership characteristics. Characters like Santiago, Don Corleone, Mufasa, Dorothy etc., have been a source of inspiration for leaders and common man alike from ages.

In this paper the research scholar through various characters of classic novels and movies wants to stress the importance of leadership and management through them.

Keywords: Leadership, Management, Goals, Achievement, Decision and Knowledge.

Introduction

“Let noble thoughts come from all universe”. Rigveda.

Gandhiji, the Father of our nation, inspired millions of Indians to join the freedom struggle through his exemplary behavior and true leadership. He said that one should learn good things from everyone, even if they happen to be our opponents. He urged the Indians to inculcate within themselves, the sense of discipline which the English had in them. The vast realm of literature is replete with excellent examples of characters who can provide inspirational leadership to the readers. Autobiographies and biographies are excellent learning tools, but often fictional literary figures are not considered when teaching the criteria for strong leadership characteristics. In reality these male and female characters provide good and bad models of leadership. Imagine how, with the addition of fictional personalities, the spectrum of examples of leadership could grow, as well as the number of classes which teach today's youth strong, intelligent leadership skills.

Personal integrity, practical knowledge, survival techniques, political and spiritual motivation, social commentary, ethics and morality, and much more can be found in the novels below. There are hundreds of titles and authors being used in today's classrooms and the following is a brief list of potential titles to be used as whole class novels or for individual projects. In this paper the research through various characters of classic novels and movies wants to stress the leadership and management through them.

An important character is Santiago in 'The Old Man And The Sea' by Ernest Hemingway. The exemplary courage and resilience depicted by Santiago is a classic leadership inspiration depicting the strengths of self-belief and a 'never say die' attitude, even in the face of most fierce competition. The narrative throws light on how a leader's decision should reflect his understanding of the market fluctuations in order to mitigate any adverse impact on his organisation's internal and external audience. In fact, the novel is a true example of how a leader today should constantly strive, strategise, and create result-oriented inroads to enable his team to meet organizational goals.

It concludes on the a leader should always be on the watch as to what calamity can befall his organization in order to reduce the impact of the crises. The lessons learnt by Santiago is of crisis management. The other day, while channel surfing, I caught a glimpse of Spencer Tracy playing Santiago in Ernest Hemingway's, The Old Man and the Sea. It didn't register much at the time because as you may know, when one channel surfs, the little grey cells kind of take a nap. Later though, I began to think about that story and the lessons it has to teach us.

For those who are unfamiliar with the story, Santiago is an old fisherman living in a village not far from Havana. Fishing is his livelihood and yet he has failed to catch any fish in eighty-four days. The young boy,

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who usually goes out with him, is instructed by his father to stay away from the old man. He is bad luck. because somewhere within him, he believes there is a big fish just meant for him. His instinct proves to be correct as his hook and bait are swallowed by a Marlin so large it dwarfs the boat. The old man is determined to catch this fish. He wants to prove that he isn't bad luck. He envisions bringing the giant fish into the tiny harbour of his home with enough to feed the whole village. Perhaps, deep down, he likes the idea of being a hero. So, Santiago hangs onto the fishing line with all his might. The fish fights valiantly all the while dragging the boat further and further out to sea. The old man suffers as the line cuts through the muscle of his hands and his back goes into spasms of pain from pulling and resisting.

In the end, the fish tires enough to allow the old man to reel him in closer to the boat. It is then that Santiago is successful in sinking his harpoon into the fish's heart. The battle is won. But, the war is just beginning as the old man realizes the fish is bigger than the boat. So with great diligence and respect, he straps the fish to the side of the boat and begins to make the very long journey home. Over the course of the journey, the fish is attacked again and again by sharks. And, as much as the old man fights to preserve it, he fails. By the time he reaches home, he is completely exhausted... and the fish is reduced to a skeleton. Let's, just for fun, suppose that Mr. Santiago is the CEO of his own company. His fishing business is not doing well. He has no allies except perhaps a young assistant who, while eager, is being influenced by his family to look for work elsewhere.

Mr. Santiago is desperate to save his business and his reputation in the business community. He decides to take a huge leap of faith without really thinking it through. At first, it looks as if his tactic is paying off. In fact, he starts to reel in more business than he can possibly handle. And, it's starting to draw the attention of other businesses hungry to expand. Mr. Santiago fights hard to protect his interests with the few resources he has, but to no avail. Eventually, he is forced to close his doors and the glorious outcome he envisioned when he set out, becomes unattainable.

So, what advice might we give Mr. Santiago to help him realize a different outcome? Well, a few things come to mind for me:

Have a Clear Goal

Spend some time envisioning the goal. In your vision, where are you fishing? How much and what kind of fish are you catching? How big is your boat? What equipment do you have? Who is giving you support? What have you learned that you don't know now? How did you learn it?

Build a Plan to Support the Goal

Being able to clearly imagine the goal is important but you must also have a realistic plan for achieving it. This includes ensuring you have sufficient resources and capability to execute the plan. And, by the way, a good plan is only good

So Santiago goes fishing alone. On the eighty-fifth day, he decides to go out further than he usually does when it is acted upon. Otherwise it becomes an exercise in wasting your time.

Consider the Potential Risks and Rewards

Before venturing into uncharted waters, it's a good idea to first reflect on what you stand to gain and lose by doing so. If the risk seems greater than the potential reward, you might want to re-think the strategy.

Develop Solid Relationships with others

John Donne once said, "No man is an island entire of itself". With that in mind, consider inviting others to share the goal and be part of the venture. Protect your interests from becoming shark bait by offering other, like-minded people of your choosing to participate and share in the rewards.

Think Beyond the Achievement of the Goal

To consider achievement of the goal as the end would be a mistake. You also have to anticipate what might happen in the event of a huge success. What then? How will you manage it? What more will you need? How will it change you? How will it change your company?

Know When to Cut the Line

There is of course a point of no return on just about everything. In the case of Santiago in the original story, going further and further out to sea after he had caught the fish ensured that by the time he made it back to shore, there would be nothing left of it. In business we also have to know when to stop.

The bottom line is that striking out to explore new territory is an essential part of leadership. However, the success of such exploration and the achievement of goals rely on one's ability to marry leadership skill with management ability. Perhaps if Santiago had understood this, the outcome of his story might have been more positive.

Don Corleone, "The Godfather"—An important attribute I learnt from him was his skill of effective listening, which helped him grasp the people's grievance details in depth. Besides that, he was very good at knowledge management. He used different strokes for different folks—changed his treatment according to the folks he encountered; used the right method for right people and was sharp enough to apply the right techniques to motivate them.

This is an important point that no one should miss and understand that we meet many people in one's personal life and it is vital to harbour a different approach while dealing with different personality traits. Another personality trait of Don is his paranoid behavior and the skill of critically evaluating the situations. It is not bad to be paranoid: one gets an in-depth view of the state of affairs while evaluating the pros and cons of actions and suggestions that people make. Lessons learnt by Don Corleone's character is people management. I Watched The Godfather This Weekend. Don Corleone Was Quite Clever About How He Was Able To Influence People And Get

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Things Done. Here Are A Couple of His Leadership Best Practices

Different Strokes for Different Folks

He was perceptive about the right way to motivate people and he used the right method with the right people. He would use fear to motivate some people (i.e. the undertaker), he was very respectful of some people (Luca Bracci), and he gave others a swift kick in the pants (i.e. Johnny Fontaine).

Two Ears and One Mouth

He always listened carefully and did not do too much talking. He'd occasionally ask for clarification, but he never interrupted.

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

His role was to listen, think, and make decisions. He did not ever "do" anything in the movie, but made lots of decisions and delegated the actions efficiently. Good managers are factories for good decisions.

No Happy Ears

After getting the bad news from the movie producer that Johnny Fontaine wouldn't star in his movie, the consigliere responded that he needed to leave immediately and fly home because the Don insisted on hearing bad news immediately. As an old manager of mine once said, "bad news doesn't get better with age."

Emotionless Decisions

There are numerous times in the movie where emotions could have influenced his decision, but in every case he made a dispassionate business decision.

Only the Paranoid Survive

Toward the end of the Godfather, the Don goes over and over how Michael (his son) will likely be targeted/ assassinated. The Don was paranoid and had a high attention to detail on important matters.

Keep Your Word

The Don was no saint, but when he said he was going to do something he did it, always keeping his word. That way, when he promised to do something (i.e. not take vengeance on the killing of his son Santino), it was believed by all involved without question.

Action Reaction

When he thinks about what to do, he always thinks about the reaction of all the constituents in an almost system dynamics like fashion. For example, when they asked him to fund a lucrative drug practice, he said no because the judges/police who were on his payroll would no longer support him if he entered a "dirty" business like drugs, as opposed to gambling and prostitution which his constituents thought were harmless vices.

Quid Pro Quo

As an old friend of mine used to say, "never do something for nothing." The Don did "favours" for folks all the time, but let them know their time would come for return a favour.

Good Knowledge Management

During every meeting, he had his "consigliere" with him taking notes and action items to ensure nothing fell through the cracks.

Of course the Don used one more tool to great effect - fear. He was a cold blooded killer who had set some harsh precedents. But the present scholar does not condone that type of thing.

Mufasa, The Lion in the movie 'The Lion King' is excellent at maintaining balance and harmony within his kingdom and making sure his resources were not depleted. One of his main responsibilities was to prepare his son to take over the kingdom and he invested his time and efforts to teach Simba how to be a good leader. The key lesson that we can learn from Mufasa is that it's always important for the CEO to lead by example. The lessons learnt by Mufasa's character is of succession planning. "Being brave doesn't mean you to go looking for trouble'.

Disney's "The Lion King" is really a film about leadership. Perhaps it's time about to head back to the pride lands and see what we can learn from little people and animated characters. By looking at each character in The Lion King you will witness a combination of the skills and qualities necessary for leading the Lion King way. Here are the ten leadership lessons that we must know. Lesson 1— Good Leaders understand the circle of life Mufasa, Father of Simba, is a "true Leader. He understands the responsibility and boundaries of his jurisdiction (pride lands). First of all, he understands the "circle of life" and has made sure his offspring is properly educated as per the expectations of a thriving organization.

As human beings, we are the only creatures, who delegate the largest part of our offspring's learning. Lesson 2- Good Leaders use transformational leadership Mufasa demonstrated transformational leadership. He taught Simba how to be a leader. He didn't use force or manipulation instead Mufasa provided discipline and unconditional love. In the process Mufasa was willing to invest time and effort so that Simba could become a capable leader he was personally involved with his son. Lesson -3 Good Leaders Display motivational Leadership Mufasa also displayed motivational leadership. Throughout the movie Mufasa encouraged his son to be strong and courageous.

Whenever we encourage others they in turn become confident and gain respect for themselves. Lesson 4- Bad leaders accept only power not people. Scar's leadership style was transactional or positional, His motives were selfish and dishonest. He had no concern for the well-being of the Lions or anybody else. His desire for power led him to murder his own brother and deceive his family. His leadership style was manipulative. Scar lied to everyone so he could fulfil his selfish desires. His only concerns was to achieve and maintain absolute power. Lesson-5 Bad leaders have no vision. Scar's had no vision for his followers.

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This is evident towards the end of the movie when all the flood was gone and Scar was still unwilling to make necessary changes to help the community. He was more concerned about his position as king. When their ability is questioned they come up with excuses or blame others for their failures. The result of this type of leadership leads to tension and frustration. Next example is of the character Napoleon in 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell. Absolute power corrupts, absolutely, and who better to point out this truth than the brutish pigs of Animal Farm. Animal Farm reveals the power of ideology, propaganda, blind faith and ruthless opportunistic actions.

Loosely based on the Russian Revolution and subsequent political state of the early 20th century, Napoleon and Snowball become excellent examples of political leaders whose initial ideology shifts, thus creating mass corruption. Napoleon is the power hungry tyrant who can be compared to Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Slobodan Milosevic and other despotic rulers.

Snowball on the other hand, creates a potentially empowering political theory, but does not have the strength to carry it to the end, thus his reliance on basic rhetorical skill and lack of action proves that successful leaders need strength in both categories. The Character of Dorothy in 'The Wizard of Oz' is another example where the corporate learning derived from this movie is around coaching managers on ways to introduce good mentors into an employee's life. Dorothy took a guy with no brains, one with no heart, and one with no courage and developed them into an effective team that successfully accomplished its mission, which is an effective leadership lesson. Good leaders seek to understand the personal needs and motivations of their followers, and help to align individual purposes with the higher purpose of the organization. In all, Leadership is much more than telling people to go down the yellow brick road.

It's about authentically engaging them in the adventure. Lesson learnt from Dorothy is that Team Work is essential. There are so many metaphors to choose from, but for me one of my favourite lessons is contained towards the end of the film, where Dorothy misses her balloon flight home, starts to cry, but is then told by Glinda, the Good Witch, that with those ruby slippers, she had the power to return home the whole time. The answer was literally under her nose or on her feet to be precise. Like Dorothy, we are all more powerful than we think and the answers we seek are always within. Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his first radio talk "Man ki baat" exhorted every Indian to recognize their inner strength and to become heroes in real life.

In conclusion, it can be said that the qualities of a leader found in all the above literary characters are the same qualities which actually make real life leaders like Gandhiji, Martin Luther King, Lincoln and Winston Churchill, so can we be inspired by the outstanding leadership skills of Simba and others.

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