

Leadership Crisis in America

VA hospitals neglecting our veterans, a poorly rated public education system, unaffordable health care, and corporate corruption running amok have all been in the news. What's going on here? What do all of these have in common?

“Inadequate leadership” is the answer.

Steven Covey, in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, mentioned the discovery of an interesting phenomenon when he reviewed success literature written during the last 200 years. The success literature of the past 50 years emphasized the importance of personality and skill development. The literature of over 50 years ago by writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and others, emphasized character and inner development.

What happens if we do not build a strong foundation through inner development? We have witnessed charismatic politicians, ministers, athletes, and others with tremendous communication and interpersonal skills who ended up in disgrace and/or prison. What was missing? The foundation. It was either missing or unstable. Character is the foundation upon which we must build skills, techniques, and strategies for effectiveness which can withstand the test of time and temptation. Without strong character the likelihood is that our skills will be misused and improperly channeled, which may be damaging to us and others.

Competent leaders with character and integrity who lead by example are needed. We need principled leaders who genuinely care about the welfare of others. Where is the great leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Mahatma Gandhi? We need leaders of this caliber.

The good news is that we can develop successful leaders. We can achieve this by examining great leaders and systems that are producing results. Then we can create and use models of what is working. This is an effective way to address the problem.

Schools are one place where we can start developing future leaders. Our schools need to teach character education and create a climate where kids strive for excellence and learn to care about others.

Are there examples of such schools? Fortunately there are many. For example, kids from the poorest neighborhoods who go to KIPP charter schools, who are on the average two grades behind when they start, are outscoring students from excellent schools on standardized tests. The students develop character traits and work in a spirit of cooperation to help each other succeed. The teachers are excellent leaders whose dedication inspires students to bring out their best.

True leaders are torch bearers who nurture the seeds of greatness in their followers. Helping others to unfold their potential is education and leadership at its best. Developing more of these types of leaders is a solution to the leadership crisis.

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