

The autobiography of the dalai lama

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Although he never sets out to explicitly discuss a definition of leadership, we are quite able to see his point of view by considering the two places in the text where the Dalai Lama specifically praises a person as a good leader. The first of these is his own sister. In the course of his discussion of the many difficulties managing the groups of destitute refugees who had fled into India, her contribution was invaluable. As an explanation of why, he tells us that, “ She had an enormous capacity for hard work. This, coupled with her rather fierce nature, made her an excellent leader.

By itself, this description does not quite bring out the focus of his compliment; but that focus is made somewhat more clear when he tells us, a few pages later, about Mr. Luthi, a worker with the Swiss Red Cross. He was, “ a man of tremendous zeal and energy, a real leader, who drove the people under him extremely hard. ” For the Dalai Lama, then, there seem to be two elements to leadership, one is the ability to bring a tremendous amount of effort to the task in question, and the second is an ability to get a similar effort out of the people you are leading.

At first glance, this appears to be somewhat at odds with this holy man’s compassionate, peaceful nature. However, such an appearance is mitigated when we consider the numerous places throughout the book where we see that he holds himself to exactly the same rigorous standard. A particularly good example of this is when his observation of the struggles of his people made his responsibility fully tangible, even given his relative youth. “ One thing my journey down had convinced me of was the need to study hard and learn as much as I could.

I owed it to the faith of my people to be the best person I could be. ” What was/is their leadership philosophy? As we might expect from the discussion above, the core of the Dalai Lama’s leadership philosophy is to lead by example. In addition to the passages above, this idea also runs throughout the course of the text in the form of his consistent focus on creating opportunities for personal, one-on-one contact with the people he is trying to lead and/or persuade—whether the citizens of Tibet, or the political leaders of China and India.

In talking about the positive changes he was able to bring about in government, for instance, we learn that he was, “ determined to be entirely open, to show everything and not to hide behind etiquette. In this way I hoped that people would relate to me as one human being to another. ” Even more telling is his narrative account concerning the fighting by Tibetan guerilla forces operating from over the border in Nepal. He feared that their attacks against the Chinese occupying forces would only end in more bloodshed, and he realized, “ that the only way I could hope to make an impression on them was by making a personal appeal. ”

As the Dalai Lama, any discussion of this man’s philosophy (of anything) must be placed in the context of his religious vocation to bring compassion and an end of suffering to all sentient beings. We see this underlying motivation suggested in the passages already quoted, but we see it move to the fore in the form of leaders that he himself admired. Perhaps none of the examples he gives is more familiar and understandable to us than that of Mahatma Gandhi, whom he considered to be the ultimate

politician because he was able to be such a great example to his people of the difficult ideals he expected of them—namely, altruism and non-violence.

How did they learn to lead? With characteristic humility, our author shows us that his most important, and most lasting, lessons in leadership were learned from his various large and small mistakes over the years. In one anecdote, we hear the story of the younger Dalai Lama punishing a pet parrot because it did not respond to him with the desired affection. Once he had beaten it with a stick, it “ thereafter fled at the sight of me. This was a very good lesson in how to make friends: not by force but by compassion. ”

The same lesson was shaped by his religious studies as a monk, and we see it reflected in mature form years later in his attempt to deal with repeated acts of deception by Chairman Mao. “ Besides,” the Dalai Lama tells us, “ as far as I was concerned, a positive approach was the only sensible one to take. There was no point in being negative, that only makes a bad situation worse. ” Did they challenge the process? Not only has he challenged the process for the last forty-plus years, but the Dalai Lama is still challenging the process.

In areas from promoting the role of women in Tibetan government to working for U. N. resolutions and intervention in the case of Tibet’s occupation by China, it is not unfair to say that his whole career has been an attempt to challenge the way international politics is conducted. Would you consider them inspirational? If so, why? The thing that is probably the most inspiring about him is that in spite of all that he and his people have been through, he still responds by seeing and hoping for the best in people. Near the end of the book he says, “.

. . for there are more than a billion Chinese, and whilst maybe several thousand are participating in acts of cruelty at any one moment, I believe there must be several million performing acts of kindness. ” How did they build a team and strengthen others? This is, perhaps, best shown in the account of his discussion with Prime Minister Nehru over the treatment and education of the Tibetan refugees who had come to India. His main approach is to appeal to the very best part of human nature in each of the people around him.

In the case of Nehru, the Dalai Lama had laid out his case and, as hoped, Nehru’s humanitarian instincts won out in the end. The same idea is repeated in other places in the book, though not so succinctly. In general we see the application of his faith in leadership by example. In this case by the moral example he presents. By making sure that people can deal with him one-on-one, they are able to see his honesty and sincerity, and, thereby, be inspired by that side of themselves. Did they practice what they preached?

In order to answer this question, let us first attempt to encapsulate what the Dalai Lama preached (and preaches). In relation to leadership, it would be fair to say that his sermon consists in: Hold yourself and the people you lead to high standards; the highest of which is to be selfless, altruistic, to put the welfare of others ahead of your own. In looking back over his struggles, there are a lot of examples of this on his part. One of the most pivotal instances was when he had to make the hard decision to leave Tibet.

He realized that only if he left would the gathered crowd — protesting against the Chinese, and protecting their leader from the Chinese — disperse, thereby saving them all from deadly Chinese military reprisals. In

one decisive moment he gave up his beloved homeland of Tibet in order to save hundreds and hundreds of lives. How did they handle mistakes? Perhaps owing to his lifelong academic training as a Buddhist monk, the Dalai Lama sees each mistake as a learning situation. We have already seen a good example of this in the story of the parrot, in which he made the mistake of beating it to change its behavior.

In looking for an example where he made a significant mistake as the leader of Tibet, there is the gradual realization that he had been wrong to believe in the good intentions of Chairman Mao. In contrast to earlier periods where he had been uplifted by his faith in Mao's underlying goodness, and, in fact, had often appealed to him concerning the conduct of occupying soldiers in Tibet, later in the story we hear the Dalai Lama say, " I began to see that Chairman Mao's words were like a rainbow – beautiful, but without substance.

" In response to this realization, the Dalai Lama comes away with a better understanding of how China has worked to create a misleading PR campaign to undermine the appeals of the Tibetan leadership among the world community, and he comes away with a different strategy for moving forward based on getting accurate observers into and out of Tibet to provide objective information on the condition and treatment of the Tibetan people at the hands of the Chinese. How did they recognize the accomplishments of others?

Given his varied, persistent needs in trying to keep the Tibetan culture safe and thriving, as well as the managerial tasks of the refugee population, and the political tasks of building international support for his cause, the primary effect of someone showing great leadership or achievement has been to give

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them more leadership responsibility. We see this talked about in regard to his tutors, his close associates, and even his own family. By way of illustration, we need only point back to the example given earlier concerning his sister.

Because of her ability and demonstrated energy as the manager of the household, he created a situation where the entire refugee population was part of her “ household. ” What could we all learn from this person that would make us better leaders? One of the recurrent elements throughout the story is his sincere desire to connect with people, we see him constantly working to meet people — whether they be Tibetan or foreign, wealthy or poor, politician or scientist. In fact, he made it a personal goal to try and meet with every refugee coming into India from Tibet and with other religious leaders whenever he went abroad.

He repeatedly mentions these opportunities as being the most valuable part of his life in exile. More than just the intrinsic value of these connections and interactions with people from all different walks of life, though, he also helps us to see that there is a secondary benefit in terms of making someone an effective leader. One of the many positive side effects to come from his interactions, especially with the Tibetan masses, is that by remaining close to the common people, a leader avoids being, “ misled by advisors and others around you who, for reasons of their own, might wish to prevent you from seeing things clearly. ”