A Legacy of Leadership: Anita Dorr and Maya Angelou

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The two leaders that will be discussed in this paper are Anita Dorr and Maya Angelou. The paper will explain how these two strong women have become an influential part of society. Both leaders come from different backgrounds, but they have prevailed against the norms set for them. By becoming the fathomable women of their time, these ladies were transparent and open in their life journey.

Description of a Leader

There is no such thing as born leaders, however, people can become leaders through acquired experience and influence. Merriam-Webster describes leadership as the “capacity to lead” whereas capacity is defined as “the facility or power to produce, perform, or deploy” (Capacity, n.d.; see also Leadership, n.d). To have the capacity to lead, an individual must have the required skills and qualities. For example, a leader must exude confidence and transfer that confidence to team members. By exhibiting confidence, team members can trust and accept the decision made for the group. Through delegation, leaders recognize how to share the responsibility of work and improve productivity. Leadership entails effectively communicating the vision to team members, inspiring trust, and focusing on challenges to improve the desired environment.

The desired environment could be identified as the workplace, organization, or the entire world. Each leader has a set of goals to achieve while upholding the standards that have been placed on them. The concept of leadership is complex but it is visible through multiple leadership styles (Blanken, 2013). Before explaining the different types of leadership, one must understand that leadership is separated into formal and informal leadership. A formal leader uses authority based on their position to assign duties within an organization's hierarchy (Ross, 2014).
For example, formal leaders can be a manager within a company or charge nurse on the floor. Informal leadership occurs when a person without formal authority or no position to hold power over those that choose to follow (Ross, 2014). For example, an informal leader can be the person that takes the lead in a group project on their own terms. Per Reddy & Jooste (2015), leadership is influencing oneself through self-direction and self-motivation which is necessary to allow an individual to perform in a desirable way. Understanding the difference might create a positive balance between leaders if each member acknowledges the foundation of their leadership styles.

Autocratic (also called directive, controlling, or authoritarian) leadership style is based on all decision-making decisions are centralized in the leader. An autocratic leader “gives orders and make decisions for the group” (Weiss & Tappen, 2015, p. 4). Suggestions and/or initiatives from subordinates are not entertained with autocratic leaders. Democratic (also called participative) favors decision- making made by the entire group. This promotes motivation and creates creativity in the group. A democratic promotes motivation by consulting the group before making decisions and seeks to persuade others to go with the best suggestion. Laissez-faire leadership (also called permissive, nondirective, or free rein style) leaves the group entirely to itself. Group members thrive with the little direction given because this can be motivational for people that want control (Weiss & Tappen, 2015). However, the lack of direction may interfere with deadlines towards the group goals.

Analysis of Non-Nurse Leader

American author, filmmaker, dancer, poet, and civil right activist Maya Angelou lived a life of faith, peace, and tolerance. Maya Angelou is a quintessential woman who wrote more than 20 books, wrote and recited a poem at a Presidential Inauguration ceremony, and directed film. She has done it all. In 1969, Maya Angelou wrote a memoir about her childhood and young adult
years, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Her story became the first nonfiction best-seller by an African American Woman ("Maya Angelou", 2018). There is a significant power in being the first recognized because people of all ages feel empowered. Her book exposed sexual abuse and racism challenges she faced as a young adult. Born in the Jim Crow era, she rose to become a woman who shared her life through her writing as well as stood up for what she believed in.

As a child, Maya did not speak for years but she found a way to inspire others with her voice and love of literature. Maya overcame each stone thrown in her path and accomplished more than anyone could imagine. As a civil right activist, Maya served as the northern coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1959 ("Maya Angelou", 2018). It took courage to step out against the rules of society by marching or speaking out of for social injustice. Maya participated in countless marches but never turned around when trouble came. Maya accepted consequences that might have resulted from her actions because she did not let fear rule her actions. By seizing her own destiny, Maya stood up for what she believed in which takes courage and faith.

A well-known quote of Maya's that many leaders may carry with them is, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel." This has been an inspirational quote for leaders all over the world; the quote inspires people to go below the superficial surface of others and enhances their ability to influence others through actions. Her democratic leadership approach influenced the decision-making process of how people treat one another. Maya Angelou strived on making people feel loved, needed, and respected. She lived through her simple words by making a better place for today.
Maya's light and positive thoughts in this world gave people the hope they needed to get past difficult times in their lives. Her legacy encourages people to face their trials and hardships just as she did. As a master storyteller, Maya wrote about the stories of women and men experiences around the world (Bavanasi, 2014). Her ability to stay strong and positive allowed her to be an amazing informal leader. No one selected her for a leadership role but she is recognized within society as one of the most influential people. Maya’s democratic leadership style shows through her books, poems, and with recognition.

**Analysis of a Nursing Leader**

Anita Dorr, RN worked in the Emergency Department (ED) at Edward J. Meyer Memorial Hospital in 1970 (now the Erie County Medical Center). Dorr established rules and expectations for her staff as the supervisor for the ED. For example, before a nurse could work in the ED the nurses would have to pay a two-dollars membership fee for Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) (Fadale, 2000). Dorr joined the Army Nurse Corps before supervising and she used her skills to maintain an organized unit in the ED. In order make the ED more efficient, Dorr founded the “first emergency nursing crisis cart, commonly known as the crash cart” in 1967 which reduced time gathering needed materials in emergency cases (Fadale, 2000). Dorr found resources to create a safe environment for co-workers, patients, and herself. Unfortunately, she was unable to patent her invention. Though Dorr was not able to patent the crash cart Ms. Dorr continued to make changes in the ED.

Anita Dorr, RN, FAEN and Judith Kelleher, RN founded the Emergency Department Nurses Association (EDNA), later renamed Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) (Fadale, 2000). Anita recognized the importance of continuing education especially in specialized areas of nursing. She found it essential to collaborate with pharmaceutical companies, professional
organizations, and universities giving lectures to increase the education of her nurses (Jezierski, 1996). ENA is a wonderful organization that provides networking and leadership to its members. Today ENA has more than 42,00 emergency nurses promoting safe practice (“Join ENA Today!”, n.d.).

Though Dorr has passed, one can imagine her ability to thrive on educating her staff, remaining cool-headed in emergencies, and welcoming challenges. Anita Dorr exhibited passion, care, and shared her vision and actions with others. Dorr was passionate about saving lives by encouraging education continuum for her nurses. Dorr used an autocratic leadership style by requesting that her nurses pay a membership for working on the unit. However, her actions showed that she cared about her staff and welcomed excellent patient outcome. Lastly, Anita Dorr shared her vision and actions with others through EN as the organization stands strong today.

**Comparison of Leaders**

Maya Angelou and Anita Dorr came from different backgrounds, both leaders were amazing at inspiring and motivating others. Each leader had a different profession, but they achieved a tremendous amount in their lifetime. Anita and Maya thrived on the importance of continuing education for themselves and others. Both leaders gained loyalty from their followers which attributed to their credibility. For example, by being the supervisor of the ED unit, Dorr leadership role was established but her co-workers were loyal to her through joining the ENA. Maya lead by example which inspired loyalty from others. Maya continued to achieve past the standards set by society. She accomplished a great deal before passing because society did not set her standards.
Similarly, to Maya Angelou, Anita Dorr did not stop her dreams after the crash cart did not get patented, she moved on to creating the ENA which is still operating today. Anita and Maya's authenticity lead them to become more approachable for people. By influencing an environment of trust and loyalty, people were willing to help them grow and advance their organization/goals. Lastly, these ladies did a fantastic job making people feel important and welcomed through their transparency. Bottom line -- these women focused on "we" instead of "I". They improved, influenced, and imprinted on society in more than ways than one.

Self-Analysis of Leadership Potential

The author strived to become more involved in her high school environment. Each year the author would become more involved in organizations. As a senior in high school, the author became the senior class president. She did not understand what leaders experienced until that moment because it was stressful. However, the author felt like she was the best candidate to make changes and unite her school. As the author finished up her senior year in high school, she felt drained and did not want to take up a leadership position again. After four years in college, the author plays the remarkable role of an informal team player. Though the author is no longer a president of an organization, she realizes that leaders are important for the development of young children and for people who need guidance in their life.

The author has been a peer mentor for the past three years. She guides her peers by assisting them in adjusting to a college environment, tutoring, and being available whenever her peers need her. By donating her time or helping build a new educational program in surrounding schools the author believes that it is important to give back to her community. She is willing to take the risk to be front and center of any cause; however, she is also great in the battlefields.
In nursing school, the author believes that her classmates and herself are leaders as they must step up to the plate each clinical shift and advocate for their patients. They recognize that they are leaders in their community. For example, they give weekly educational lessons that focus on maintaining cardiovascular disease, promoting nutrition, and understanding the significance of vaccinations for their community. The author is determined to continue her education because she is looking forward to making a change in her community. Per American Nurses Association (ANA), nurses implement strategies to advance the nursing profession to improve health by emphasizing prevention and coordination of care (Cipriano, 2016). The author must do her best so that for those who follow are better than her.

Throughout the author’s leadership journey, she gains and explores her leadership capabilities every day. Today, she has learned to listen to what her peers say even if she does not agree with their opinion. For example, group assignments have become the most irritating time for the author because everyone in the group wants to talk at the same time. However, it is important to communicate and have patience with one another to complete assigned tasks. As a leader, it is important to work effectively and have patience with team members so that no one is misunderstood. By being able to agree to disagree, the author has learned to consider group member’s ideas because they may be able to use the idea in the future.

Summary

Leaders inspire and empower people to achieve set goals established by an organization. Loyalty and trust allow for a transparent relationship to grow an organization. This creates a welcoming environment to develop skills and qualities for leaders. By influencing oneself to achieve more than what they could imagine, people establish their own qualities that help with leading others. As a leader, it is vital to foster and adapt qualities as environments change.
References


