

The most influential and effective leaders history essay



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When one thinks of some of the most influential and effective leaders to have ever made a meaningful contribution to the betterment of modern society only a few individuals can come to mind and one of those individuals is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, and grew up in a Baptist home ran by his parent Reverend Martin Luther King and Alberta Williams King. After graduating with a Bachelor's of Divinity from Crozer Theological Seminary, king went on to follow in his father's footsteps and become a minister. In 1957 King along with other African American civil rights activist formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference which organized black churches to come together to conduct non-violent protest against the civil rights reform. As the SCLC began to gain media attention Dr. King, who was also the president of the SCLC, rose to national prominence and became the leader of the civil rights movement. Dr. King would go on to lead one of the largest political rallies for human rights in United States history in 1963 called " The Great March on Washington". Dr. King was inspired to take a non- violence approach to the civil rights reform through the teaching of Gandhi and in 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. Dr. King's leadership of non-violence <https://assignbuster.com/the-most-influential-and-effective-leaders-history-essay/>

protest, strong convictions, and moral courage for racial equality would prove to be pivotal in the movement's success in ending segregation in Southern States and other parts of America.

The purpose of this paper is to examine why Martin Luther King Jr. was an excellent example of leadership personified. To do so we first have to give a brief overview of what transformational leadership is, then we will be looking at how Dr. King displayed traits of transformational leadership by looking at each of the four main qualities that a transformational leader should possess. Finally we will wrap up our thoughts on Dr. King and give a brief conclusion.

Transformational Leadership

A transformational leader can be defined as one who brings about positive, major changes in an organization by enhancing motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. For example a leader acting as a role model for his/her followers that gives them inspiration and continues to keep them interested to the task at hand and challenging followers to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. James Burns is credited with introducing the concept of transforming leadership. As Burns states in his book entitled "Leadership" transformational leadership is the process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morality and motivation" (Burns, 1978). Burns also established two terms called Transforming Leadership and Transactional Leadership noting that there was an apparent difference between the two and a leader only needed one, either

Transforming leadership or transactional leadership.

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Bernard Bass, a pupil of Burns disagreed with Burns and went on to further develop the two concepts first off by putting transformational in place of transforming and noting that in order for an individual to be a transformational leader they had to display both traits of transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Bass went on to develop four components that were based on the moral foundation of a transformational leader and they are as followed: “ Inspirational Motivation” building trust and confidence in followers and empowering them to face difficult challenges, “ Intellectual Stimulation” arousing and changing followers’ awareness of problems and their capacity to solve those problems, “ Idealized Influence” engendering both trust and loyalty between leaders and followers through application of charismatic vision and behavior, and “ Individual Consideration” responding to specific needs of followers to ensure they included in the transformational process.

Inspirational Motivation

The degree to which a leader articulates a vision that is appealing and inspiring to followers. Leaders inspire motivation by articulating a clear and appealing view of the future, setting high standards for the followers to attain objectives and encouraging followers to integrate and become part of the overall organizational culture and environment.

Martin Luther was known for his words of inspirational motivation through speeches that he administered. A prime example of his inspirational words of motivation can be displayed through his “ I have a dream” speech that he recited at “ The Great March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” in 1963.

As Godwin, Houghton, Neck, and Mohan argue Dr. King’s “ I have a Dream”
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speech displayed an excellent example of a transformational leader creating and communicating a transformational vision through using rhetorical techniques to suit the situational context, displaying a sense of urgency, and using familiar language and imagery that resonated with the crowd. Godwin, Houghton, Neck, and Mohan also noted that Dr. King's remarks struck the perfect tone of context within the event. The spectacle of the peaceful march and the millions of people around the world either listen or watching to Dr. King's speech provided the ideal context and backdrop for Kings transformational vision and dreams. Also because protestors sought civil rights through non-violence protest at the march it once again validated King's vision of non-violent protest.

Dr. King's speech captured the listener's attentions by King creating of sense of urgency and crisis by adapting a prophetic voice in his rhetoric to resonate with the audience. Godwin, Houghton, Neck, and Mohan note that Dr. King spoke to the audience and used symbol to which people at home and in the crowd could relate to. King accomplished this by communicating common yet important experiences and symbols and incorporated them into his vision for a future of equality regardless of race.

Idealized influence

Bass describes Idealized Influences as a leader behaving in admirable ways that consequently cause followers to identify with the leader. A leader accomplishes this by displaying applications of charismatic vision and behavior. For example, articulating a vision and explaining how to accomplish this vision in an appealing manner, leading by example, showing

high levels of ethical and moral conduct, and articulating values and strengthen them by symbolic actions.

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leadership encourages change through intellectual stimulation. As Bass noted, a transformational leaders accomplishes this when they challenge assumptions, takes risks and solicits followers' ideas. A prime example of how a transformational leader can accomplish Intellectual Stimulation is by fostering a climate that favors critical examination of commonly held notions, beliefs, and the status quo.

Martin Luther clearly displayed this trait in a letter he wrote entitled " Letter from Birmingham Jail". Dr. King wrote the letter while incarcerated for his leadership and participation in the Birmingham protests which included the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Right group and Dr. Kings SCLC group. The protest was in relation to the high levels of racial segregation of black by the Birmingham government and the retail stores located in the city's downtown core. Dr. King wrote the letter as a response to the statements made in a letter written by eight white Alabama clergymen entitled " a call for unity". In the letter the clergymen noted that the demonstrations that were directed by outsiders were unwise and untimely and if they wanted to negotiate to do so through the courts rather than protest.

In his letter, Dr. King wrote that Africans Americans could no longer sit around and wait idly because " injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". He also stated that " freedom is never voluntary given by the

oppressor it is demanded by the oppressed". He went on to talk about Birmingham being one of the most segregated places in the United States and unjust treatments of African Americans were a common reality.

Therefore Non-violent direct action (like sit-ins) would be used to create a crisis and establish creative tension so that a community who refused to negotiate would be forced to address the issue.

leader behaves in admirable ways that cause followers to identify with the leader.