

Leadership Education: a balanced program for the rest of us

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Leaders are needed across America in cities, towns, and hamlets to run schools, community groups, service organizations, condominium boards, local government, nonprofit services, social clubs, church councils, small companies, speciality stores, union locals, trucking fleets, trade associations, professional chapters, volunteer police and fire departments. The list goes on. Most of these people do not have access to elite colleges or prestigious graduate programs that largely prepare corporate, political, diplomatic, and military leaders. So, this article will consider an educational approach *for the rest of us*.

While teaching at a *community college*, I realized that properly selected core courses provided an excellent basis for a *balanced* leadership education, with certain adjustments. For example, biology was chosen for the science requirement because many behavioral theories are physiologically based. In sum, the 60 credits required for an associate degree provide a decent foundation for future leaders. These basic courses can also be integrated into a four or five year bachelor's degree program.

A good program provides an educational foundation and not cookbook answers to all anticipated problems. While leaders do not need to be expert in everything, it is helpful to have sufficient knowledge to recognize the difference between sound advice and a snow job. My MBA program included several review courses, not available in engineering school, and basic understanding provided me a useful basis for working with specialists in various fields. Leaders are more than automatons or titled figureheads, they also need to know something.

The last sentence implies two common fallacies and one need of leadership education. First, leaders must tackle many different situations in uncertain times. They cannot emulate a rote program taught out of a textbook or adopt the latest fad. Second, while having magnetism is a human relations advantage, charisma without substance does not sustain a leader when there is trouble. This brings us to a knowledge based developmental approach that can be learned is most reputable junior colleges.

The 20 courses listed in the table below are readily available in many community colleges. While they can be assembled as offered in the catalog, the following page will outline what I believe would be enhancements for a leadership program, without undermining the usual intent of such a course. For example, many biographies and novels tap into leadership themes and the teacher can make academic points while using pertinent material.

Competent leadership is based upon having a suitable educational foundation for both the craft and art form. I find it useful to thumb through a collection of Picasso's works and see that his earlier work showed he could draw. This is not a universal truth, however. Switching metaphors, many talented singers cannot read music.

It needs to be mentioned that we are not only training people to be "great" leaders. This program provides information that a person with and without leadership *talent* will find useful. Liken it to a drawing class that serves to develop either artists or craftsmen or dabblers.

This curriculum is based upon the assumption that innate leadership *talent* can benefit from cultivation. But, not everyone will rise to leadership "greatness" by education. Some may have the temperament to be managers or supervisors or workers. They will all find it better to have knowledge and not rely on affectation.

Balanced Sixty-Credit Leadership Foundation Program				
PSYCHOLOGY		①	②	BUSINESS
Introduction to Psychology Developmental Psychology Personality Psychology Abnormal Psychology (and Treatment)				Management, Administration, & Supervision Bookkeeping & Accounting Banking, Finance, & Economics Overview of Leadership Theories
Social (and Organizational) Psychology (and Group Processes)				
Research Design, Analysis, Interpretation, Conclusion & Reporting				
Introduction to Computers & M.I.S. Statistics Experimental Design Human Biology Political Science				Grammar & Writing Reading (Biographies and Literature) Literature Review & Major Paper Cultural Anthropology Ethics
STEM (Sci., Tech., Engrg., & Math)		③	④	LIBERAL ARTS

Balanced “Renaissance” Leadership Curriculum

The Four Domains

① The curriculum consists of a balance between four domains of courses. First, a leader needs to understand the nature of people and persons, their motivations, how they got the way they are, and deviance from mental health. I use people to describe how people act as part of groups and persons to identify humans as individuals that may act in and be influenced by their affiliations.

② Second, whatever the organization, there is a need to plan, direct, control, and understand finances. There are not only generally accepted accounting principles but standardized practices throughout the business world. It is necessary to recognize and adapt to procedures that others work by. A leader needs to comprehend the thinking, principles, and protocols that customers, suppliers, and controllers of money expect. Like sports, there are rules to many games that players must know.

③ Third, information and ideas come in many forms and one must be aware of theories underlying belief systems and methods of assembling, ordering, and analyzing data. Technology provides access to a host of “numbers” that may or may not be valid or useful. Hucksters abound that sell “solutions” to problems. Also, the nightly news provides stories about extreme outlying individuals to counter the average of responses from statistical groups.

④ Fourth, is reading, research, writing, communication, culture, and integrity. Leaders are expected to honestly interact with subordinates, superiors, and peers. Unfortunately, many executives have narcissistic and other negative character traits. *Personality disorders* are enduring and resistant to treatment. They are often accompanied by an ability to manipulate, impress, and charm those who can enable their career. [This may be why dysfunction is so great in leadership positions.](#)

I have already mentioned some tailoring of standard classes to provide motivation. *Henry V* is a good way to introduce charismatic leadership and Shakespeare in a literature class. Political science can study philosophies of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Machiavelli.

Although not necessary, two bridge courses indicated in the Table are possible. Social and organizational subjects teach similar things about people in groups. Professors choose areas to emphasize and leadership examples can be emphasized to get across similar ideas.

The other bridge course might be team taught to explore a psychological or business theory, develop a suitable experiment, and organize the results in a well developed report. In graduate school, a sequence of studies culminate in a thesis or dissertation. Here, this seminar would expose the student to the process without as much depth and breath of independent scholarship.

Leadership theories is listed as an “overview” to discourage a specific approach. Gary Yukl’s *Leadership in Organizations* is an excellent book that covers the many and sundry theories and methods.

As leadership is an art and not a craft, universal solutions should not be applied to all occasions. Therefore, the popular theories, methods, fads and fashions are not belabored in this program. They are covered to inform and not control behavior, knowing unusual situations require idiosyncratic approaches.

In practice, a liberal arts education does not guarantee ethical behavior. While it may be possible to identify negative personality characteristics with psychological assessment instruments, there is a reluctance to use them in selection processes. The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination. Fortunately, community colleges can be less concerned with the underlying nature of the student and may educate sinners and saints.

Leadership for The Rest of Us

The 20 three-credit courses listed in the table, above, are generally available in broad spectrum community colleges. They are divided into four academic domains to provide a sufficiently broad foundational education for a person in a leadership position. I have advanced degrees in three of these areas (M.B.A., M.S.E.E., Ph.D.) and believe these undergraduate courses are adequate to prepare leaders for most positions.

Graduate and postgraduate credentials may be expected in many positions, but the *practice of leadership* is an applied and not an academic function. A school pedigree does not necessarily enhance a leader’s skills. Note that data shows [25–75%](#) of those in charge are incompetent. To be fair, many highly educated people have been credible CEOs and generals; others have not.

While elite universities and military academies may try to *shape* its students for particular post-college positions, this is not always the case. (My degrees were based on course work, as I was a commuting student.) The practice of pseudo psychotherapy with attempts at personality change are addendums to a basic education.

This is a renaissance program that focuses on bestowing a range of *cognitive competencies* and does not dwell on character enhancement or correction. Of course, counseling to enhance study, behavior, and presentation skills can help the tenderfoot navigate the college and workaday environments and the experiences themselves provide growth. Thus, neophytes can be expected to mature by virtue of the higher education process.

This readily available curriculum is needed to provide more potential leaders *and* trustees that properly oversee the persons they put in a leadership position. As ambitious contenders with personality disorders have the social skills and talent to impress interviewers, their on-the-job performance has to be monitored.

I posted papers on competent and incompetent leadership, board members awareness and fiduciary responsibility for oversight, and related topics on Web:

www.HOUD.info