

Examining the life of influential leaders history essay



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What is meant by leadership? Leadership has been described as “ an influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes” (Lim & Daft, 2004, p. 6). Good leaders are made not born. They grow through their experiences in their life. Therefore, to examine what makes a leader, this essay is going to discover three different people with their name as a legacy of leadership.

Great Modern Leader

Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad was the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia for 22 years. He was the longest serving Prime Minister in Malaysia and also Asia who held the position from 1981 to 2003. He had a humble beginning of his life. He experienced through World War II when the Japanese invaded Malaya and the return of Britain after the war. These are among other incidents over the course of his youth which has shaped him to become a Prime Minister that came from a modest social background first in the country. What really made Tun Mahathir a leader?

Tun Mahathir is known as a man full of ideas and visionary who predicted Malaysia to become a developed country by the year 2020. In such a way, he is a man with a high openness to experience personality. During his tenure as prime minister, he came up with many policies such as Look East Policy and the concept of Sogo Soshu. He developed Malaysia into a modernize nation with these ideas. Moreover, one of the highest buildings in the world which is the Petronas Twin Towers was also his idea. Thus, he has been granted the name of Father of Modernisation.

Another profound personality of Tun Mahathir's is his high conscientiousness. He was always an achievement oriented person. This was obvious even when he was young where he obtained excellent results for the Cambridge School Certificate, and later in the medical degree. As prime minister, he wanted to make Malaysia internationally recognize, so he embarked on various large scale national projects such as the production of the first national car, Proton Saga. He was so achievement driven, he ensured that all his endeavours worked out.

According to Fiedler's contingency model, Tun Mahathir is a task-oriented leader. If he were given the questionnaire based on the least preferred co-worker (LPC) scale, he would be more uses negative concepts to describe other people and places greater value on task activities than on people. For example, he described his former protégé Anwar Ibrahim as an impatient man to grab power (Loh, 2009). Malaysia fluctuated between highly favourable and highly unfavourable times when Tun Mahathir still tenure as prime minister.

Leader of the Civil Rights Movement

Mahatma Gandhi was the pre-eminent political and ideological leader of India during the Indian independence movement. He had known as a simple man who wore the traditional Indian dhoti and shawl. Gandhi swore to speak the truth and propose others to follow. Therefore, he influenced many people included important leaders and political movements. Gandhi helped free the people of India from British rule through non-violent resistance, and got his name known as the Father of the Nation in India.

The most dominant trait of Gandhi was his emotional stability personality. In his whole life, he was put into prison for many times both South Africa and India. However, no matter how many times he was imprisoned, his passion for India to independence from British never died. He was jailed for total of 2338 days. He could give up from his goal. But, he was decided to take the pain and worked hard without any complain.

Main objective of Gandhi is to seek independence for India. During his early years in South Africa, he protested unjust laws such as discriminatory law. When he returned to India later, he began to organize many other non-violent protests such as the freedom of press (Fischer, 1954). Gandhi was a conscientious person. He was very persistent in ensuring that people's rights and the laws to be fair.

Based on the study of Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Theory, Gandhi has taken a directly standpoint which was the Telling style. When he led the mass civil disobedience on salt tax, he knew the consequences of his actions. Yet, his followers were felt insecure because they did not know what would be the results from the Salt March. Therefore, he had to explain to his followers how it works since they had low readiness in how civil disobedience works. Then, he made the first step by selling off a pinch of salt he had made (Fischer, 1954).

In the preparation of a strike by the labourers in Kheda, Gandhi put forward four conditions to ensure the success of the strike. In his autobiography, Gandhi wrote that he told them " never to resort to violence, never to molest blacklegs, never depend upon alms, and to remain firm, no matter how long

the strike continued” (Gandhi, 2005, p. 392). This incident shows that even the need for a strike or protest, violence is not the behaviour of Gandhi. Hence, he was a role model of the ethical leader.

One of the factors that led to the success of Gandhi was that he had the opportunity to be exposed to gain new experiences and knowledge. He began to read religious books when he studied law in London. He had personally experienced discriminatory criteria that, as a coloured man, he did not get the luxury to sit in the first class coach of a train in South Africa. This is one of the incidents that made Gandhi to be a better person and it led to the beginning of his pursuit of fairness in the law (Gandhi, 2005).

Legacy of Courage Leader

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the 35th President of the United States, serving from 1961 until his assassination in 1963. He was the commander of military service during World War II in the South Pacific. After he came back from the war, he desires to turn into political. As President of the United States, Kennedy was the only president has won the Pulitzer Prize.

Kennedy had a strong emotional stability personality which was evident during the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962. It was the time that the Soviet missiles under construction in Cuba. Next step of Kennedy was crucial because it may lead to nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Anyhow, Kennedy did not make any invasion of Cuba such as drastic measures but he spent more diplomatic stance with them.

Reflective insights

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I realized that all leaders no matter what of their race and religion are distinctive in their identity. Their degree of dominance in personality is differentiating them from others. In addition, it seems that the dominant personality will always stand out such as Mahathir's openness to experience and even Gandhi's emotional stability.

Next, the simplicity of contingency theories is difficult to explain all the variables because in each theory are always shortage in certain areas. It cannot fully explain the effectiveness of leadership in the ideal situation.

On the other hand, comparing the personal qualities of purely rational versus ethical leaders is one of the problems.

Conclusion

Leadership is not easy to achieve. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, Mahatma Gandhi and Bill Clinton are all great leaders. So, what makes a leader? For me, leader means an individual with ability to solve problems at first and requires a lot of patience and special characteristics.