

Leadership and Education Convocation

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Leadership and Education

Leadership
Coronation Nov. 3, 1949

When I was honored by your invitation to participate in this program, I quickly repaired to the University Library - seeking enlightenment from sages who have pondered the subject of leadership - there to discover what psychologists, sociologists or historians might have thought concerning the composite intangible known to us under the label of leadership. From an educational psychologist, I obtained a particularly penetrating summary. I will call the author Professor X. I quote:

"....Professor X presents statistical data which indicates that height and weight of executive leaders increase with the importance of the position held. He obtained data on age, age at marriage, number of children, number of children of father and grandfather, height and weight of 48 vocations ranging from that of railroad president to bankrupt. He found that the height of the executive leader was 71.4 inches, that of lesser executives 69.3 inches and of insurance policy holders 68.5 inches. Executive leaders weighed 181.1 pounds and lesser executives 161 pounds. The data also reveals that bishops are fatter and heavier than clergymen in smaller towns, that city school superintendents are taller and heavier than principals ~~in~~ small towns; that university presidents are taller and heavier than presidents of very small colleges" -

After considering the foregoing while measuring in my mind's eye the weight and height of the distinguished President of our own University, I threw the book away, decided to disregard the experts and resolved to be strictly on my own. But curiosity overcame me - surely there must be scientific repudiation of this avoirdupois theory of leadership. What of the feminine leaders? Must co-eds aspiring to leadership seek to become Amazons of ever-increasing girth? I met another authority who concluded that personality is the more important factor. Elucidating, he brilliantly observes:

"...personality is an elusive term and is classified under two heads, physical and social. This is based on data from student leaders in colleges and universities; information was tabulated on height, weight, voice, complexion and color of hair." Conclusions?

“ 1. That personality in the collegiate sense (whatever that may be) has little to do with stature.

2. That such leadership is not due to a large dominant figure;

3. That personality, viewed as the adjustment tendencies of the individual to his social environment, is one of the characteristics of leadership and may be built. ”

What deductions ^{could a simple lawyer} ~~of my own did~~ draw from the foregoing? Well, being somewhat obfuscated, I decided that, on the evidence at hand, it would be unwise upon this occasion to advise those who aspire to leadership to grow taller, to get fatter or to cultivate their personalities. That I positively refuse to do. If you choose that route, you do it on your own responsibility. So, again, I am on my own.

The levity of these introductory remarks belies the seriousness of the few thoughts I would express here this morning. We gather to honor a group of student leaders who, by their achievements, have distinguished themselves among their fellows. Congratulations are due to each honoree. Fitting it is that high recognition be accorded to student leadership.. Responsibilities shouldered by student leaders in the formative period of University life can be made useful as an experience, a prelude, and as a guide in approaching ~~the~~ broader spheres of responsibility. Our age faces problems and decisions of catastrophic proportions. Never has it been more correct to assert, that the need of the age is for leaders in all walks of life; for leaders in science, religion, education, in public affairs, in the professional callings, in every vocation; for leaders at every level in

international, national, state and community affairs. This audience is largely composed of such potential leaders - for leadership is inevitably the responsibility of men and women who, with the advantages of education, acquire the skills to influence others. If this be so, it may not be impertinent to ask on this occasion: Are you years at this University qualifying you intelligently to assume the responsibilities of leadership which will follow the advantages that have been yours? Are you as a student group wisely developing your full share of the qualities of mind and of character to enable you, in keeping with your talents, to contribute to society's increasing demand for leaders, more leaders?

These inquiries need not be relegated to their usual place at commencement exercises. If raised now, there is unlimited opportunity for you seriously, systematically, with vision and self-discipline and with determination, to add cubit upon cubit to your capacities for leadership. At this University, you seek an education. If successful, in that quest, your qualities of leadership should grow as a by-product in proportion to the quality with which you achieve the main objective. A distinguished University dean recently observed "...education is the most effective means yet discovered to develop God-given talents of leadership. Leaders arise by many means. But without nurturing education, the wastage is higher than we can afford."

Our society can ill afford wastage in the process of the development of its leaders. Our time may be running out. Other civilizations have perished from the face of the earth. The very preservation of the ideals and human values our civilization holds dear dictates that we get on more quickly with the task of education for leadership. Ability to perpetuate our ideology of democracy with its freedoms as we know and enjoy them will be in direct proportion to the quality of leadership emerging in our society. This is a challenge to educators

and to education, but it is the student's challenge as well.

Education is the most likely pathway to leadership but unfortunately education may become merely a label of academic currency lending itself to devaluation quite as easily, but more imperceptibly, than its monetary counterpart. If you aspire to leadership through education it is the part of wisdom to insure that no devaluation is allowed to occur as applied to your own individual program at this University.

University students, incipient leaders of the future, would do well to keep certain fundamentals before them.

First, as to education - the best possible training for leadership, the training which will be truly effective, is training to think. Your courses are successful if, in addition to acquiring information, you enhance the ability to think, the capacity for reasoned judgment. On this campus, there are not only course programs focused at this objective but also a faculty eager to furnish guidance and assistance. May I be bold enough then to suggest additional inquiries at this point? Am I ^a student in my quest for an educated mind fully utilizing such opportunities as this University affords for the development and the stimulation of my intellect? Am I developing a broad intellectual curiosity? Am I alive to what is going on in the one world around me? What books have I read beyond the minimum course requirements? What keener insight am I obtaining into the burning contemporary issues in international and domestic affairs? Am I, as an individual, developing the capacity to reason clearly and to think intelligently about the complex problems of our modern society? Just how far beyond an average standard of competence in the laboratory or classroom does my intellectual curiosity really go?

I am certain that many L.S.U. students would gain more than a passing grade upon such a self-examination. But one of the unfortunate results of mass higher education is that on every college campus there are

those who cannot pass such a test. There are those who go to and through college without ever developing the power to think. There are those who are content with the desultory accumulation of a miscellaneous mass of factual information through the process of frantically taking notes of material which passes through the mind as a sieve becoming empty again after it has been handed back to the instructor on examination.

Achievement which does not rise above this level hardly merits the name of education. Assiduously cultivate your minds, broaden the horizon of your thoughts, develop your intellectual capacity in keeping with your talents; learn to think; keep academic devaluation out of your programs. You owe it to yourselves and to society which expects you to emerge as intelligent leaders.

Secondly, it is obvious that cultivation of the mind, standing alone, will not suffice. The educated leader needs a sense of values. He needs the spiritual strength which accompanies moral character and which, if nurtured, flows from the fact that man is created like unto God Himself. This aspect of education for leadership must never be overlooked. The kind of leadership needed at every level and in every calling in the world today is closely bound to good morals. It must be motivated by a sense of responsibility and a desire to be of service to one's fellow men.

With attributes of mind and of character obtained and strengthened through higher education - the student becomes not ~~only~~^{merely} the competent specialist needed in our more and more specialized civilization, he becomes more than a chemist, a lawyer, a doctor, a writer, a teacher, an agriculturist, he becomes a man or woman with the capacity to lead in community, state and national life.

As leaders, you will soon have need for attributes related to moral character if you are successfully to influence others. For instance, the

leader will need reserves of courage. It is often his task and fate to go his way alone, disregarding and overcoming opposition. Only the upright, independent and courageous leader truly leads. This thought was well expressed in the stanza:

I honor the man who is ready to sink
Half his present repute for the freedom to think
And when he has thought ~~for~~ ^{he his} cause strong or weak
Will sink the other half ~~for~~ ^{for} the freedom to speak
Caring little what vengeance the mob has in store
Let that not be the upper ten thousand or lower

That kind of courage the effective leader must constantly have at his command. Then, there is the self-discipline exacted of our leaders. This also has its proving ground in the period of education for leadership. At L.S.U., for example, we may draw a sharp contrast between our student life as it exists today amid the numerous distractions, and the ready-provided study discipline at this institution in the initial year of its operation some 89 years ago. General Sherman, to insure the accomplishment of the objective that his 70 charges should become "thoroughly scientific and literary gentlemen" introduced certain regulations at the Old War Skule. First year students ^{were} required to promise they would not marry while a student, promise they would not incur debts, and promise they would not receive spending money from home. The University routine of those days was described by him:

"...three or four students are in a room, all have their beds, which they make up on the floor; at daylight they make their beds; roll them up and strap them. They then sweep out their rooms, and study their lessons until breakfast at 7 o'clock; then they ^{begin} (commence) to recite and continue reciting until 4 p.m. when they are drilled for an hour. At sundown they get supper and study their lessons till 11 o'clock when all go to bed and sleep till daylight." Such measures, said Sherman, were necessary because 100 young men in the University dormitory under a "civil government" as distinguished from such military discipline would "tear it down and make all study impossible."

No one would advocate that kind of academic discipline for Tiger Arms or

East and West Dormitories, but with the freedom a University student now enjoys - he must develop a compensating self-discipline to the end that his time be soundly budgeted and wisely spent. He must become the well-balanced student rendering unto ~~education~~^{recreation} and extra-curricular activities a desirable proportion of his budgeted time, but choosing wisely from the myriad of activities that are open to him. Activities of leadership reflected in your various student organizations, such activities as we recognize here today, have their value as complementary to the work of the classroom and laboratory. They contribute to an understanding of the art of effective living together in a democratic society; these activities can develop sound ethical and cultural standards in social relationships and provide an opportunity for service, recreation and continuing growth. But, if the pendulum should swing too far cutting across a student's main purpose of education for leadership, then must the student call on his virtues of self-discipline as ~~the~~ the guarantor of success in his main purpose.

In the ninety years of its history, Louisiana State University, has been a proving ground for leadership. It has been privileged to serve a steady stream of eager young minds. Through its portals they have passed as they have gone forth to supply leadership in varied vocations and professional callings for our State, Region and Nation. The demand for the maintenance of the leadership tradition at increasingly higher levels ~~was~~^{was} never greater than ~~today~~^{it is} today.

As I survey this audience of students, beneficiaries of educational advantages placing in your hands the potential palms of leadership, I am confident that what is expected will emerge; that you will not fail in the development of your minds and that you also will go forth with all the virtues of moral excellence exacted of educated men and women - the leaders upon whom our society will depend. Of L.S.U. men and women no less can be demanded.