Now Versus Later: How We Prepare for the Future

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For those who have been in leadership positions, it is evident that effective leadership is not a point in time, but a journey. It occurs over time and is influenced by factors such as who we are, what we do, and whom we interact. While we can certainly see some short-term movement in skills that underlie and support that development, the reality is that it takes time. To that end, we need to ensure our developmental efforts (e.g., training, education, and experiential) have this longitudinal approach in mind. We must be mindful of where the leader is at, but we must also keep an eye on which direction he/she is headed. As a result, we need to ask, how can we provide just-in-time developmental efforts, but also scaffold it in such a way that we are setting leaders on a developmental trajectory that is beneficial for both the individual, as well as the organization? Such a question gives us two targets to keep in mind as we develop, execute, and assess all of our efforts aimed at character and leadership development.

The first target centers on the idea of what do leaders need to know, right now, to be successful? In addressing this question, I find it useful to go back to an old technique that I learned as a faculty member at the United States Air Force Academy. When we wanted to get feedback on how things were going right now, we would utilize a tool called *Start-Stop-Continue*. That tool asked three simple questions:

What do I need to start doing that I am not doing right now?
What am I doing that isn't effective that I need to stop?
What am I doing right now that I need to continue doing?

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These may seem like very basic questions, but they get directly at the heart of development. In fact, those questions can get at the heart of any developmental effort. Development is rooted in an accurate assessment of where I am and how I am showing up. I must understand this reference point as it determines where I am starting from which can then translate into where I need to be heading. This applies to organizations as well, as they need to know where the leaders are at so that they can provide the necessary developmental interventions. In either case, the key is to make sure that we are getting accurate individual level information.

In most cases, getting information is easy. Sources abound on where we can get information. However, accurate information that can be used for development is less straightforward. For example, if we want to know how we are showing up into a leadership situation, who better to inform us than ourselves? We are, in fact, the one who is showing up. The challenge is that we do not show up alone. While we certainly bring our physical selves into the situation, we also bring along many other things as well such as thoughts about ourselves, our past experiences, our past successes/failures, immediate stressors, etc. All of these things will have an influence on how we interpret the events going on around us, and our place in those events. It is no surprise, then, that it can be difficult for us to an accurate assessment when we have all of these influences impacting us. The good news is that does not necessarily mean our perspective is incorrect. What it does this mean? It means that we need to aware of the impact of various influences on us, and how those influence our ability to accurately assess events impacting our leadership and our organizations. It also means that that it can be useful to gather other perspectives by which to compare our self-assessments. As character and leadership developers and practitioners are aware, 360-degree feedback is a useful tool to get at these various perspectives. This type of feedback not only captures what we think about ourselves, but it allows us to get feedback from various other perspectives (e.g., peers, subordinates, superiors, and others) by which we can compare perspectives. For example, if we are getting different feedback about our leadership effectiveness from our peers, subordinates, and our immediate supervisor, how can that feedback help inform us about our leadership effectiveness? This comparison is important because it gets at the true heart of development – the challenging of our perspectives and ourselves by weighing the information to determine where we need to be. It is the self-understanding needed to assess where we can be better, where we can improve, and most importantly, why we need that development.

While it may seem that this is an individual endeavor, focused on a particular individual, at a particular point in time—the organization also has a significant role in this process. Well-led organizations strategically invest in their people. They do this because it not only helps short term in terms of performance improvement, but also long term, by developing future capacity and capability. This gets at the second target of development.

The second target deals with where do I want to be in the future? It would be difficult to chart a path to where you want to go if you do not know where you are at now. That is why the first target is so important— it is the foundation upon which we begin, or begin again. If we are just starting out on our leadership journey, it is our true beginning. However, if we have already begun our journey, it is important to reassess our development and progress to ensure continual growth. For those who may have taken a pause on that developmental journey, it is a restart. For those who

are still on the journey, it is useful to take a pause and reshoot that azimuth to see if anything has changed. Even if we are on track, it is still useful to gauge that confirmation. Understanding where we are at gives us the ability to see where we want to go. However, equally as important, is deciding on how we are going to get there. That journey referenced in the opening of this thought piece, is part what happens to us, but the other part is what we choose to do. The encouraging piece of this is that we have an impact on what we want to develop. As we think about the future, most people see uncertainty. That is fair. When we think about leadership, however, we should also see stability. If we look back over a century of research on psychology and leadership, we see some common themes. We see the topics of communication, decision-making, team building, and the importance of relationships; of which all are themes that have stood the test of time. While the context in which those occurred may have certainly changed, those competencies (and others) have stayed stable. What we have also learned, is the way leadership is shown has changed over time. For example, as we look at coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, how we work has changed. People are not all in one place anymore, and many are working remotely. We are leveraging technology more significantly than we have in the past. We are learning that virtual teams can be as effective, and in some cases more effective, than an on-site team. These changes requires a concomitant change in how we view leadership. So, while some things have not changed (basic competencies), some contextual things have. As we look at leadership development, we must be agile enough to understand changes and intentionally account for them in our programs, courses, and processes. The challenge is to consider both targets in your development.

In This Issue

We need to attend to both preparing for now and preparing for the future. The key is that we understand that balance between now and later. The encouraging part is that it is not an either/or, but an and/both situation. We do not have to choose, as they are linked. Understanding the value of both of these targets allows us to leverage synergy in our efforts to amplify skill development in order to attain long-term leader development. This issue of the Journal of Character & Leadership Development (JCLD) is aimed directly at the two aforementioned targets. We have brought together a collection of articles that impact and inform both of these targets. Our goal with this issue is to shed light on different aspects to consider when looking at preparing leaders to be effective into the future.

The issue begins with an article by Stacey Dietsch who is a Partner at McKinsey & Company. In her article, she begins with the notion of reimagining leadership after COVID-19. Through an examination of several studies undertaken by McKinsey over the past year, she outlines how we can reset the bar for leadership. This includes a discussion of the importance of several leadership behaviors that are rising in importance post COVID-19. These behaviors cluster around three main categories: Caring, Curiosity, and Courage. She outlines each of these and discusses how to build them in organizations today and moving forward.

The issue continues with an article by Chris Beckert and Paul Jones of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). They discuss the value of the human in the loop in the disrupted leadership environment. They begin by describing a global study done by CCL, which identified five major disruptions in organizations: big data and analytics; crafting an innovative culture;

artificial intelligence; equity, diversity, and inclusion; and communications overload. They step through each of these disruptions and provide actionable steps for leaders to deal with these disruptions in themselves and their organizations.

Next, we have an article by Samuel Hunter of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and colleagues which broaches the topic of the leader's role in shaping innovation. Starting with the basis of creativity and innovation as processes, they outline why it is important for leaders to support innovative efforts. They also describe why leading for innovation is challenging. Following that, they discuss how a leader can directly, and indirectly, shape innovation to have sustained innovative success. They wrap up their article with the reminder that innovation does not occur spontaneously, nor does it occur without dedicated leadership.

Edward Brooks of the Oxford Character Project at Oxford University continues the discussion by focusing on what character can contribute to a new generation of wise thinkers and good leaders. He starts with a description of the changing dynamics facing leaders today and into the future, and uses that as a basis for describing why there is a need for values-based and person-centered leadership. Through his article, he makes the strong, and needed, case for the value of character development in leadership education. Through his descriptions, he draws on research done as part of the Oxford Character Project.

The next article focuses on how purposeful engagement can be used in leader development. Robert Reimer of the United States Air Force Academy, Scott Allen of John Carrol University, and Greig Glover, of Fairview Heath System, discuss how intentionality

in leader fundamentals and theories of adult learning should inform our developmental efforts and practices. Through utilizing the framework of the what, the how, and the context of purposeful engagement, they walk the reader through their convincing approach.

Joe Don Looney offers a compelling discussion as to why diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical to leadership development at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). As the Chief of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at USAFA, he begins with definitions of these important topics and then integrates them into the guiding policy documents around these topics in the Air Force. By discussing three strategic lines of effort at USAFA (e.g., recruitment, retention/ success, and development), he eloquently explains why and how these are integrated into leader development at USAFA.

The next article in this Issue is a conversation with Colonel Fred Gregory, USAF (Retired; USAFA 1964). Col Gregory served in many capacities during his career to include as a pilot, test pilot, astronaut, and as Acting Administrator of the National Aeronautical Space Administration (NASA). In the conversation, he discusses his professional journey and how he handled many hard stops along the way. Throughout his journey, he shares several compelling leadership lessons he learned along the way.

The final article is by Dr. J.R. Flatter of Flatter Inc. In his article, he discusses a framework for courageous leadership. Gleaned from his numerous years in the leadership field, Flatter talks about important leadership competencies, based on a foundation of courage, which can be utilized for effective leadership. Through discussing aspects of his own developmental journey, he walks through each of the categories and

talks about how each can be developed. With this approach, Flatter describes how any leader can develop courageous leadership.

Book Reviews

In addition to the feature articles and conversations that are in the JCLD, one of our goals is to introduce readers to other works related to character and leadership development. While there are numerous books published yearly on these topics, we try to highlight several works that are especially applicable to character and leader development. In that light, we have two reviews in this issue of the JCLD. The first is a review is on the book *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin. This book focuses on leadership best practices distilled from Navy SEAL experiences in combat, and how those skills can be applied to the private sector. The second review is on the book, *Unauthorized Progress, Leading from the Middle: Stories & Proven Strategies for Making Meaningful Impacts* by Geoff Abbott. In this book, Abbott leans on his decades of experiences to discuss techniques on how you can create positive change within organizations. While you already likely have your own reading list, we encourage you to add these to your list.

Profile in Leadership

One effective way to understand leadership is to read about and study current and previous leaders. Through that examination, we are able to pull from their experiences to help inform our own development (both short term and long term). To support that approach, we have a Profile in Leadership section where we are able to take a bit of a deep dive into a particular leader. For this issue, John Farquhar explores the career of General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.. Through the examination of aspects of General Davis's career, Farquhar delves into how Davis was able to be

successful through perseverance, professionalism, and humility. By detailing the events around General Davis' command history, he discusses the challenging leadership situations Davis found himself in, and how he was able to successfully lead in spite of those challenges. It is a great overview of General Davis' approach to leadership.

Looking Ahead

The next issue of the JCLD (October 2021) will be our annual Conversations with Leaders edition. In that issue, we will have numerous conversations with leaders from many different domains (e.g., military, academic, sports, business, etc.). These conversations will detail these leaders' leadership challenges, as well as their successes. This insightful approach to leader and character development gives a unique view of how leaders approach their charge of leadership. It is a great approach to finding out about the developmental journey of these leaders. That insight is useful as we all work on our leadership journey. The February 2022 issue of the JCLD will continue our linkage with the National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS) held annually at USAFA. The theme for the 2022 NCLS is Ethics and Respect for Human Dignity. The February 2022 JCLD will have that same theme.

If you have an interest in submitting manuscripts on the above topics, or know of someone who would be interesting to have a conversation with, please contact me at douglas.lindsay@afacademy.af.edu or jcld@usafa.edu with your ideas.