

Reflections on the Roundtable on Leadership Education for Law Students  
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Dear Colleagues,

It has been my practice, often lost in the challenges of heavy schedules, to take time after a rich and provocative dialogue, to capture my reflections on what I heard and to note what thoughts it prompted in me. I wanted to do that on the heels of our Roundtable on Leadership Education for Law Students.

**Why is it important that we provide some form of leadership education for law students? What are the goals and outcomes we would hold as important for such education?**

That was the question that seemed most elusive at times during the roundtable. Yet I heard throughout the day a repeated set of goals and outcomes, that seemed to me, as a leadership educator, to be central to both leadership and the law. Michael Kelly touched this intersection directly during his panel presentation. The goals I personally noticed across the entire day were:

- 1) Sensitivity to context. The ability to see the broader frame of a particular piece of work, and the dynamic context in which that work or challenge is imbedded. The ability to read dynamic context, to see the complex dynamics in play. The ability to keep an awareness of peripheral developments that can become crucial to success. This seemed to be at the heart of the leadership challenge and the transformation at DLA Piper.
- 2) Sensitivity to culture. The ability to value and be comfortable in an unfamiliar culture. The ability to respect those unlike ourselves, to create welcome for them, and connection to them, so we can serve them well and so we can work with them productively. This seemed central to the story about the northern white law students challenged by finding themselves uncomfortable in the culture of the southern post-Katrina service work.
- 3) The ability to draw out the thinking and experience of the other. Often framed as interview skills, this is the capacity that our student panelist, Annette Hollowell said she gained from the oral history interview work that she had done.
- 4) Self-awareness. Consciousness of ones motivation, strengths, weaknesses, thought processes, emotions, impact on others. I believe that this capacity often gets drubbed out of high achieving, goal-oriented people, who find themselves moving from one challenging responsibility to another. The need for self-awareness among leaders was raised numerous times during our roundtable.
- 5) Emotional intelligence. The ability to “read” ones own emotional state, so we have access to the important data it brings us. Ability to read the emotional state of others, to experience empathy, to build connection to others. Self-regulation—being able to handle ones own strong emotions and still function effectively, professionally. It occurred to me that while it may well be true that the law profession scores low on emotional intelligence, I wonder if this (like self-awareness in item 4 above) is another native capacity that gets wrung out of people by the pressures/focus of law school and then law firms. If we can help students hold onto whatever capacity for emotional intelligence that they have upon entering school, show them that we value it, and even help them strengthen it, they may be miles ahead of their more senior colleagues who have not benefitted from that support of emotional intelligence capacities in earlier law school experiences.
- 6) The ability to listen effectively, fully and accurately. The capacity to set aside ones own need to talk and interject, and to listen fully, openly, and to be aware of the filter that one

brings to listening that may screen out certain information, and inaccurately amplify other information.

- 7) Envisioning. The ability to envision and articulate alternative paths, alternative possibilities, alternative futures—at an individual level, as well as on the organizational or societal level. This is a key dimension of the work at the University of Indiana Medical School that David Mossbarger described. Having heard the stories about what was most alive and powerful already in the system, what could they then envision as a future in which their goal of “relationship centered care” was a lived reality?
- 8) A personal sense of path, calling, vocation. This is the work of discernment, personally, that connects one with “What I want to do”, to use Kurt Schmoke’s language. What we want to “do with our lives” not what we want to be. For me, Bonnie Allen named that in my work in a way I’d not seen in a meeting we had on the 19<sup>th</sup>, when she said what I am doing is “capacity building”—that’s what I am called to “do” in whatever role I hold, wherever I find myself.
- 9) The ability to enlist others, to work with others toward a common goal, or simply to work with others through a baffling confusion. Team competency.
- 10) A sense of the right thing to do. In big dilemmas. In small dilemmas. In the moment. In the strategic plan. Everywhere. That sense of true north personally, organizationally and within our community and society.

### **How do we work with the diversity represented by our students?**

Even if we can see some important goals or outcomes, like these above, that stand as the reason for attending to leadership education for our law students, how do we work with the wide diversity of students who come to us, some experienced leaders, others not interested in leadership at all? Several questions then follow from this question about the diversity of our students.

For those students who come to us with a leadership and service orientation, and considerable experience leading, as well as a sense of calling toward leadership, to what extent does law school value that and enable those students to stay connected to that calling during their law school years? How might we better support them, so they don’t experience law school as implicitly requiring that they set aside the leadership part of themselves? What about their law school years can better strengthen their existing capacities as leaders, for times when they will serve in singular leadership roles as well as times when they are part of a collective effort to move things forward constructively.

For those students who come to the study of law without a leadership orientation, how might we better introduce the practical and legal value of that orientation/skill-set so that they emerge from law school more likely to step into leadership roles, in their firms, in their communities, in their nation. And to do so with some experience, and conceptual frames, that allow them to lead with some confidence and competence?

### **What is the structure of a program that could serve all our students, as diverse as they are?**

This evident diversity among our students points us, I believe, toward the need for a particular structure of program which I would advocate. Its foundational element would be a core intellectual leadership framework/philosophy (not necessarily anchored by a single required course, although it could be) reflected in a range of leadership experiences resonant with that philosophy, thus allowing for student

choice (and leadership education fitted to the student's knowledge/background/skills), and for growth in leadership capacity no matter what the "raw material" the students brings to us.

And my own instincts, coming from a fairly populist background, are to pursue this work in law schools by identifying existing capacities and structures for moving leadership work forward within the law school experience, rather than assuming that we need to create something from whole cloth, that does not exist. That is not to say that all that might be done is currently being done, even if existing structures and processes are in place. Nor is it to say that we might create an innovation that doesn't exist today. But rather it says, that already existing are resources and innovations that can be encouraged, and further grown, to move toward what we hope to achieve. In that sense we enter this process much as the Indiana Medical School did (and to some extent as Dean Polden at Santa Clara has) by identifying resources already in place that could be tapped for this effort. And by being willing to experiment from that base.

That process, known by the technical leadership term, "Appreciative Inquiry" means that we begin innovation by thoughtful interviews among those who are drawn to this work, about the extent to which they see the "desired state" already, in the case of our work the desired state would be something like "gifted leadership among lawyers and law students" in this law school. The appreciative inquiry process identifies natural allies, and resources, and also points us away from deficit thinking and toward asset thinking—a critical leadership orientation. This is the process that was at the heart of the transformation of the Indiana University Medical School over a period of more than 5 years.

After collecting the "stories" of legal leadership embodied, a next important question for the legal academy, or for any particular law school, might be where can we identify existing structures, mechanisms, portions of the law school experience which could include more of the dimensions listed in 1-10 above, whether called leadership education or called by other names? For instance, could clinic include greater explicit consideration of cultural competence? Could orientation include greater explicit attention to identifying ones "calling" to law and ones gifts for leadership?

A next question which seems natural is, who at the Law School is drawn to this set of leadership-related dimensions, and how could they include more of various of these dimensions in work they already do? That theme emerged several times in the roundtable.

Then we might ask where there are additional energies and partners that can be engaged in this effort, already interested and committed (including perhaps in the case of the University of Maryland School of Law, the Academy of Leadership, the many supporters of the school in the field of law, who were in the room for the roundtable on February 19th) who would like to be engaged in the work of strengthening leadership education for law students?

And finally we need to ask ourselves, what is our point of view about leadership? Our theory or framework of leadership in the field of law? Or said in another way, a critical element, from my point of view, is for the law school to begin to shape an intellectually rigorous, thoughtful, leadership framework that serves as an umbrella over all the leadership work, a way to understand the pieces. We can see examples of such frameworks: the approach at Santa Clara, as sketched by Dean Polden and built upon the work of the Santa Clara's Business school Dean Barry Posner well known for his leadership research and writing; the framework at MIT, which represents the work over several years of four colleagues including Deborah Ancona and Peter Senge reflected in the article "In Praise of the Incomplete Leader"; the notions in Sharon Parks' book, *Leadership can be Taught* that focuses on the work of Ron Heifetz at

the Kennedy School at Harvard, and the notions of transformational leadership at the heart of the work of the James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership. But whatever the framework, it should bear the stamp of the school and its leadership partners, and should represent a leadership perspective that is solid, supported by experience/research, fits the unique nature of the law school itself, and is completely understood and embraced by the team shaping/leading the leadership work, as well as acceptable to the rest of the faculty. The shaping of this framework will take some time, but articulating it is central to the sustained coherence of the leadership program. Beyond the theoretical and conceptual framework, it requires beginning with where people are, and the values they hold, and uncovering/creating a natural and authentic common language, which allows them to hold onto these ideas, ideals, insights.

And finally, let me say that I was struck by the resonance of the challenge in law with that I've experienced with other "super smart" work cultures (high powered consulting firms, the intelligence community, scientific organizations, medical institutions) all of which have a work culture where skepticism is the order of the day. And in those cultures, here are some practices and approaches that I use which I think are most likely to meet people where they are, and to engage them in a fruitful way. I have listed some of them below, as possible "experiments" to imbed in existing structures or processes at the law school.

**Reflective activities that help students maintain a sense of purpose and perspective, as well as a personal commitment to leadership:**

Attention, by all, students and faculty alike, to leadership turning points, like that which Martha Bergmark described, when her teacher saw her as a leader, and ordered her to get in line or get out of her class. And Martha chose "out". Warren Bennis calls such moments "crucibles of leadership" and points us to the importance of being aware of these crucibles in our own development as leaders. This is part of the increasing self-awareness of becoming conscious of our own wisdom about leadership and how it has been shaped. We can foster this self-awareness through many educational formats: Journal, group work, retreats. But whatever the format, the goal is to foster awareness of ones individual story, the way in which we realized and acted on our own urge to take things in a constructive direction— leadership. And to deepen our appreciation, respect and valuing of those whose stories are different from ours by sharing those stories, so that individual students, faculty and mentors, as well as other members of the law school community are aware of them.

Additionally, work to maintain ongoing perspective on ones work. A practice that works well is to ask people to write, and then share the story of what has brought them to where they are in their work and their life. This can take the form of interviews among the students. Journal work. The practice of maintaining and increasing perspective on our own lives, on our sense of purpose and calling, on our service. This quality of question is at the heart of the way we interact and learn from each other.

**Retreats interspersed through the course of professional education that provide specific dimensions of leadership education.**

Many graduate professional programs that wish to have a great sense of connection among the students, and also attend to their ongoing leadership development, provide some form of opening retreat, often a mid-way retreat, and a final closing retreat. Such a retreat structure can have imbedded in it a full leadership course for credit or not, and certainly it provides a vehicle for making clear the intellectual framework—even when it is in its development phase. Retreats also provide space for

experiential work, group process training etc. A chance to work in teams. Attention to team leadership and collective leadership.

**Skillfully structured processes for authentic connection between students and professionals active in the field:**

Many threads of our Roundtable hinted at the need for skillful and meaningful interaction between students and professionals active in the field. Maria Roeper's words captured it best for me: I need support. I believe this means beyond the usual networking activities where people exchange business cards, to deeper and more interesting sustained conversations across generations in the profession.

It is in this vein that I want to share an innovation for learning, support, and mentoring created for seasoned leaders and younger leaders in another field that might serve us here. In an effort to bring younger leaders and highly placed leaders in a profession together over conversations worth having, we created a series of "Leader's in Residence" lunches/dinners. (The logistical requirements are simple: a buffet lunch or dinner, a number of leaders and roughly three times as many students, and small round or square dining tables with space for four. ) The format is simple--1 leader, 3 students around a small table. Focused on first one, and then another question that really draws people's attention and invites sharing of their professional/personal self. Here are some examples of questions which the leader explores in terms of his/her own experience, and then open to conversation with the students: When did you first realize that you were a leader? Who supported you in that view of yourself? What has been your most significant leadership crucible? What's been your biggest mistake and what have you learned from it? What have you learned from a particularly difficult ethical dilemma that you faced? When in your life has your leadership come not from role, but from leading informally? The leader hosts his/her little table throughout the process. The students, with table assignments in advance, explore one question with one leader (for 20 minutes to half an hour) and then disperse to three different tables, and a different question. Three or 4 questions can be explored at one event. This format is also a way to begin to discern particularly powerful and natural mentor pairings and processes. What has been remarkable to us is not only how inspired the students are from this experience, and what a sense of connection they develop with the leaders, but that the leaders come away refreshed, hopeful, and feeling much more connected to the next generation in the profession.

**Enough for now; on to the full report.**

It's been a pleasure to muse over these reflections over the past several days since our roundtable. I look forward to being part of the shaping of the final report, but I also hope that these reflections, in and of themselves, will be of service, and invite others to share their reflections on our time together.

With appreciation,  
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