

# Moral leadership essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



The distinction between right and wrong concerning principles is called morality. It is morality which helps to govern people whether as an individual, in a family, community, or organization. Within the last century, morality has been closely linked to leadership by identifying a style called “Moral Leadership”. In fact, it is within this last decade, that the continual confusion over true moral reasoning has caused an ethical collapse of massive proportions within the seven spheres of influence in our society. These spheres are business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, the family, and religion. These have all been affected by the lack of true moral leadership. 1 (Hillman, 2011, p. 7)

Society as a whole, has experienced a paradigm shift. It is with an inflated capacity of the ego that some leaders use as their power to influence and gain success.

A problem that leaders are facing within every sphere of influence is the distinction of success. One may view themselves as being successful because they are a good leader. This lends to the question, “ Does being a good leader automatically make you a moral leader?” 2 (Rhodes, 2006, p. 5) Perhaps it does. Of course that depends on the system of reasoning used to define their decision-making process.

There are many ethical systems that people use to characterize their behaviour. However, not every system allows the authentic self (true spirit) to be revealed, and thereby individuals lead with ego and ultimately self-interest. In addition, it should be pointed out what cannot be disputed: the foundation of morality, which are behaviours such as integrity, honesty, truth

and virtue. What is in question is the following: (a) the source of the behaviours and (b) the conceptualization of reasoning.

In writing this paper one hopes to establish what makes a moral leader and identify ethical systems that help to govern moral leadership.

The making of a moral leader is established through both nurture and nature. “ In 1956, psychologist Erik Erikson developed the Eight Stages of Development. This is a socialization process consisting of eight phases. These phases were primarily a studied discussion of the stages of basic human moral and psychological growth. According to Erikson, this developmental process consisted of a variety of stages and each one relates to how a child learns to develop morals, ethics and rationale. The stages begin in infancy and are barely becoming aware of the world around you. They continue until the individual has reached the final phase where the mature adult will either have developed a positive or negative view of himself. If he was loved and nurtured growing up, then this phase of his life should give him a feeling of happiness and a sense of pride. If the child was not nurtured and loved, than this is the phase of her life where she has developed a sense of negativity toward herself, her peers and the world around her.” 3 (Gutierrez, 2011)

Every situation speaks like a teacher within people’s lives. This is especially true when it comes to leadership. The mark of a true leader is seen as he/she is able to take the lessons of life, negative and positive, and allow them to illuminate their course of success. As a course is made clear, the potent combination of the divine nature within and the environment that people are

born into begins to shape the rational used to govern their life. As the physical body matures over the course of years, so does the moral development of individuals. A leader's moral compass is established in three areas: self-awareness, self-disclosure and social awareness.

Self-awareness is a maturity that shows an individual is conscious of one's own self. " It is the top level of consciousness; cognizance of the autobiographical character of personally experienced events." (" APA", n. d.)<sup>4</sup> A good leader is one who is able to separate oneself from the situation and have the courage to make judgments according to his or her own morality knowing the outcome may not be received with favourable opinions. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the element of emotional intelligence is a primary attribute to leadership. Having the courage to make unpopular decisions is difficult within itself. Being able to identify with the thoughts and feelings of followers that have to adapt to the leader's decisions is the key to successful followership. Followers are significant to the role of the leader; without their participation there is no role for the leader to carry out.

Self-disclosure is, in essence, sharing who you are. Sharing your values and belief system in both action and speech help people identify with you as a leader. In this age, technology and information are in close relation. Social media makes it very difficult to keep things hidden. For many decades, leaders have exemplified an opposition of principles between their private life and their public life. An example of this conflict would be President Bill Clinton who almost lost his presidency at the infamous impeachment trial of 1999; a trial that specifically raised questions about the distinction between

public morality and private morality. 5 (Chapman, 2010, p. 465) With so many public failures, it would behoove any leader to leave little distinction between his or her private and public morality. The audacity and ignorance that leaders portray when they exhibit behaviour that is steeped in relativism is a catalyst for failure. Perhaps this is why society, at large, welcomes another paradigm shift moving away from the immoral behaviour that is so openly displayed these by leaders.

Lastly, social awareness is recognizing the values of those following you. At the risk of sounding repetitive, social awareness is another facet to emotional intelligence. Knowing the values of the people you lead allows for effective leadership. Also, taking the time to know your followers helps to create more effective followers. This is someone who himself is a “critical and independent thinker who actively participates” in the leader / follower relationship. 6 (Daft, 2008, p. 200) As a leader is courageous in taking his/her ethical stand, it encourages the follower to also be courageous in his/her development as a mature follower thus reciprocating boldness when needed. It is important to note that a leader’s social awareness should not come from a biased perspective. It would be immature to think that every follower is going to have the very same value system and moral guide. What speaks volumes is understanding the perspective from which the other person is being validated. Many leaders have been successful because of the ability to transcend beyond culture, ethnicity, age and gender.

Dr. Myles Munroe is an example of how a poor, black child from a third world country (Bahamas) was able to mature and educate himself thus equipping

himself with awareness of self. He discloses his journey of successful leadership to encourage his followers in that they too can have a successful future. He is, all the while, aware of those around him so as to be deliberately effective towards everyone he encounters. According to the Today Newspaper and Ghanaian Journal (Ghana, Africa), Dr. Munroe (upon a recent visit in March 2012) spoke clearly, honestly and courageously about Africa's lack of good leadership. 7 ( Atutornu, 2012) Whether Ghanians agree or not, Dr. Munroe was authentic enough to share this thought with altruism.

As moral leadership becomes a more popular form of leading, it does raise the issue of ethical systems. Every one practices some type of morality; that is without dispute. Whether moral or immoral, it is still a practice of values that affects one's life. Even if one were to focus on just moral behaviour, not giving any credence to immoral actions, there are still many ways for leaders to approach their decision making. In the process of leading, one has to determine a pathway to consider any decisions. A leader has to distinguish whether morality lies in making right decisions or how one comes to making the right decisions. As a moral leader, should one lead with an action-oriented system of beliefs or should it be based solely on virtue? Questions leaders and followers should ask themselves are: 1. Is the end result more important than the process of coming to the result? 2. Should principles alone be used to judge right and wrong? 3. Can a leader practice absolutes and concrete beliefs in a changing and abstract society? 4. Who defines moral language? 5. Can rational be used as a base for values?

Within these questions (and there are many more) are very difficult answers. It is easy to sit on a side line and make decisions without having anything invested in the situation. The art of a great leader is to be able to look at the whole situation and apply all of who you are to make a decision. Being a moral leader is not just about making a good moral decision. Morality comes from the spirit of who one is. Having moral intelligence authenticates leadership competencies. Walking in integrity, responsibility, compassion and forgiveness are all a part the foundation of moral intelligence. Leading people does not always bring problems that require easy answers. For example: a leader with a deontological system of ethics may find it difficult to mediate in a situation where Biblical principles have been broken and the only answers available do not fit within the specific guidelines of his or her values. What is a leader to do? Maturity should cause the deontologist to reflect on the whole, maintain courage, and rely on his or her moral compass to make the best decision he or she can. As stated above, leadership is an art and, as an artist, leaders have to embrace their tripartite being. Then with confidence and courage they lead. Even if mistakes are made, at least they are made in truth.

Successful leadership in the moral sense is simply put by Albert Einstein (1879-1955): “ Try not be become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value. The true value of a human being can be found in the degree to which he has attained liberation from the self.”<sup>8</sup> Letting go of ego and embracing the authentic part will help a society that is crying out for moral leadership. Good leaders and good followers simply will not satisfy. Moral leaders and moral followers make significant change.

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