

# **After Dinner address to Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research Centre State Forum**

**Mackay**

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Thank you Heather.

Before I begin, I must acknowledge the Yuibera people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which this conference takes place.

Tonight I've been asked to briefly discuss leadership.

I must say that I was reluctant to accept the initial offer to be an after dinner speaker for tonight. Why – because I myself have always had an objection to the whole idea of after dinner speaking! After a hard day's conferencing, all you want to do at this very moment is relax, give your brain a rest and enjoy yourselves. The last thing you want is to have to put up with someone droning on while you're trying your best to have a good time!

I eventually agreed to speak but on the proviso that the maximum time would be limited to 20 minutes. I hope I have the presentation down pat to meet this condition and apologise if I go a bit over.

I want to start by making the following quite clear:

1. I am not an expert on leadership
2. I have not read all of the literature available on leadership
3. What I present is just my own brief take on some parts of it in the time allowed.

I decided for the sake of brevity and the aim of trying my best to make this interesting to focus on a series of leadership quotes that I found inspiring and/or assisted my understanding of what leadership is. Hopefully some or all of them may resonate with you.

So here I go.

1. What is leadership? Who can be one? What do leaders do? What does it require to be a leader? These are just a small sample of the sorts of questions people usually ask when thinking about leadership. I can't answer all of them tonight but the following collection of quotes may give some clarity.

Firstly:

***'A leader is a dealer in hope'***

**(Napoleon Bonaparte)**

A leader inspires others. To do so, the great leader promotes a vision of what could be, what should be instead of what is and what has to be. The leader is able to influence others to follow him/her to achieve success, to make change, to transform our worlds.

***'The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality'***

**(Max DePree)**

***'We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are'***

**(Anais Nin)**

In this sense, the leader must have a vision of what is to be achieved. This sense of vision comes from the leaders ability to comprehend and make sense of what currently exists that oppresses, stymies, prevents,

disables etc achieving the common good and how this reality could be changed.

Sometimes there's a tendency to get confused by what constitutes management and leadership.

Consider the following:

***'Management works in the system. Leadership works on the system'***

**(Stephen R Covey)**

***'The manager accepts the status quo – the leader challenges it'***

**(Warren Bennis)**

***'When Noah heard the weather forecast he ordered the building of the Ark – that was leadership. Then he looked around and said 'make sure the elephants don't see what the rabbits are up to' – that was management'***

**(Author unknown)**

While the distinctions are clear through these quotes, I actually think its not all that clear-cut day to day. In reality, many of us have worked or are working in managerial positions that also require the exercise of leadership. What is important is to be able to distinguish the tasks and activities that represent or require the application of one or the other, or sometimes both simultaneously. That is, knowing when we *are* managing or leading, or even knowing when *to* manage or lead.

So how have others understood leadership?

***'I suppose Leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people'***

### **(Indira Gandhi)**

Leadership is not about exercising top-down authority. Unfortunately it's the most common model people use and it's also the easiest because it takes little thinking, only threats and manipulation.

Leadership is about working with people in ways that confer respect, dignity and trust – its doing the right things the right way.

***'You do not lead by hitting people over the head — that's assault, not leadership.'***

### **(Dwight D. Eisenhower)**

Rather, leadership is about working for people with people for the common good, for a common cause. Leaders encourage, they empower those with who they work. Great leaders create other leaders.

If they fail to do this, then this is what they risk:

***'It's a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead – and find no-one there'***

### **(Franklin D Roosevelt)**

Great leaders take their lead from those they purport to lead. Leaders effect change through influence, not coercion or manipulation. It's important to note that leadership status is conferred to you by others; it is not something that can be self proclaimed.

A significant part of the leadership literature focuses on what leaders do and how they do it. Usually this primarily concerned with achieving success in whatever field leaders are operating.

However I have been quite interested in what parts of the literature have to say about the personal qualities successful leaders seem to possess.

***‘There is no passion to be found playing small – in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living’***

**(Nelson Mandela)**

Nelson Mandela refers here to the importance of achieving one’s potential. To be an effective leader requires a form of personal modelling to others which has its starting point in one’s own commitment to being the best one can be. We should not be intimidated by personal achievement because it inspires others to do the same.

***‘It’s amazing how many cares disappear when you decide not to be something, but to be someone’***

**(Coco Chanel)**

I like this one because it values more who we are and might become as opposed to what we may be in title. People can become obsessed with the status attached to their title at the expense of neglecting personal development. A title in itself does not equate to leadership or automatically confer it.

The pressure to try and be something you’re not or to assume leadership without possessing or demonstrating the fundamental personal qualities that are the building blocks of leadership e.g. strength of character (such as principles, values, ethics) risks placing ourselves in positions where we become obsessed with the idea or notion of being a leader without having done the necessary personal work to develop the requisite leadership qualities.

The result is that we will fail to lead when we should because we lack the character and substance to lead others, especially when the going gets tough or things aren’t going smoothly. We run and hide instead

standing resolute and confronting the challenge. We avoid the responsibility.

Consider the following:

***‘The only job where you start at the top is digging a hole’***

**(Author unknown)**

***‘Leaders aren’t born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work. And that’s the price we’ll have to pay to achieve that goal, or any goal.’***

**(Vincent Lombardi)**

***‘The art of leadership is saying no, not yes. It is very easy to say yes’***

**(Tony Blair)**

Leadership is built on experience and resilience. It takes hard work to develop the necessary qualities and character to step up to the next level. One must ‘pay one’s dues’ through sacrifice and hard grind associated with achievement. Success does not happen overnight nor does leadership.

Leadership shines during times of adversity because that is when the courage to take an unpopular stance is most needed. Being honest and making tough decisions won’t always make you feel good. You can’t claim to be leader if you do nothing when the tough times arrive. Responsibility goes hand in hand with leadership.

In conclusion, leadership can be achieved by anyone – if they’re prepared to do the hard work over time. The so-called soft virtues – compassion, humility, courage, passion, wisdom, humour, integrity – are the backbone of successful leaders. Being a leader is a tremendous responsibility as people rely on you even when it’s not

always obvious. They watch you everyday in terms of what you say and how you say it and what you do. People will always listen to what others say about you behind your back. This is the pressure any leader has to manage.

You might think that you don't or can't make a difference in your work and feel dispirited. You might think that what you do in your work and your life is very important but goes mostly unnoticed.

But you do make a difference! And your work is noticed!

You make a difference in the world by being in it. You make a difference to all of those around you that you come into contact with – those who love you and those who work with you. This is perhaps the most important foundation for the inner strength you need as a leader – that you value yourself.

Our tasks as leaders is to transform our organisations by influencing and changing the way people think and behave across the organisation over time. It won't just happen because it's a good idea. Systems and structures have to change and people must be able to have their say in the change process.

And the time to act is now.

My final quote is this one and I think it's an appropriate one to finish on:

***'Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek'***

**(Barack Obama)**

Thank you and good evening.