

Lay Leadership in Societies

Of all the factors contingent to growth, the quality and style of lay leadership may be the most significant. Lay Leaders usually carry the burden of management and as such often determine the welcoming character of the Society, along with shouldering the burden of fiscal responsibility. The American Ethical Union and the National Leaders Council have already prioritized this area by the creation of lay leader Summer Schools and the use of outside trainers both on the local and national levels. Mediation and the use of outside consultants when necessary has also been a means to support lay leaders. **Now is the time to provide a regular and systematic educational process to training lay leaders that is more accessible to all. Regionally based learning experiences such as these have the added benefit of stimulating inter-societal collaboration.**

In the words of Leader-in-Training Hugh Morales, “Everyone in Ethical Culture is challenged/expected/nurtured to be a lay leader. Many turn their "leadership" toward their workplace or home. . . .with that meaning of the term, "lay leadership" is just the stepping into leadership roles within Ethical Culture of those in whom ethical agency and relationship building skills have grown. Everyone practicing Ethical Culture, however, should be on a journey to build ethical agency and relationship building skills in themselves and others. “ Leadership in Societies builds confidence in the member, and offers the opportunity to render both service and skills that enhance and deepen community life. In relationship to clergy Leaders, Lay leadership carries with it the recognition of equality in deed, differentiated in role. As a democratic community, we seek to promote high levels of cooperation in community as well as increased levels in membership of individual responsibility to the whole. We need as well more interaction with the AEU as well and so, recommend that the Presidents and Leaders together work to identify those local members who demonstrate talent and skill to serve on the national committees. Such service strengthens identity in the Federation as a whole and can increase reciprocal benefit to each, the AEU and the local Society.

New Style Leaders

It is generally agreed upon that the 21st century demands a different style of leadership today. As described by Alban Institute, we are shifting away from the model of charismatic leader toward the team leader, one whose skills are more of an architect than of a strong controlling presence. Good leadership begins in self-awareness. Good leadership calls for flexibility and insight into the needs of the overall community. Good leaders are both good listeners and good followers. Such a leader needs to build a strong team built upon the local context. “Integrity” and “integrative” may be the core descriptive terms of a lay leader, one who perceives the needs of the collective well being, who discerns leadership potential in others and finds opportunities for their leadership development. Identifying the potential for leadership in others includes mentoring and the willingness to rotate oneself out of a role even when membership feels safer in the established way of doing things. Such a leader does not “upset the applecart” as much as prepare members for continual adaptation to the rise of newer members. This may include a willingness to adapt any one leadership role to the skills and talents of the next new leader. Leaders in Societies must determine what is doable with regard to its resources and what type of management structure is “to scale.” (cf. Alban Institute recommendations for a Society whose membership is close to 100 members to illustrate. We do not hold that the recommendations included need all be applied. They are merely guidelines.)

The GRLT recommends that some attention be given in each Society to particular exemplary qualities of leader described in Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership The Challenge*, (Jossey Bass, Wiley Prints, 2002). While the authors have developed their expertise from a business model, their discoveries uncover the same qualities in leadership that are appropriate to democratic based institutions. Out of their research, they developed assessment materials can assist individuals to better understand their own leadership tendencies and thereby stimulate among all members a willingness to develop in their local communities more leadership awareness. Those qualities described by Kouzes and Posner are listed below with summary descriptions. The questions within each section suggest special items to consider in any growing ethical culture community:

- **1. Model the way**

Summary description, “behavior wins respect....(we) must first believe in something....First commitment, is to **find your voice** by clarifying your personal values and then expressing them in a style that is authentically your own....exemplary leaders go first...personal-best projects (are distinguished by relentless effort, steadfastness, competence, and attention to detail. ... (we) **set the example** by spending time with someone, by working side by side with colleagues, by telling stories that make the values come alive, by being highly visible during times of uncertainty, and by asking questions to help people to think about values and priorities. Modeling the way is essentially about earning the right and the respect to lead through direct individual involvement and action. People first follow the person, then the plan.” (pp.10-11)

- how do we promote ethical democracy in Societies ?
- what does fiscal ethical modeling look like ?
- how do we discern how to disagree and remain open to change?
- what is unique about ethical social action, ethical education, spiritual practice?
- How do we practice transparency and accountability to members?
- How do we balance respect with truthfulness?
- Have we acknowledged how membership in ethical culture serves to help us find our voices? How so?

- **2. Inspire a shared vision**

Summary description: “ **Leaders envision the future.** ...(they) have a desire to make something happen, to change how things are,... **To enlist people in a vision, (we) must know or constituents and be able to...energize and uplift them.**Leaders forge unity of purpose by showing constituents how the dream is for the common good. ...leaders (are) incredibly enthusiastic about their personal best projects... (their enthusiasm) is sparks to the flame.” (pp.11-12)

- Who is an ethical hero in our Society?
- How do we nurture leadership toward growth and development in our Society”
- What special leadership traits might be identified with ethical culture?
- How can transparent practices inspire a shared vision in our Societies?
- How do we prioritize religious education including adult education from the perspective of a shared vision?

- **3. Challenge the system**
- Summary description: “ **Challenge means that leaders search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.** (p. 15) Challenge may be developing an innovative new strategy, a new way to engage in service, a new way to be more visible in the larger community, etc. “Whatever the challenge, all cases involved changing the status quo. ...Leaders are pioneers – people willing to step out into the unknown. ...Leaders know well that innovation and change require them **to experiment and take risks.** ...Little victories ...build enough confidence to meet even the biggest challenges...We also must pay attention to the capacity of o(our) constituents to take control of challenging situations and become fully committed to change.” (p.12)
 - o Can we discern the difference between constructive challenge and destructive criticism ?
 - o How do we encourage others and at the same time tell “truth to power” ?
 - o When does the use of critique diminish healthy change?
 - o What areas need constant revision in Societies? How do we communicate this to members?
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- **4. Enable others to act**
- Summary description: “Leadership is a team effort. Exemplary leaders...**foster collaboration and build trust.** ...(that) must include peers, managers, citizens....all who have a stake in the vision....we have to involve, in some way, everyone who must live with the results, and we must make it possible for others to do good work.no one does his or her best, when feeling weak, incompetent, or alienated; ...leaders work to **strengthen others** to deliver on the promises they make.(we) give the power away. When we trust others and give them more discretion, more authority, and more information, they are much more likely to use their energies to produce extra-ordinary results.teamwork, trust and empowerment are essential elements of their efforts.When leadership is a relationship, founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, and keep organizations and movements alive.” (pp.13)
 - o How do we empower others to become ethical culture leaders both lay and clergy?
 - o What priority and programming attention do we extend to the YES and FES groups
 - o How broad a spectrum can we tolerate when we think of empowering others
 - o How do we nurture rotation of Committee Chairs and other designated roles in our community? Do we do much mentoring among ourselves?
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- **5. Encourage the heart.**
- Summary description: “Leaders **recognize contributions by showing appreciation** for individual excellence.Leaders **celebrate the values and victories.** ...It’s how leaders visibly and behaviorally link rewards with performance.leaders also know that celebrations and rituals, when done with authenticity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit can carry a group through extraordinary tough times.
 - o How do we honor our members who demonstrate sustained commitment to ethical culture?

- How do we promote vibrant relations between older and newer members?
- How do we care for the high functioning members in our community?

Preparation and Leadership Education

We encourage all Societies to nurture and educate toward leadership among the widest spectrum of members through workshops and study groups, Platforms, etc., with the same intensity as is necessary to maintain an atmosphere of the welcoming community. **We recommend that the AEU allocate resources toward regional training opportunities.** We acknowledge those initiatives that are already underway such as the Workshop on *Creating Generous Congregations* offered by Michael Durall in two different regions and many other programs during our Annual Assemblies. We urge members to take advantage of them when they are offered. These trainings need also to be conveniently located where more than one Society can participate at any given event. We encourage the Presidents' Council to engage more actively with the AEU to identify those areas where trainings may be most important. We also encourage the presence of clergy leaders during these trainings to build trust and clarify roles. These trainings should encourage a high degree of interaction between all participants.

Ethical Action

Special attention needs to be given to leadership in ethical action. To achieve greater effectiveness and more sustained cooperating relationship of ethical culture members, holistic models for ethical action are necessary today. **We call upon a strong national Ethical Action Committee that will focus as much on how ethical actions are pursued as what ethical actions we might choose.** A strong national committee will create inter-societal working groups to achieve those shared common goals thereby synchronizing efforts around important initiatives:

Ethical Humanism connects personal living with moral responsibility to and for community. Our relationships bind us together in universal citizenship. This sense of mutuality leads us to a shared responsibility for the kind of world in which we live. Examining life through the prism of human experience, we see that we are capable of wonderful and inspiring things. We find that there is meaning in the potential for personal growth and cultural transformation. (NLC vision statement)

One such model is developed by Dr. Monica Sharma, MD, who created training for those working to address AIDS in Africa. She is presently training a large coalition of NGO's at the UN, in this model. (Cf articles on MS in Kosmos and Ions.) Her training begins with a small group of individuals who understand the need for systems shifts in the way we do things. Systems shifts are those ways of doing things differently that represent the inclusion of new information and can address emergent needs. One example is the systems shift that is taking place in leadership itself as described earlier. An example of emergent need may be the urgent requirement for international policies that can address the climate change crises and the increase of hunger and inequity. Doctor Sharma identifies five basic elements we might apply to ethical action:

- effective ethical actions include some systems shifts;
- we need to pursue every initiative in pre-established and agreed upon values and principles that relate both to our personal needs to work well and to the systems shifts we seek;
- we need in all efforts to be dedicated to a culture of peace (AEU Resolution, 2007)
- we will acknowledge that in today's world everyone matters at a depth we usually assign to our families; (attribution of infinite worth of all persons)
- we are able to own our own complicity in what does not work in the world; willful ignorance and lack of self-knowledge, for example.
- all actions must include deliverable outcomes however small; therefore, we will envision the change in one year, five years; it may not always be quantitative

Her training begins with deep reflection in intimate small groups among those who seek social change. Such reflection invites increased inter-Societal relationship especially in various regions. (We believe this inter-relation remain informal on an ad hoc basis and be locally driven as already takes place in New York with such events as Darwin Day). Her reflection includes some assumptions:

- Instead of allowing the common ground to determine our design for action, (consensus, however, remains a useful tool when in deliberative processes) we are better served to find those who share our deepest passion. To be effective today, we need to move from our innermost sense of truth and goodness in order to identify the wisdom guiding us, one that grows from human experience and that which guides our choices. When we move from that place, we will discover that others will readily find others who align with that wisdom. Together, this small group will learn to describe their aims and aspirations. Developing the ability to express this wisdom is what she calls generative language. Generative language is the place out of which both the problems are identified and the systems shifts that need to take place are targeted. Only then to we begin to devise strategic actions. Learning to articulate a vision is the place where specific values and ethical principles become the framework within which any strategic plan is to be implemented. There is a big difference, for example, between street protests against impending war and educational initiatives that promote a culture of peace. While both are needed, different values and different leadership tactics will be employed. This model recommends that we prioritize ethical actions that will have longer range impact and include ways to evaluate actual changes we are seeking.

Examples of generative questions: what are the underlying conditions we seek to change? If it be gross inequity, for example, we might decide that we will target what in ourselves, is missing with regard to the promotion of inequity..... consumptive patterns, etc. We will also look to our group to identify what knowledge base exists, what human experience can we access. Out of this reflection, we will learn whether we should work to end subsidization, whether we should identify and ramp up participation in already established best practices such as the community based programs called Fonkoze, a microcredit project in Haiti that has maintained its fair distribution practices over a substantial period, or some other initiative called Student World Assembly. Both projects are long range initiatives launched by ethical culture members.

We will not only focus on the whatness of a project, we will determine which values and principles to practice in the pursuit of our initiative. These principles will be chosen for their ability to implement any plan. For example, if we chose to go on an "cultivating empathy"

campaign, we would identify the underlying principle is compassion. We would then agree to develop a shared framework for action whose glue is compassion. The underlying principles become the norms upon which we will continually assess our plans for action. Other small groups may answer the same questions differently that will be interdependent upon different principles. Their approach but will carry as much potential for change as they align their frameworks with their articulated understanding of any issue. Such a model promotes a coherent ethical identity along with more rational strategic planning. At the UN, for example, through the NSC, we are identified with human rights. We are, however, less identified with critiquing those who fail than inspiring ways through education ways to promote their implementation along with the consciousness needed to appreciate their win/win potential. It may be that ethical culture recognize its vast resources as an ethics-based organization to increase its skill in becoming policy changers.

Generative language is that which moves others to recognize serious deficits in the existing system and at the same time suggests ways to address the systems shifts necessary to make the changes; such language does not come from anger but from vision; it moves others to engage in such a way that enables the change agents themselves to continue personal growth by walking the walk even though the desired outcome may not be realized. What is attained, however, is the expression of certain principles by which those acting for change are recognized. What is also attained is a more collective way of doing things which will serve to inspire ethical culture's way of doing things through its quest for social change.

To summarize:

- Strategic planning emanates from a communal reflective process out of which the planners will determine what doable outcomes can happen. The desired impact will be identified and further influences the development of programs, campaigns, etc. There is an axiom that it is the "space between events" that makes the difference. This means that we don't just create events around an issue, but we create a series of initiatives that will bring forward the change we seek.
- we identify resources and skills that will create the doable actions in the given situation. Our strategic planning will look for deliverables after one year, five years and 10 years both quantitatively and qualitatively. This planning may be educative, direct action, advocacy, but whatever it is, there is always reciprocity between the actors and those acted upon, there is trust building and cooperation that is inherently ethical, Dr. Sharma uses circles to reflect non-hierarchical approaches where deep reflection may begin in small circles of persons who are supported in the larger communities. Such commitment engages all to translate an ideal of a better world.

This type of leadership already exists in the AEU community, but not in an overarching way. It may exist in direct service projects. One example of short-term direct action will take place at the 94th Assembly with a service project initiated by Hugh Taft Morales to which several clergy leaders along with Assembly participants will participate in. Our purpose is not only to communicate our collective reverence for those not fully abled but to stimulate intimacy and more collective action among ourselves. Direct service where Society members work together such as clean-ups, etc., are valuable ethical actions that promote trust and intimacy such as done in the Westchester Society and in Brooklyn. These small actions also promote systems shifts toward greater accountability of one's citizenship.

An organization that follows closely Dr. Sharma's model may be found at The National Service

Conference whose actions and engagements are both flexible and determined by activists' skills and interests. The NSC cooperates with those institutional mechanisms at the UN that nurture reciprocal change between the actors and the systems we seek to change. We work to support the AEU through the many AEU Resolutions we have created over the past years that highlight the systems shifts needed. And we boast of our inter-societal relationships. But we never present a Resolution unless we are actually working on it and are willing to give time and attention to the influencing a more positive change in the long run. We enjoy our process because of a common passion we share. In addition, we demand growth in ourselves, which requires high commitment, time and use of our personal resources. We do our own fund raising. The NSC has existed since 1929. We believe this approach is replicable in local Societies so long as the small commitment circles are nourished. We know also, that financial resources are not always available for long term social change. We recommend including the vast human capital in our membership as a core component of our wealth. **We encourage the National Service Conference to increase its communications to better inform Societies of its process as well as its active initiatives in the context of promoting lay leadership. cf. www.nationalserviceaeu.org.**

So long as we take an issue based approach to social justice rather than a more sustained effort, we do little to raise our particular branding in the world. Neither do we promote leadership among our members, by stimulating in them deeper experience with that which actually leads to social change. The expression of outstanding ethical action leadership among individuals is present but reflects largely an old paradigm model of the charismatic inspirational member who does good things but must develop a plan of action beyond the body of ethical culture. We can change this by changing the way we seek to promote social change. Perhaps we might think of ourselves as "influence peddlers" who will take to the streets as part of a larger plan. But in doing so, we continue to maintain an intensity of reflection that seeks to devise longer term commitments to social change "unto the seventh generation". By means of ethical action, we can invigorate our relations with one another as we refine our shared ethical sensibility to co-create the world we seek. **We support increased networking and information sharing among Societies to achieve this.** New members love to see Societies doing things, or so it seems in BSEC and NYSEC.

We support those approaches such as non-violent communication, (NYSEC, northern Virginia, Brooklyn) Appreciative Inquiry (NSC) and other modalities that work to stimulate greater dialogic skills in the very process of ethical action engagement. We all can read intelligent critique and we need to, but for growth and development, we must become the change we seek. We acknowledge the AEU for passing all those Resolutions that carry within them the opportunity to practice this forward style of social change as we take advantage of our nations efforts to live into democracy. **We recommend using more of the already existing AEU Resolutions to begin the process of local community reflection that will precede ethical action initiatives.**

Suggested Readings:

Alban Institute Recommendations from an outside consult with one local Society as adapted by the American Ethical Union office.

Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence, Social Intelligence; the New Science of Human Relationships*

Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership the Challenge*, Jossey Bass, Wiley Prints, 2002

Gilbert Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation*, Alban Institute Publication, 1998.

Monica Sharma et al, "Leadership for Results", UNDP, HIV/AIDS Group, 2005; Ions Magazine, "Conscious Leadership at the Crossroads of Change", August 2006; , "Personal to Planetary Transformation", *Kosmos Journal*, May 8, 2007

Margaret Wheatley, Ions Magazine, "Dreaming the World", August 2003. *Leadership and the New Science* Interview, 2006;

On the Internet:

Servant Leadership blog

Leanne Hoagland-Smith, *Why Leadership Development Must Include Empathy*, Ezine articles.