

Excerpts from

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP FOR RURAL AMERICA

by

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What a title! What a challenge! "Developing Leadership For Rural America" could just as well read: "How To Save The Nation." Depending on perspective, the banner could also be, "Influencing The Insignificant." Adlai Stevenson once said, "I can hardly wait to hear what I have to say." Tag that on to the fact that the very last speaking slot on a very long agenda is like a cavernous pothole in the highway of a conference and we have a formidable task facing us.

I say "we" because by no means am I going to do this alone. The title of your conference swallowed me up as well but rather than get lost in the semantics of "Information And Rural Economic Development: Infrastructure," let's just consider this summer construction on our reality highways. Penn DOT (the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation) caution horses are up and I'm holding the sign that says "SLOW" while working on my tan.

What is leadership? Do you know it when you see it? Are the candidates for president of this nation capable of effective leadership? And finally, what of rural leadership? What I'd like to do in this next hour or so, is come up with some working definitions, share some thoughts on leadership and outline what's available for rural areas in leadership development.

In the words of the great theologian and philosopher...Joe Paterno...
"The whole thing is a partnership."

(Ed. note: due to the interactive nature of Ms. Dunbar's closing remarks, we are unable to reprint her presentation in full.)

Manz and Sims interviewed Paterno in a book called *Super Leadership* and Paterno debunked myths and set high standards. He recognizes that the old authoritarian approach of a leader is out of touch with contemporary times.

You just can't tell a kid today that he has to do something blindly. He wants to know why and he's entitled to know. An athlete will no longer buy this business that they'll do something just because you have a 'coach' in front of your name.

He acknowledges that another critical ingredient is setting a proper example, "People accept you as a coach [leader] if they know you're working as hard as they're working... and you're not relying on [titles] such as coach [leader] to get the job done for you." He says you have to be as demanding of yourself as you do of others and you have to **convince others**, not by demanding, but by instruction or example.

This includes sincerity and trust: "Whether a coach or a father [or a leader], being a hypocrite...being a phony...literally destroys the relationship."

Positive patterns of thinking – enhancing self-esteem – are an important part of the equation. Paterno emphasizes, "You must be able to develop three things in an athlete: pride, poise and confidence in himself." (Or herself, JoePa!)

Inspiration is next in Paterno's goal-oriented philosophy. "Set high goals...think big...then make sure and aspire to the highest goals you can achieve." Or, as Browning said, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

Risk-taking is also part of the Paterno leadership philosophy. "You can't be afraid to lose," he says. "That's part of the problem we have in this country sometimes. We're not innovative enough because we're afraid to take the chance."

"If there is success," he continued, "that's the time to give it to other people. If there's a failure, you've got to be ready to take the blame."

The basis of *Super Leadership* refers to the "leadership as partnership" Paterno theory. "Leading others to lead themselves is the key to tapping the

intelligence, the spirit, the creativity, the commitment, and most of all, the tremendous unique potential of each individual."

IDENTIFYING LEADERSHIP

There's a hero in our midst. [*sic*...Daryl Heasley] Not a super-hero; not as celebrated as Garth Brooks or Ross Perot. But a leader due to his ability to lead others.

He follows the concept of leading without a leash. And for five years, he has been leading me as I cavort out ahead of him, sniffing the bushes and lifting my leg, discovering making mistakes, and leaving behind my scent.

Heasley, Daryl K..."Leadership is a process - it is dynamic. It is influence exerted by each of you to an agreed upon goal. It is coordinating group action toward that goal meaningfully and satisfying for the person(s) involved."

Now that I've cribbed his definition for leadership, let's see if I can capitalize on his research into "rural." In the movie, *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal's wife sends him out of a metropolitan environment, to a rural area. She says, "Go find your smile somewhere."

So, rural areas may not have all the resources of urban communities but we are rife with smiles. And people come to rural areas on a quest for elusive laughter..for happiness and calm they can't seem to find in the city.

To wit, Daryl's definition is that rural is not urban. It is also identified by:

1. density of population
2. occupational difference
3. geographic qualities or isolation from "urban"
4. differences in values or beliefs
5. less access to community facilities and services; when those available tend to be more costly (money, time to access, etc.) and of lesser quality

OR... "You know you're in a small town when you're run off Main Street by a combine."

Daryl's abbreviated definition of leadership is, "the ability to mobilize and activate resources towards a goal."

He had developed a laundry list of characteristics of rural leaders:

1. Commitment to a continuing leadership role+lifestyle.
2. Development of a capacity to understand the need for tasking RISK.
3. Development of professionalism.
4. Development of an analytical, objective, inquiring mind.
5. Development of an ability and desire to engage in team building.
6. Development of the ability to work with varying views and yet be able to mobilize these views into action.
7. Development of an openness to increase knowledge, aspirations, and be accepting of varying attitudes.
8. Growth in individual and group leadership skills and ability.
9. Growth in the process of problem-solving public issues.
10. Development in the ability to communicate.
11. Development of an adaptive and flexible approach to leadership and problem solving in order to meet the varying circumstances on encounters.
12. Development of a desire to get beyond self.
13. Development of personal, group/organization, and community goals.
14. Development of a curious mind+a visionary outlook.
15. Development and maintenance of creative tension.
16. Development of a sense of humor.
17. Development of a time for reflection+for broadening.
18. Development of a set of ethics—continually demonstrated—by a rural leader.

- ♦ Know yourself—are you concerned with the power of love or the love of power? There is a tremendous difference!
 - ♦ Don't procrastinate.
 - ♦ Don't expect only behavior from others or from yourself that you feel is "correct."
 - ♦ Be assertive.
19. Development of patience.
20. Development of a capacity to LOVE. Of affection.

The listing of "Daryl's 20" is not meant to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive, but a starter listing for your thinking. Alter the list in order to make it work for you, your family, your groups/organizations, and for your community.

I am unable to attribute a source to this next quote but I feel it is particularly insightful: "If you wish to be a leader, you will be frustrated because nobody wants to be lead. Only when you wish to be a servant will you be a leader."

In *The Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner, the following struck me as provocative.

Leadership is not a place, it is a process. It involves skills and abilities that are useful whether one is on the executive suite or on the front line...Leadership is disciplined passion.

Larry Niven said that, "Everything starts with somebody's daydream." Look to the person beside you as a messiah of rural America and the person inside of you as the Savior to apathy. People are only using a fraction of the potential within them. When I stand in front of each RULE class, it sucks the breath right out of me, I am in such awe. I liken it to falling into a pot of gold—with a disparate mix of precious stones.

Some are diamonds in the rough, just lacking a bit of polish. Others are gemstones—as true blue as summer sky or as radiant red as a ruby—a kaleidoscope of colors in this pot of potential leadership gold. So, tread lightly in your communities. You're in the presence of precious metal.

And metal is malleable though you must take care not to weaken it.

Your keynote speaker this morning, David Wright, is an orator I much admire. At first, I despaired that I would follow him on the agenda. It's like running the Preakness, lame, behind Secretariat. He once left me with this caveat. "All this leadership stuff is okay. Just don't drink the Kool-Aid."