

Becoming an effective leader



After serving in the Navy for 20 years, I can honestly say that being a manager does not make you a leader. For me, there is a big difference. An effective leader is someone who can motivate people to do things that they would not normally do by themselves. Furthermore, what makes a leader great is their ability to bring out the best in people no matter what the situation may be. After watching the movie, “12 Angry Men,” I will present to you in this essay how different leadership styles displayed by three prominent jurors were both ethical and unethical. Additionally, I will show how the consequences of these leadership styles affected the other people in the room regarding the guilt or innocence of a young man and conclude with what can be learned about leadership from these very men.

To be an effective leader, it must start from within oneself. Hence, to be an ethical leader, one must be an ethical person first. By combining this class to what I already knew about being a leader, it strengthened my values and my conviction of effective leadership, and that is allowing your people to grow and be successful. Leadership is not about “my way or the highway,” that is a dictatorship. Leadership is about valuing you people and seeking their contributions.

In the movie, this was not the case with juror’s #3 & #10, which demonstrated the most unethical leadership style for that situation, the authoritarian. Although there are times when authoritarian is needed and will work, in a jury deliberation is not one of them. These men had one goal, and that was to impose their beliefs and convictions upon others in the room, especially the jurors who were easily manipulated. These two men allowed their biased views to prevent them from doing their civic duty which leads to

their attempt to indoctrinate the other jurors into thinking like them; they refused to listen to reason or consider any reasonable doubt presented by the other jurors. In chapter eight, Bowie wrote about this unethical leadership style and how Burn's rejects what #3 and #10 were doing to the followers in the room. Bowie writes, "[Burn's] rejection of the indoctrination shows that he respects the autonomy of the followers," (Bowie pg. 142) whereas #3 & #10 do not. When it comes to people in any situation, self-worth and self-respect are vital to one's autonomy and should be respected by other people. In the movie, juror #3 & #10 routinely use unethical authoritarian leadership to prevent other jurors from having any capacity to decide for themselves. By doing so, it gives way to Fonda and his ethical leadership style.

To be an effective leader, one must influence followers to work towards a common goal regardless if it is a company, a sports team, or a murder trial. In my experience, how this is achieved is through empowerment of your people. By doing so, you create an ethical environment that allows the people to grow both professionally and personally because they feel that they are part of the team. When it comes to human nature, everyone wants to belong and feel important in some way, that is why you praise in public and reprimand in private. When you value the opinions of people, it creates a high degree of respect within the group that brings out the best in people. That is why Henry Fonda was such a great ethical leader. He sat quietly and listened while observing how the others acted and what they said. By sitting quietly, Fonda noticed that only three people were doing most of the talking and how they were trying to persuade the other jurors. In Fonda's case, he

brought forth a different perspective, one that was unbiased. In fact, he repeatedly stated that he has no idea if the boy was guilty or innocent, but it was his social responsibility to ask questions to determine that answer. He was not going to allow other individuals to persuade him or his ethical beliefs. In fact, when he asked the other jurors, who felt pressured by the authoritarian group what they thought, he was demonstrating effective leadership. By valuing their opinion, he empowered them to open up and provide their perspective, and by doing so, he made them feel important which in turn made them more willing to contribute. For example, Juror #9, Joe Sweeney is the one that provided critical information, the eyeglasses, that no one had ever thought as being relevant or important, turned out to be the key to finding the boy innocent. If it were not for Fonda's ethical leadership and belief in autonomy, Juror #9 might not have spoken up like he did. Fonda use of transformational leadership helped the other men look at the case from a perspective of serving justice by appealing to their higher values. His goal was simple, bring everyone onboard so they could deliberate through participation. By doing so, he explains that the jury should have some form of human dignity and use rational moral decision making to collaborate to determine the boy's fate. By doing so, he empowers the weaker jurors to voice their opinion.

In regards to the consequences of the two leadership styles, Fonda's ethical leadership style inspired others to stand up for what was right and not give in to the pressure of others. For me, the one juror that was most inspired by Fonda was George Voskovec, juror #11. When Voskovec finally had enough, he began to stand up against the authoritarian figures because some were

not taking this deliberation serious, telling them that it is our civic duty and social responsibility to listen to all the facts and give a fair verdict, not one based on biased prejudice. Fonda's inspiration ignited a flame within Voskovec, and that erupted into an inferno that eventually spread throughout the room and gave the men an ability to perceive ethical truths during a chaotic experience. However, this was not the case for jurors #3, and #10, their unethical authoritarian leadership style and outright bigoted views that were once unchallenged by most of the group were eventually smothered like a cigarette. The once calm and timid jurors that were easy prey for the authoritarian leadership at the beginning of the film could not be pushed around anymore and turned their backs on juror #10 and left him cowering in the corner like a scared little boy.

When it comes to this movie and what we can learn about leadership and ethics, it is simply, understanding the leader and follower relationship that exists between these two entities. Henry Fonda's character showed us that transformational leadership is an excellent example of combining leadership and ethics because it holds people they lead to a higher standard and expects more from them. By being an ethical leader, you inspire people to do great things even when they do not think they are capable, and in doing so, these subordinates become leaders themselves who learn to share information and ideas. Additionally, this movie shows us that leaders do not have all the answers, such as the case with the glasses. This evidence did not originate from Fonda; it took someone else to bring up the information. What this shows is the more ideas introduced into a situation through group discussion leads to a better decision-making process. For this to happen, it

takes an ethical leader to allow other people to provide their perspective. By doing so, people feel empowered and valued. Finally, the movie shows us that to be an ethical leader your intentions must be ethical in nature when you allow your biased views to dictate your actions and beliefs you end up with leaders like juror # 3 and # 10.

Work Cited

Bowie, N and Werhane, P. (2005). *Management Ethics*. Oxnard: Blackwell Publishing