

Leadership Qualities

On How Solitude Creates Leaders, and how I Wish to be a Leader in the Future

Leadership is something that necessitates many different qualities to be effective at. Courage, kindness, a willingness to hear other people out—all these things are important for a leader to have. However, one thing people tend to look over when describing leadership is a willingness to think for yourself—having vision. To think for yourself means to be able to come up with ideas that are solely your own, and to have the courage to act on them. To think for yourself means spending a lot of time away from others, as spending time with others puts the ideas of others in your head. In other words, to be able to concentrate, think for yourself, and create truly unique ideas, you require solitude.

In a 2009 speech to students at West Point Academy, the most prestigious military academy in America, author and literary critic William Deresiewicz spoke about exactly this. As he says in his speech, “what makes him a thinker—and a leader—is precisely that he is able to think things through for himself. And because he can, he has the confidence, the courage, to argue for his ideas even when they aren’t popular. Even when they don’t please his superiors” (Deresiewicz, 6). Deresiewicz in his speech also brings up how today, the people we elect as leaders seem to be missing this aspect of leadership: “for too long we have been training leaders who only know how to keep the routine going. Who can answer questions, but don’t know how to ask them... What we don’t have are leaders. What we don’t have, in other words, are thinkers” (Deresiewicz, 5). Because of this, bad decisions are made. He brings up the first four years of the Iraq war, stalemated because the higher-ups could not think to do anything but maintain the status quo. A good leader does not simply do as they are told—that is the hallmark of a good subordinate. They instead will create something they can truly call their own.

Now, how one reaches that point is interesting, and something Deresiewicz also touches on. Because the only way to find ideas truly unique to yourself is to find them inside yourself. Deresiewicz explains: “Your own reality—for yourself, not for others.” Thinking for yourself means finding yourself, finding your own reality... Leadership means finding a new direction, not simply putting yourself at the front of the herd that’s heading toward the cliff” (Deresiewicz, 9). When Deresiewicz talks of “the herd”, he means things like social media, the internet, and others like that. Finding a truly unique idea is hard, simply because we, as social creatures, get a lot of our ideas from other people, all the time. It’s a subconscious thing that humans do constantly. To find an idea untouched by the thoughts of others requires a great deal of concentration—and solitude. Deresiewicz says the same thing when he claims that “Marlow (from *Heart of Darkness*) believes in the need to find yourself just as much as anyone does, and the way to do it, he says, is work, solitary work. Concentration” (Deresiewicz, 9). The best way to find an idea unique to yourself is through solitude.

Deresiewicz’s comment about “finding your own reality” resonates with me personally because that is something I wish to do in the future. I think of myself as an aspiring game developer, and the parts of games that I love the most are the worlds they take place in. I love how detailed and immersive and lifelike the worlds of video games can be, which is why I want to make my own. For example, games like *League of Legends* and *Splatoon* contain tons of lore scattered in various places other than the games, from artbooks to stories on websites to other games. But doing that requires many, many ideas—and as Deresiewicz says, the best way to

find those ideas is through solitude. In a way, worldbuilding is a form of leadership, as it requires knowledge, thought, ideas, and a willingness to think for yourself. Thus, all the qualities of leadership are required to make the worldbuilding process smooth and easy. Solitude may sound like a scary, lonely word, but it's the opportunity to be alone with one's own thoughts that makes solitude enticing—and necessary to become a truly excellent leader.