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### **Understanding Successful Leadership in Shakespeare's Plays**

Leadership is a lot of things. It is not just having power and authority, but it is taking responsibility, holding yourself accountable for your actions, communicating with others, getting to know the people, listening, caring for the country, motivating, and much more. These are qualities that not all leaders portray, but qualities they should have and use in unison. While Shakespeare's plays show many successful leaders, he also shows leaders who did not accomplish what they had in mind because they lacked basic leadership skills. Shakespeare's plays *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, and *King Lear* contain great examples of the different types of leaders, such as the listener (King Henry V), the power-hungry, self-destructing one (King Lear), and the manipulator (Mark Antony). Analyzing and understanding different types of leaders is important for becoming a well-rounded leader yourself. This essay will analyze these three leaders in Shakespeare's plays and will determine which leader exerts the most beneficial leadership traits that led to them ruling their country in the most successful way.

Three main concepts make a good leader; authority, responsibility, and accountability. For one to show good leadership skills, one must use those three qualities simultaneously. Out of all the types of leaders that are portrayed in Shakespeare's plays, one of the greatest is King Henry V since he practices all three of those at the same time. Henry V is a leader of the people. Throughout the play, *Henry IV Part One*, Henry V (Hal) was shown as a prince who was always misbehaving in the tavern with commoners. The reason that Hal did this was to get to know the

people, rebel against his father, and prepare for the day that he would become the king. Hal did not show responsibility while he was rebelling against his father and hanging out in the tavern, but he did once he spoke to his father before the battle, apologized for his behavior, and decided to fight with him. Hal says, “I will redeem all this on Percy’s head” (3.2.132). When Hal said this, it showed that he was finally ready to take responsibility for his actions to win the trust of his father back. This is the first time that Hal starts to become a king and a good leader because he starts holding himself accountable for his behavior.

When hanging out in the tavern, Hal listened to the commoners and became their friend before he got the throne from his father. Hal was continually in “learning mode” when it came to becoming a leader. In Act 4 of *Henry V*, Hal disguised himself to have honest conversations with the commoners about what they thought of his leadership. This shows that he truly cares about the commoners and respects their opinions of him. He wants to keep improving his kingship and wants to maintain relationships with the people. Hal doesn’t see himself as greater than the commoners, but he sees himself as one of them, which conveys that he does not misuse his authority. This is seen when he says, “I think the King is but a man, as I am” (4.1.103-104) when he is disguised. Friendships that he created with the commoners were so important to his journey to becoming king because it taught him what the people needed from him and it opened his eyes towards how he can manipulate and motivate them for the well-being of the country and the people.

Becoming friends with the tavern gang and acting rebellious was Hal’s plan to lower people’s expectations of him. He did that so that once he became king, people would be amazed and would respect him more. This shows that he was also a manipulative and smart leader who thoroughly thought out his actions and had a plan to become a good leader who was adored by

the people. Once he was crowned king, gained authority, and had to lead the people, he became very serious and wanted to do the job well. He cut off his friendships with the tavern gang and most importantly with Falstaff to become more of a businessman. However, because of his time with the tavern gang, he learned how to lead and manipulate/motivate the commoners. A great example of this is the St. Crispin's Day speech. During the battle against Hotspur, the soldiers were about to give up, but Hal took the lead by giving the soldiers a speech to unite them by saying lines such as, "The fewer men, the greater share of honor," (4.3.22) "For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother," (4.3.61-62) and "He that outlives this day, and comes safe home, will stand a-tiptoe when this day is named" (4.3.41-42). These quotes show how good of a leader Hal really is. He is offering soldiers immortality, brotherhood with the king, honor, and bragging rights if they fight in this battle and survive. This is an extremely manipulative way of leading since he is using his words to encourage the soldiers to keep fighting, even though it is extremely dangerous and they are weak. This speech works, however, since they end up winning the battle. The St. Crispin's Day speech next to all the other ways that Hal has been able to lead the country shows how good of a leader he is. He does not use his authority to just get what he wants, but he combines it with responsibility and accountability which makes him able to understand the commoners and do what is best for his country and the people living in it.

A counterexample of the good leadership and ruling of the people portrayed by King Henry V is King Lear. Although Lear was a successful leader in his time, once he started getting older, he became an explosive and unapproachable man. This is the opposite of Hal, who was more interested in being liked by the people, leading the country well, and doing the right thing than gaining power. In the play, *King Lear*, Lear is shown as an angry old man who had a lot of

tantrums and made bad decisions. One of these bad decisions was giving all of his power to the daughters who he thought loved him the most. Lear wants to give away all the responsibility and accountability that comes with being king, but he wants to keep the authority. This is seen in the fact that he wanted to make sure he kept his 100 knights, since they make him seem very powerful and important, which keeps a distance between him and people who care for him. This shows bad leadership because you cannot use authority without combining it with responsibility and accountability. Lear sees himself as very powerful by saying things such as, “Come not between the Dragon and his wrath” (1.1.124). Lear sees himself as the dragon; someone who has outbursts of anger, but is allowed to have that since he is greater and more powerful than others. Lear shows very bad leadership here since he only cares about his authority and does not see how others feel unseen and unheard by him. You need to be able to listen to others and grow from your mistakes, but Lear does not understand that yet and instead keeps his distance from others.

Lear sees himself as the treasure of his daughter's lives, which is why he thinks he can just choose one who loves him the most, give her all his power, and then live a happy and carefree life with authority and without any responsibility. This is where Lear is in the wrong. He never showed his daughters, Goneril and Regan, love, so now they will instead use him to gain his power and then steal it all away from him. When Lear finds out about this betrayal, it shows Lear's true feelings and his lack of self-knowledge. “Does any here know me? This is not Lear.” (1.4.232) is said by Lear after he finds out about the betrayal of Goneril. All that Lear wants is love, which he thought he had from his daughters, but because of his lack of self-knowledge, he misses who truly loves him and who is just using him. He thought that the people around him knew him, but it turns out that they do not care for him since he never truly cared for them.

Self-knowledge is important in order to be a good leader, so this is another reason why Lear was not a good king. Kent, someone who cared for Lear but was banished by him, said, “See better, Lear” (1.1.160). He, next to his other daughter, Cordelia, actually loved him, unlike Goneril and Regan, and he was trying to get Lear to see that. Not seeing who his enemies are led to his downfall and death because he died in the battle against Goneril and Regan. The whole reason why the battle began in the first place is because Lear gave them power without realizing their true motives.

Lear did not see how mistaken he was about everything until he was out in the storm. After the betrayal, Lear became a “nothing” and he was out in the cold and rain. This made him realize how he never cared for his people, his family, and his friends, since there are people that live in the storm at all times. This was a crucial moment in Lear’s self-discovery because it made him truly see how he was wrong and selfish before. The realization opened his eyes and brought back a sliver of his good leadership that he portrayed before he started losing his mind. However, he dies before he can become a good leader again. All of this portrays that Lear does not depict good leadership skills in comparison to King Henry V since he does not listen to the commoners, only cares about authority, and does not understand who his real friends or enemies are until the very end, when it is already too late.

Both Hal and Lear showed completely different leadership strategies. One is a people-pleaser and the other is a grumpy old man looking for love and power. Another leader shown in a Shakespeare play is Mark Antony in the play, *Julius Caesar*. He also showed a very different approach to leadership by using pathos to manipulate people instead of Hal who used logos and Lear who was unable to manipulate others. Antony’s main motivation is avenging his friend Caesar after he was killed by Brutus, so he uses lines such as, “He was my friend” (3.2.87)

and “My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar” (3.2.108) to create an emotional response from the commoners to follow him instead of Brutus. This use of pathos clearly works since his emotions for his passed friend seem so strong to the commoners that they feel sympathetic towards him and Caesar. Because of this, the commoners quickly decide to go against Brutus and to follow Antony, which causes a lot of violence. This was exactly what Antony had planned, so this shows that he is a good leader since he can easily manipulate people and grab the authority even though it may not be truthful. However, Antony using his authority like this shows that he is extremely power-hungry since he is just doing it to gain control over Rome, now that Caesar is dead. It also shows that he has an appetite for violence since he knew that saying these things to the commoners would cause them to use violence to stand up for what they believe in. It is bad, as a leader, to want to create violence among commoners in your own country. Antony is just doing this to gain power over Rome, so he is very selfish and desperate for authority, making Antony an inadequate leader.

Antony’s extravagant plan for power over Rome is a sign of bad leadership because you are then likely to not take responsibility for your actions or to hold yourself accountable. These are both just as important as using your authority. It is seen in *Julius Caesar* that Antony does not hold himself accountable since he puts everything on everyone else instead of on himself. This is seen in his speech for the commoners after Brutus had spoken. He says, “I will not do them wrong; I rather choose to wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you, than I will wrong such honorable men.” (3.2.127-219). Antony says that he will not wrong Brutus for killing Caesar since he is an “honorable man,” but by saying this in context of the rest of his speech, he actually is blaming Brutus and putting the chaos that Rome has become after Caesar’s death onto Brutus’ shoulders. Antony does not think he is responsible for anything that he has done after Caesar’s

death. However, Antony does end up succeeding since he ruled over Rome for a while, so it can be argued that he was a good leader. In spite of that, looking at his leadership qualities, he does not practice authority in correlation with responsibility and accountability, which makes him a bad leader who is just craving power and willing to use manipulating emotions to get it.

After analyzing the leadership of King Henry V, King Lear, and Mark Antony, it can be concluded that there are multiple different methods of being a leader, and most of them do not end in success. Henry V ended up being the most successful leader because of his true concern for the people whom he is ruling over and his smart plans. Both Lear and Antony were too interested in gaining power and Lear was not knowledgeable about himself enough to rule over his country well. To be a good ruler, you must practice authority, responsibility, and accountability together, and the only one analyzed in this essay that did that was Hal. He was able to rule the country well after gaining information from the commoners themselves about what they needed from him. This is something that Lear and Antony did not do which is why they did not succeed in their kingship. The most important aspect of being a leader is communication, not just with other people of authority, but with the commoners as well. Once you are able to communicate, learn from your mistakes, and not be afraid of failing, you will become a leader of the people, which is the most successful approach.