LEAD3030 – Leadership Development

Journal Four – Table of Contents

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# A – Federalist #10

There was a little bit of confusion in the definitions of the words democracy vs republic. It’s probably because we English speakers tend to misuse the word ‘democracy’. We tend to call a government ‘democratic’ when what we really mean is ‘republic’.

The definition of democracy that I’m familiar with is one where the people vote on every single decision no matter how small or irrelevant. Should we raise the user fees for some obscure phone line? Vote on it. Should we lower import taxes on widgets from Pacific island nations? Vote on it. This is obviously an unmaintainable and costly mess that can’t scale past the city states that the system originated in.

Instead what modern democracy has turned into is what Madison would have called a republic. We elect officials that we generally agree with to make decisions for us. It has the downside of turning a lot of power over to a small number of people. The upside is that the entire population isn’t constantly involved in voting.

# A – Dealing with Resistance to Change

I once read somewhere that smart people are more likely to make decisions based on bad reasoning. It sounds ridiculous at first, but the reason that was given for the claim is that smart people are better at rationalizing bad decisions. In other words: the smarter a person is, the better that person will be at making excuses for going with an emotional choice.

I’ve seen this happen before too. I’ve known some very smart people who consistently made terrible decisions. I’ll give them fake names, Tom and Jerry. Their decision process was often to go with their first instinct then stubbornly rationalize away any reasons that others would disagree with them.

The problem is that once Tom and Jerry had made their decision, no amount of reasoning or persuasion would change their minds. They would pretend to consider what others thought but would actually be looking for reasons to disagree and hold their ground.

It’s no coincidence that Tom and Jerry were very resistant to any change they weren’t involved in. They would let their fears and biases call the shots and then make the excuses to rationalize their emotions.

I don’t work with Tom and Jerry anymore but I’m sure the author of this article would love to try to influence them.

# B – Three Roles of the Leader in the New Paradigm

There are a couple sound bites in this article that resonate with me. The first is in the Empowering section. “People have enormous talent, ingenuity, intelligence, and creativity. Most of it lies dormant.” It makes me think of just how much of human potential is being wasted in repetitive labor.

I’m thinking specifically of the factory in Norma Rae. Hundreds of people are spending their lives doing tasks that could be easily done by robots. If the factory was automated, sure most of them would be out of work. But all of that man power is now freed up to benefit their community in other ways. This is the long term benefit of industrialization and automation. There is short term pain, but long term gain.

You can also see the freeing of potential in the film we watched in class about the Approtec water pumps. The water pump allowed that farmer to spend vastly less time watering his tomato plants. That spare time can now be spent with his family or fixing his house or any number of tasks. The water pump helped to free some of that farmer’s potential as a human being that would otherwise be wasted carrying water in a bucket.

The other sound bite that I found interesting is in the “A New Paradigm of Leadership” section. Covey writes “Leadership focuses on doing the right things; management focuses on doing things right”. We’ve had the management vs. leadership discussion a number of times in class. I think this is a great way to summarize my opinions on the differences. It’s a good short description that can be easily grasped and understood. I kind of wish I had thought of it.

# B – The Sole Proper Claim to Political Power

Aristotle places a high importance on education for politicians and I somewhat agree with him. I say somewhat because I think thought process and reasoning is more important than education. Education without the ability to properly interpret what has been learned isn’t very useful. I can always dig through Wikipedia if I need more facts.

I would like to see more politicians and people in general be better skeptics. Far too often we see politicians get on TV and make ridiculous claims (see Todd Akin’s “Legitimate rape” comments), or make statements containing obvious logical fallacies.

Maybe Carl Sagan’s book The Demon Haunted World should be a required part of public education. At the very least the chapter on logical fallacies would be very useful. I know it’s changed the way I see the world.

# C – The Allegory of the Cave

Either I’m getting better at reading this sort of abstract conversation stuff or this reading was a lot easier than the first Plato article. I was actually able to understand the point that Plato was trying to make (hurray!). People can be in a state where no amount of descriptions will convince them to change their minds, you have to show them reality instead of describing it. Seeing is believing.

Every internet argument is validation for that. People in an internet argument rarely change their minds. In fact they tend to become more convinced of whatever opinion they held going into the argument. You can’t show someone how things actually work over the internet so all the other person is able to do is to reinforce their own reasoning.

There is a kind of attitude that is present in this writing though, I don’t really have a name for it. It’s the “I have seen this incredible thing but everyone refuses to believe me” style of thinking. If nobody believes what I’m saying, I have to consider that I might be wrong.

Take a belief in conspiracy theories as an example of this. Even if you knock out every argument that a conspiracy theorist has, in the end you will just get grouped in with the rest of the conspirators. The theorists take the position that they have been enlightened and that everyone that disagrees with them is either motivated to do so, or just hasn’t been enlightened sufficiently. The people who make it outside the cave and then return to tell the others of their experience would probably sound a lot like your typical crazy conspiracy nut. Refusing to acknowledge that our senses and reasoning are incredibly flawed inevitably leads to wrong beliefs.

Once we have acknowledged that our ability to discover the world around us is flawed, the next question to ask is: how are we able to know anything at all? The answer is the only thing that I can know with absolute certainty is that I am a conscious being on some level (see the Wikipedia article on solipsism). I don’t know that I’m not a matrix-style brain in a vat and there is no possible way to determine that.

We just have to deal with the fact that there is basically nothing that we can know with absolute certainty and make decisions based on the best available information. We also have to be prepared to spin on a dime and completely change our minds if new information arises. Of course, that is much easier said than done.

# C – Antigone

The moral that I took from this play is to not be so arrogant that you stop listening to other people. Don’t let a little bit of power go to your head. Creon was so arrogant that he stopped listening to his people, his niece, his son and even his advisors.

There are a few places where Creon shows his arrogance. The first is during the conversation with Antigone after she was arrested. Creon makes the claim that everyone in Thebes agrees with him and Antigone responds that “You’ve silenced them”. The conversation continues with Creon basically ignoring that. He knows he’s silenced his dissenters and that this isn’t an argument he can win.

Another place that Creon shows how out of touch he is with his family is during the conversation with Haemon. The conversation starts out civil but turns into a shouting match as soon as Creon realizes that Haemon is trying to change his mind. Haemon understandably doesn’t want his wife to be killed but Creon tells Haemon to just find a new wife. As if Antigone means nothing to Haemon.

There is also a point where Creon rationalizes some excuses so that he can ignore Haemon. Creon says that Haemon is too young to have a valid opinion, that if he were to change his mind that would mean a woman would have authority over him. These aren’t valid reasons to dismiss someone, they are rationalizations. This is exactly the sort of behavior I described in the “dealing with resistance to change” section of this journal.

There is more rationalizing in the conversation with Tiresias. Tiresias is also trying to convince Creon that he is wrong but Creon needs to be right no matter what. So Creon predictably invents an excuse to ignore Tiresias saying that Tiresias is just being paid to disagree. Whether someone is being paid to make a claim is irrelevant to whether the claim is actually true. Creon isn’t interested in what Tiresias is saying, he is looking for excuses to dismiss what he doesn’t want to hear.

# D – Crash

The thing that bugs me the most about this movie is how easy the conflict between the locksmith and the shopkeeper could have been avoided. The shopkeeper was upset that the locksmith pointed out that the door was broken and was suspicious of the locksmith’s motives.

All the locksmith had to do to put the shopkeeper’s suspicions at bay was to take the racism in stride, calmly invite the shopkeeper over to the door and show him what needed to be fixed. He could even explain the consequences of leaving the door in a poor state (no insurance, easy to break in, etc). With the shopkeeper’s mind at ease, both of their tension levels would lower. Things would remain awkward between them because of the accusations but at least you wouldn’t have the enduring hatred.

Instead, the locksmith chose to elevate the situation instead of simply and quickly defusing it. Not that I blame the locksmith for his reaction. When someone starts throwing ignorance at you it’s just a natural reaction for some people to get angry. I just wonder how many more situations in that movie could have been disarmed with a similar methodical approach.

# D – At First Sight

I actually have a friend who needs glasses. When he is watching a hockey game on TV it’s actually bad enough that he can’t tell the score. All of our circle of friends know he needs glasses, he knows he needs glasses but he still refuses to get them. He could even get them for free on his benefits plan so it’s not a money issue. We tease him about it fairly often and he even tried on a few pairs once but he still hasn’t done it.

I think it’s because it’s almost become part of his identity now. When we are out drinking, it’s a reliable way to get a conversation going. He is the guy that has subpar eyesight but doesn’t want to do anything about it. If he were to go do what he should and start wearing glasses, I wonder if he feels like he would lose some part of his identity.

I could kind of see this happening to Virgil too. When offered the chance to regain his vision, he sort of portrays himself as “I’m blind, that’s just who I am”. Being able to see would be a change to his identity and his self-image. People know him as the blind guy. Virgil also mentions how he was treated differently by the people in his life because of his condition. People didn’t expect anything from him.

I’m not trying to psycho-analyze a character from a movie I’ve never seen but the parallels are striking to me. My friend gets special attention because of his choice, so does Virgil. My friend has formed an identity around his vision, so does Virgil. My friend feels threatened by a change in his self-image, so does Virgil.

# E – Labels Exercise

For me the best part of this exercise was the look on Monsour’s face when we all just started laughing at him for no reason. He had gotten the “laugh at everything I say” label. He looked so shocked and confused, it was great.

I can imagine how that awful it would be if something like that actually happened without the tags. I got the “constantly say my name” tag and it was a little awkward. The way the conversation was going I was wondering if my tag was “ask me lots of questions”. It certainly seemed that way because normally I prefer to silently observe conversations but I wasn’t being allowed to do that. I’m not used to getting that much attention or having people be that interested in my opinions, so this was a little weird for me.

# E – Same Again Wine Company

I feel like I should defend my opinion that this company’s employment situation is not critical. When I hear the word ‘critical’ I think of something that needs to be fixed immediately. While I agree that changes are necessary I don’t agree that they need to happen immediately.

If you felt the situation was critical, the way to make those changes immediately is to (for example) fire half the accounting department and replace them with males. This is a bad idea for a number of reasons. First, you are causing a major disruption in a team of people which are productive. Second, you are losing vital knowledge to the operations of the business. Accounting system knowledge, contacts with external suppliers, etc. Third, the remaining disgruntled staff will have to train new employees while doing their current job. Fourth, the remaining employees will look at the new employees with a lot of resentment over their lost friends. Clearly this is a pretty bad situation to put the company in and not a realistic option. Even if you implement this slowly, the problem will still remain.

So let’s look at the reasons you would want to balance out the ratios in a department so quickly. In class there was some concern about potential lawsuits. I Am Not A Lawyer, but I’m not particularly worried about the potential for lawsuits. The reason is I don’t think it’s possible to file a lawsuit because a company’s departments are unbalanced. The reason a person would be able to file a discrimination lawsuit is because they were turned down for a position because of discrimination. It is possible that the voting system could result in a discrimination lawsuit.

It is for that reason that I recommended dropping the voting system that is currently in place. I think it’s fair to say that the voting system as it is can’t keep going and that the hiring policy needs to change. It’s pretty standard practice to hire based on merit. The company can continue to consider personality but keep in mind that personality can be managed to an extent.

By just changing the hiring policy, the required changes will take place as turnover continues to occur naturally. There won’t be any additional strain to train the new employees, or resentment from current employees, or major sudden brain drain and the team will remain productive. You can even monitor the situation as it progresses to make sure that there isn’t any clique type problems forming. To me this is the best case scenario for the company and its employees.