

Leadership analysis: dead poet's society assignment

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



Leadership Analysis: Dead Poet's Society Leadership is defined as the ability to guide, direct or influence people, but it is much more than that. There are many ways to merely guide or direct. A leader is someone whose personality helps them to guide a group of people in a direction they believe is desirable. People want to follow the leader, but they are perfectly free not to. A leader guides people by the infectious nature of their vision. Leadership and authority are not the same thing. The key difference lies in the source of power. If a person has the ability lead a group to perform a certain act than that person is an authoritarian.

They may also be a leader but being in charge does not make one a leader. There are many traits that must be present for a person to be a good leader and most of them require the leader to be wholly committed to his position. People can sense authenticity and want to be led by a real person.

Leadership requires a reciprocal relationship and creating the relationship cannot be forged by the use of power. The two distinct methods of authority displayed in the film illustrate the manner in which individuals react to each and the consequences of the methods.

Mr. Keating's leadership approach creates a strong bond with the students and empowers them to be successful. In Keating's classroom, the students are pushed to think for themselves. Keating's words and actions lead the students to feel a personal connection to him and a sense of trust. " Trust is the natural reciprocation of concern, respect, understanding and fairness. " Leadership involves building a team identity and gives the group attainable goals and at the same time the leader holds them to high expectations.

The Welton academy is filled with attention-channeling systems; systems of rewards, such as acceptance in to the Ivy League, and punishments, such as expulsion or paddling, which are intended to push the students and uphold the esteemed status of the institution. Early in the movie, one teacher even dares the students to test him, after claiming that all homework assignments are mandatory and if not handed in on time will result in one percentage point taken off of their final grade. This management style strives to force conformity and exert its authority.

This method demands its subordinates to follow the rules or else they will be removed from the organization. There are no types of relationships being built, because to the faculty the academy is there for only one purpose and getting students to think on their own is not it. It is apparent from the beginning of the film that even though Keating was once a student at Welton, his style of teaching and leadership are not going to fit in with the Academy's rigidity. The striking differences between Keating's classroom and the rest of the school exemplify the difference between management and leadership.

Even on the first day of classes, it is obvious that Keating is different. The first encounter the students have with Keating is him whistling, strolling through the filled classroom. This leaves the students perplexed. Based on their past experiences at the Welton Academy, the students have never seen a teacher act this way. Usually the teacher would enter the room, the students would rise and then the lesson would start. He immediately makes

an impression on them; the initial conversation with the students further stresses to them his differences from his peers.

All of the other teachers are strict, pushing grueling curriculums that are the norm for a school as prestigious as the Welton Academy. His first conversation with the students shows his character and immediately illustrates his intentions for the class. The students even describe this meeting as spooky, but claim, “ at least it was different. ” This first lesson shows Keating’s role as an inspirational leader. Through his repetition of Carpe Diem, he is trying to cultivate excellence and create some enthusiasm amongst the students. This initial lesson seems to immediately influence student Todd Anderson who scribbles “ seize the day! on to a piece of paper at his desk later that night. Keating begins to motivate the students declaring, “ Carpe diem, boys! Seize the day. Make your lives extraordinary! ” The theme carpe diem resonates through out the film leading the students to take on challenges that they have avoided in the past. The second lesson shows even more of John Keating’s leadership qualities. Keating does not talk down to the students or lecture to them. He instead talks to them in their own language, calling the book’s analysis of poetry excrement and has them rip out pages from their book. Immediately he gets he attention of students who are not listening and are drawing pictures. He also shows his true character and identifies himself as the leader of the group when another teacher, Mr. McAllister steps in to the room outraged and yelling at the students for their actions. McAllister seems shocked and disturbed with the way Keating is running his class, but the reaction of the students to Keating’s actions is what is important. With McAllister in the room, Keating still calls for

more ripping, again demonstrating his authenticity to the students, while at the same time protecting them from the flabbergasted professor.

He shows that he is the leader and is asking for them to rip the pages. This exercise of ripping out the pages also serves as a team building exercise, helping to unify the students in to a group. By telling them to rip out the pages he is letting them know that they will work to learn something of real importance, not the same drab lessons that are part of the Helton curriculum. His enthusiasm immediately grasps the student's attentions. He speaks directly to them and you can see in their faces their immediate acquiescence. John Keating is a charismatic, clever individual, whose aura immediately attracts the students.

He seems more of a contemporary than a professor. There is no denying that Keating is authentic. Keating is able to easily project his persona to the students allowing him to develop personal leadership. Even when looking back at his senior annual, he seems to be the same as he is now, aside from the photo. He was a troublemaker (at least to the administration), the captain of the soccer team, editor of the school annual, lover of poetry, a person born with the characteristics of a natural leader, quoted as being "the person most likely to do anything. Actions speak louder than words and after seeing the senior annual the students feel they can relate to him. In fact, him being a former student creates an even stronger attraction and gives Keating greater authenticity and credibility to the students. He has been through the school before and can understand the student's plights. The manner in which he responds to the students inquires can also be seen

as Keating exposing a weakness, which helps build some solidarity between him and the boys. He says, “ thanks for the trip down amnesia lane, now please burn the book. Doing so shows the students that he is genuinely vulnerable further strengthening their support and respect. When asked about the dead poets society, he again uses communication to be on the same level as the boys ridiculing the current administration. He then builds their trust by asking them to keep a secret. The students are immediately taken in by the idea of the Dead Poets Society and that night, they follow the footsteps of Keating’s old group. Keating’s style of speech always involves humor and optimism. Speaking in such a way fosters enthusiasm and confidence among the students.

Also, it seems that in the classroom Keating tends to lead a conversation rather than lecture. Again, he always speaks to them as equals, not as inferiors as the rest of the faculty does. This is just one of the ways in which Keating differentiates himself from the rest of the faculty. He inspires them to look at things in a different way. He leads them by showing he genuinely cares for each one of them. He shows tough empathy when assigning them to compose an original poem and recite it to the class. When walking out of the classroom, he calls out to Todd Anderson saying “ Mr.

Anderson, don’t think that I don’t know that this assignment scares the hell out of you, you mole. ” The situation with Todd Anderson also shows Keating’s ability to pick up on soft cues and be a good situational sensor. He was able to easily pick up on Anderson’s hesitance in class and figure out the correct action to take to bring out the best in Anderson. He uses tough

empathy to help Todd Anderson get over his low self-esteem. He calls him out in front of the class but the manner in which he does so is not in any way cruel. By forcing Todd to speak in front of the class, he is doing Todd a great service.

He is giving him what he needs, confidence in front of his peers, not what he wants, to be a silent partner. The manner of Keating's approach balances his respect for Todd while at the same time respecting the atmosphere and status quo of the class. He does not merely call him out to recite and make him stand there ashamed or afraid. He takes an active role in helping Todd come out of his shell and risks his relationship as leader as well. The scene shows Keating push Anderson from someone afraid to open up in front of others, to someone who creates a powerful poem on the spot awestruck at his achievement.

The look on Keating's face after Anderson finishes is absolute bliss. His true caring for the student's well-being and development is seen through out the film. After Todd successfully recites the poem, Keating acknowledges his accomplishment and gives more support whispering in his ear " don't you forget this. " Keating uses tough empathy again after Mr. Dalton almost gets kicked out of school for his stunt calling for girls to be admitted to the school. Keating tells him what he did was stupid and shows his disappointment but does so in a way where he still shows he cares.

He lets him know that he is still on his side, cares for his well-being, and wants him around for his classes. When Mr. Dalton accuses him of siding with Mr. Nolan saying " what about carpe diem and sucking all the marrow

out of life and all that? " Keating responds saying " sucking the marrow out of life doesn't mean choking on the bone. " He lets him know that there is a time and place for everything, but that you must be smart enough to know one from the other. This type of reprimand actually even strengthens the bond between the two. It is with this type of supportive leadership that John Keating really allows the students grow.

He provides them with a " safety net" that allows them to be creative and take appropriate risks. The key word being appropriate; expressing to them when to rebel and knowing when not to. The same scene is one of the only scenes where Keating's ethical leadership is revealed. He displays all three elements that make up good ethical leadership: a balance in decision-making, responsibility for ethics, and taking the public role of being a leader. You can see that Mr. Dalton's actions have really affected him and he uses the opportunity to express himself in front of the entire group.

He is able to talk about ethical behavior and consequences in a way that Dalton and the rest of the group will care about. Keating is a master of relational leadership. His actions convey that he cares about and understands the students. Even students who do not buy in to Keating from the start are dealt with fairly and always in a similar manner as the Dead Poet's Society group. One of the students, Mr. Hopkins, does not display any enthusiasm when performing an outdoor exercise involving soccer and poetry and then laughs at students who make real attempts at poetry, only to then recite, " the cat sat on the mat" as his poem.

Keating reacts to him with the same clever wit he uses to inspire the other students and does not let one of the bad apples affect his style of teaching. He uses the student as an example of how not to be ordinary and to strive for something more. In essence his style of teaching is merely being himself and wanting to share his love with others. This is one of the reasons he is so successful. His genuine interest in his students is one of his strong points. He builds ties with the students that feel " honest, accessible, and human. " The students know that they can come to him for help.

The scene where Neil Perry comes to him after the fight with his father shows that his door is always open to his students and how he cares for them succeeding at their dreams. When asked by Neil how he can stand being in this place (Helton Academy) when the woman he loves is in London, Keating responds that he loves teaching and there is no other place in the world he would rather be. Again, the honesty embedded in Keating actions and words shows his validity. After Neil's suicide, Keating weeping at his desk emphasizes how his care for the students goes beyond wanting them to succeed in his classroom.

Keating's impact on the students is immense. For the first time, Neil Perry is doing what he wants to do and is going against what his father tells him to do. He screams " carpe diem" as he tells Todd Anderson of his intentions to try out for ' A Midsummer Night's Dream. ' They all seem to be acting ' alive' for the first time. Whether dive-bombing down a hill on a bike, going for the girl of their dreams, or trying out for a play the first time. His influence over the boys has motivated them to reach for higher goals.

They commit themselves to higher aspirations as they learn that they can do more than they had ever thought they could do. This all stems from Keating's inspirational leadership. Keating's enthusiasm for teaching and his optimism towards life create raw excitement among the students. Keating, being the type of inspirational leader he was, led other members of the group to step up as leaders themselves once he was leaving. At the end Todd, who Keating built a strong bond with through his use of tough empathy, is the first to defy Mr. Nolan as Keating is leaving the classroom after getting his belongings.

Even Mr. Hopkins, who repeatedly defied Keating's teaching throughout the film, stood on his desk as Keating left the classroom. The only one of the students from the Dead Poet's Society who did not stand up was the one who "finked," Richard Cameron. But the issue of Richard Cameron depicts an important factor when it comes to authority: the role of the individual. Not all people react to different styles of authority the same way. Take Mr. Dalton for example. He proved to be the most prone to Keating's leadership style and took the lessons to heart almost leading to his expulsion from the school.

Mr. Dalton was always somewhat of the class clown and proved to be highly impressionable even to the extent where he changed his name to 'Nuwanda' to fit his new beatnik persona. Richard Cameron on the other hand is a classic example of someone submissive to whoever is in charge at the moment. He immediately turned on Keating and was always a little hesitant to the actions of the Dead Poet's Society. Cameron's character is a natural

follower and is easily controlled by anyone whom he perceives as being in charge. The scene at the end of the film shows the power of a good leader.

Even when removed from an authority position, Keating still commands the attention of his students. As each student stood on his desk saluting “ oh captain, my captain,” the true power of good leadership over management was on display. Mr. Nolan was left threatening punishments on to deaf ears. John Keating’s approach towards teaching stemmed from his true love of teaching enabling him to influence the bright young students who have been pushed around their entire academic lives. He was himself, in and out of the classroom, and the students appreciated and supported him for it.

There is no universal formula for being a great leader, but in the context of the Welton Academy, Keating could serve as a model that the other professors should try to emulate if they really want to influence and guide their pupils. His leadership style in the corporate world though could prove disastrous as he is gauche in his adult relationships, has no patience with institutional politics, and does nothing to promote loyalty to the organization. Context is the key, and being able to use intuition to gauge what different situations require is what makes a good leader.