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College Writing Seminar

October 5, 2022

Characteristics of a Leader

“I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way”(Popova). The ability to trust oneself is an important characteristic that makes great leaders. Being a great leader can also mean having a great scientific attitude. Having the ability to look at empirical evidence and being willing to change one's theories is important to having a good scientific attitude. I personally have and still use these qualities by applying them to my swimming career.

An important characteristic that leaders have is their ability to trust themselves. In Deresiewicz speech to the plebe class at West Point, he often cited notable military works and figures who demonstrated working in solitude. General David Patreus was cited as being an individual who stuck to their beliefs such as when he was developing strategies for counterinsurgency. “He was put in charge of training the Iraqi army, which was considered a blow to his career, a dead-end job. But he stuck to his guns, and ultimately he was vindicated”(Deresiewicz). Despite the backlash against him, Patreus demonstrated the value that holding onto your beliefs has. It's important for a leader to be able to trust themselves as they are often influenced by others in their decision making. “It is harder because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it,” but “ in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude”(Popova). A good leader is able to make their own decisions without being heavily influenced by the crowd they are involved in. General David Patreus followed this idea as he made the best decision he thought possible despite what his superiors believed was better.

Being a great leader is important for having a good scientific attitude. One of the most important characteristics for being a good leader and scientist is the willingness to change theories in light of new evidence. Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis is a great example of changing one's own theories in light of new evidence. He performed multiple experiments in order to figure out

what was causing childbed fever. With each experiment, “Not only did Semmelweis change his hypothesis each time one was refuted, he enlarged it when new information came to light,” (McIntyre 54). A scientist with a good scientific attitude needs to be able to trust their empirical evidence and willingly change their theories. Semmelweis is very similar to General David Patreus as his ideas were resisted during the time only to be vindicated later. “They were insulted by the idea that gentlemen could be seen as somehow unclean,” (McIntyre 55). Because of their own collective biases, the medical community was unwilling to accept the possibility that cadaveric matter was responsible for causing more sickness in hospitals.

In some way, these characteristics of leadership have applied to my own swimming career. The general sport of swimming is mostly seen as an individual sport as you are often competing against athletes on your own team. However, by taking leadership aspects such as trusting yourself and being willing to change your theories based on new evidence, it can be applied to the sport on an individual level. I can remember using aspects of leadership during one of my races in swimming for the 500 yard freestyle.

During one of my highschool swim meets, I was signed up to swim the 500 yard freestyle. The 500 freestyle is the longest swimming event that can be held at a highschool meet. Because of this, many swimmers don’t tend to volunteer for this event. Compared to other events in swimming, long distance events have more strategy to racing them. With shorter swimming events, the approach to swim them typically requires you to swim very quickly through the entire duration. However with longer events, your approach to swimming can be different as you can choose when to focus on speeding up in order to carefully pace yourself in a race. For my 500 freestyle, I typically tried to focus on just keeping a moderate pace. In swim practice though, I found that I tend to swim the back half better than I did swimming the front half of a race. I decided to talk to my coaches about focusing on the back half of the race. However, my coaches thought it would be better if I tried to swim the race as I typically did. Highschool swim meets compared to other swim meets that I usually swam for my club team however were not as important so I decided that I should try my new strategy instead. When I began my race I mostly kept a moderate pace in the race until I was halfway through it. Once I was past half of the race, I began to speed up. When I finished the race, I got a new personal best.

In my race, I used those leadership qualities in order to improve in my race. One of the qualities I used in the race was changing my “theory” or strategy on how I approached my race

based on what I saw in practice. Because I was willing to change my strategy, I was able to swim my race more efficiently. I used the trust in myself to swim the race the way I thought it should be raced despite what my coaches thought. Because the meet was less important compared to other swim meets, I was able to experiment with my race to improve it.

References:

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