

# Leadership in utopia by thomas more



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In 1516, Thomas More, an English writer, lawyer, and philosopher, wrote *Utopia*. The word *Utopia* is a combination of two Greek words and is defined as no-place. It is a play on the words *Eutopia*, a perfect place, which More used to imply that although utopian lifestyle is desired it is impossible to attain.

*Utopia* is divided into two books. Book one criticized Europe's political system and book two described a utopian island. *Utopia* was written during the Renaissance movement. The Renaissance began in Italy in the 15th century and later spread to different parts of Europe. More included himself as the narrator and used the fictional characters of *Utopia* and their attitudes about public service to reveal leadership that is very different from the royal service of the Renaissance.

In book 1, Thomas More meets his old friend Peter Giles. Together they meet with Raphael Hythloday who is a world traveler and philosopher. Hythloday is very knowledgeable about government and ruling. Giles and More are interested in hearing his ideas. Giles suggests that Hythloday put his knowledge to use and become an advisor to a king. Hythloday says he is not interested in becoming a slave to a king as an advisor ends up being subservient like a slave because he is always trying to please the king. He believes that advisors are just puppets to the king and furthermore the king is only interested in gaining more wealth and territory rather than governing their land properly. Hythloday says that he has seen this problem in European society and that he has in his opinion visited a perfect society where these issues do not exist. In book 2 Hythloday describes the perfect society of *Utopia*. These advisor issues do not exist in *Utopia* because citizens have

an equal say on how they are governed. There is no reward for being favored by politicians and rulers. Everything is done for the common good of society.

In contrast to Europe during the Renaissance, utopia is the ideal and perfect society where everything is done for the good of its citizens. There is no concept of individualism so it is similar to a communist society where everything is shared equally amongst the people. In Utopia the ruler of every thirty households was called the syphogrant. On top of every ten syphogrants and their household was the head phylarch. Together the syphogrants elect a governor who holds office for life .

Utopia is an agricultural society. This focus on the land promotes harmony amongst the people as all citizens have to work for their food and then the produce is evenly distributed. Consequently, there is no private property in Utopia. everything is kept in storehouses and distributed when necessary. This leads to reduced or little crime and jealousy because everyone has what they need. Additionally, the utopians are tolerant of other religions as a number of religions exist on the island.

During the 15th century Italy was divided into city-states. The renaissance started in the city state of Florence. The Medici family rose to power over Florence. In order to prove that they were rulers, the Medici family were patrons of the arts. Benozzo Gozzoli was commissioned by the Medici's to paint the frescoes for The Chapel of the Magi. These paintings were used to show Cosimo de Medici's power and his humbleness, since these were the most important qualities of a leader in the renaissance period. The artist painted Cosimo riding a donkey a symbol of humbleness while his son Piero,

the current ruler of the Medici family, was riding on a white horse to symbolize the power and nobility of his family .

These characteristics of a ruler are also seen in a The Prince. Niccoló Machiavelli, an Italian renaissance political philosopher, wrote The Prince in 1523 as a guidebook for rulers. Machiavelli stated that a ruler should be both feared and loved . If one cannot combine both it is safer to be feared than to be loved. As it is written, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of man is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails. Therefore, people are less likely to plot against leaders they fear than a leader they love. He writes though, that it is crucial for a prince to be feared in a way that if he is not loved he does not become hated. When necessary, a talented prince who wished to stay in power would put aside traits such as honesty, integrity, generosity, and compassion in order to instill fear in both his followers and his enemies, since fear engenders respect. Additionally, Machiavelli claimed that for a ruler that if the end results are appropriate the means are justified. He said that the action of a prince should be governed solely by necessity . Machiavelli felt that a prince is above moral and religious affairs.

During the renaissance, Baldassare Castiglione wrote The Book of the Courtier . Castiglione was a courtier, a noble who was part of the kings court. His book illustrated the virtues of an ideal Renaissance courtier. He wrote how it was important for a leader who is an example to all of society, to have been born into a noble family as he will be more respected and revered. It is also imperative that a courtier should be knowledgeable in the handling of

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arms; he should know how to deal with every type of weapon both on foot and on horse. He must be well-mannered and conduct himself with the utmost respect. Castiglione held that a ruler used kindness and skill to gain respect.

More wrote utopia in order to highlight the political corruption in Europe. His use of fictional characters was a creative way to distance himself from his own controversial ideas. More revealed his satirical plan through Raphael Hythloday. The name Raphael refers to the angel of healing while the last name Hythloday means speaker of nonsense in Greek. Through the character Hythloday, More brings out his own beliefs that the kings and their advisors were really only interested in themselves and not their subjects. Likely a reflection of his own complicated relationship with Henry VIII. In contrast to Hythloday, it was known that More was a catholic and lived during the early years of the Protestant Reformation. He was merciless against the Protestants and persecuted them. It is therefore ironic that a main approach in utopia was religious tolerance.

More was one of the first authors to establish a paradigm for the ideal world. He created a framework for fantasy life and an ideal world that is still in use today. Even though More believed in Utopia an ideal world he called his novel Utopia to demonstrate that there is no real perfect place. Each of the authors discussed above describe different mechanisms for attaining true leadership including, humility, fear, and kindness but a true leader needs to be empathetic to the people and sympathetic to their needs but maintain aspects of all these types of leadership to be a successful leader.