When is Courageous Leadership Invisible? Why That Could be a Good Thing

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WHEN IS COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP INVISIBLE?

Why Do We Need Courageous Leaders?

Americans have long lamented the scarcity of leadership in our society. Confidence in our institutions — Congress, business, religion, even education — is “abysmally low” (Rosenthal, 2012, p. 1). More than two-thirds of people surveyed by the Harvard Center for Public Leadership believe there is a “leadership crisis” in America (Rosenthal, 2012, p. 3). For more than 20 years, leadership scholars have grappled with this crisis, and its meaning (Burns, 1995). During that same time, we have doubled our investment in leadership development, and, still, public confidence in our leaders has steadily fallen (Hogan, Curphy, Kaiser, & Chamorro-Premuzic, in press). This crisis affects all levels of civil society — from the heights of the national political stage, to the everyday stations of our communities: the police chief, the school principal, and the businessman. It is in our universities, too — in our student governments, our fraternities and sororities, and our residential colleges. Such is the far-reaching effect of this crisis that nearly three-quarters of Americans believe that unless we can create better leaders “the United States will decline as a nation” (Rosenthal, 2012, p. 3).

The source of this crisis of leadership “is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power…” (Burns, 1995, p. 9). For Burns (1995), the underlying cause of this mediocrity is intellectual. As a society, we fixate on celebrity, and on the “gee whiz” nature of his or her successes; we know a great deal about our leaders, but far “too little about leadership” (Burns, 1995, p. 9). Because of this focus, “we fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age…” (Burns, 1995, p. 9). In other words, our popular understanding of leadership is simplistic; it does not fit today’s complex and rapidly changing world. Gardner (1995), too, believes our popular understanding of leadership to be “shallow,” and that it “set[s] us up for endless disappointment” (p. 5). Specifically, Gardner (1995) cautions
against our childlike need to be “rescued,” and “wanting a parental figure to set things right” (p. 4). This element is what Gardner (1995) identifies as the most concerning aspect of the leadership crisis: that, while we cry out for courageous new leaders, our understanding of what constitutes leadership is so fundamentally flawed as to affect our very “capacity to gather forces and act” (p. 4).

Meanwhile, in this modern age, we are faced with unprecedented, adaptive problems. Problems that are more than complicated; they are complex, novel, intractable, poorly structured, and without any obvious solutions (Grint, 2005). These new problems are imminently threatening and all too familiar. They are global — terrorism, climate change, and economic disaster — as well as personal: discrimination, dehumanization, and marginalization (Gardner, 1995).

Preparing our students to combat these problems means developing courageous leaders, but, specifically, courageous leaders for the modern age. This means discarding our conventional understanding of what a leader is — the person in charge, a rescuer, a righter of wrongs — and embracing a new paradigm of leadership. In this new paradigm, which we will describe, leadership is viewed not as the effect of the individual, but, rather, a collective process (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). The result is that everyday individuals who may not hold a position of authority are able to meaningfully influence their organizations and communities. They are able to provide leadership to solve the seemingly insurmountable problems we face by drawing on their passions, values, and experiences to effectively engage others in this collective process.

Americans are optimistic about the leadership crisis. Nearly two-thirds feel they have a great deal or a moderate amount of power to help make America’s leadership more effective
(Rosenthal, 2012). Perhaps most encouraging, 88% feel a “personal responsibility” to do so (Rosenthal, 2012, p. 1). As practitioners, we have an opportunity to take that motivating force of personal responsibility and help students discover their passions, provide them with the tools needed to display moral courage as they engage others in the process of leadership.

As we begin to develop courageous leaders at this university, we must remember that the first step is not action; the first step is understanding (Gardner, 1995). We must ask the question, “How do we think, speak, and teach about leadership in higher education?” Answering this question for the modern age requires a new and deeper understanding of leadership, of connectedness, and of values. America’s leadership crisis will not be solved by the heroic individual leader, but, rather, by multitudes of everyday people engaging in courageous leadership. Developing those courageous leaders is a critical and entirely achievable endeavor. Gardner (1995) believes we have “barely scratched the surface” in our efforts to develop leaders (p. 7). He writes, “People will look back on our present practices as primitive” (Gardner, 1995, p. 7). As we will demonstrate, our approach to leadership and leadership development has, indeed, evolved. It requires ever greater participation in leadership processes, and ever greater numbers of individuals to tackle the world’s problems. Now is the time to develop courageous leaders.

### Changing Views of Leadership

For much of the last century, our understanding of leadership has been heavily influenced by the industrial revolution. The first scientific studies of leadership were conducted during the early decades of the 20th century, and the resulting industrial paradigm of leadership emphasized the “preeminence of leaders and the machine-like qualities of organizations” (Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005, p. 236). Organizations were conceptualized as stable and closed systems, and their leaders operated from formal positions atop clear hierarchies (Western, 2010). Under this
paradigm, followers were relegated to worker status, and reduced to “cog[s] in a machine, mirroring standardization and mechanization within the mass production of the factory” of the time (Western, 2008, p. 162)

Following World War II, calls for a more democratic society resulted in a shift that bet on the “principle that ‘happy workers are more productive workers’” (Western, 2010, p. 39). This approach made leadership more people-focused; it reflected the “wider social trends of atomization, self-concern, and the post-war individualistic expectations of being fulfilled, successful and happy” (Western, 2008, p. 163). However, though the approach had changed, the underlying purpose was still to control, maximize efficiency, and shape individuals to fit desired norms.

In the 1970s, another approach to leadership emerged “with the aim to create strong, dynamic organizational cultures under the vision and charisma of a transformational leader” (Western, 2010, p. 40). Business schools, corporations, civic organizations, and churches embraced this transformational leader who could offer “vision and passionate leadership” to create inspired, loyal, and committed followers (Western, 2008, p. 40). While this approach to leadership remains strong, both in scholarship and in popular understanding, the evangelical leaders it has created are sometimes seen to be a facade, as they quite often fail to produce the desired results.

Today, as the challenges we face become more complex and require a greater reliance on interdependent work, our view of leadership continues to evolve in an effort to meet those challenges. Leadership is increasingly viewed not as the effect of an individual, as it has for most of the past century, but, rather, a collective process (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). Reflecting on this shift in our understanding of leadership, Western (2008) has identified an
emerging “eco-leadership discourse.” “Eco” does not necessarily refer to the natural environment, or any environmental cause, but rather the environment in which leadership occurs. Eco-leadership borrows from the field of biology the concept of ecology: the study of habitats in which organism live (Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005). No longer are groups, organizations, and communities conceptualized as rigid, closed systems, like the 20th century factory; rather, they are understood as interdependent ecosystems in which we live and work (Western, 2010).

Eco-leadership is characterized by collective decision-making, collaboration, shared leadership, and grassroots organization. It “shifts the focus from individual leaders to leadership” (Western, 2010, p. 36). This redistributes leadership and power from the center to the edges, opening opportunities for greater participation in the collective process of leadership (Western, 2010). This allows participation by individuals who would never have had the opportunity to contribute under the industrial paradigm of leadership; it also facilitates our ability to “harness the energy and creativity of the whole system” (Western, 2010, p. 44). Consequently, this new eco-leadership approach is beneficial because a larger number of stakeholders — including minority stakeholders — have a stronger voice; thus, creating greater opportunities for individuals to take courageous stands, which can create the potential for both better decisions and ensure the voices of marginalized groups and individuals are heard (Allen, Stelzner, & Wielkiewicz, 1999).

However, implicit in this new approach to leadership is a greater reliance on everyday individuals to have the courage to participate in the process of leadership. Collective decision-making, collaboration, and grassroots organizing require courage derived from passions, values and experiences in order to participate in leadership in the modern age. For these reasons, courageous leadership requires leader development that focuses both on human capital (i.e.,
intrapersonal) and social capital (i.e., interpersonal) skills. As practitioners, we must focus on providing students with the self-awareness and critical reflection skills necessary to identify their passions. Equally important, however, we must provide them with the relational skills necessary to inspire others to join them in the leadership process in order to achieve common goals and address the complex, interdependent problems of the modern age.

**Leadership and Courage**

As previously stated, thoughts about leadership and the approach to studying leadership have evolved greatly during the last 100 years, and, as a result, there are a wide variety of theoretical and conceptual approaches to explain the leadership process (Northouse, 2013). Despite the multiple approaches, there is also wide agreement that leadership is a relational, socially-embedded process, and individuals have the capacity to exercise leadership regardless of positional power or hierarchy (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013). This relational approach to leadership softens the rigid demarcation line between leaders and followers, and characterizes leadership as a learning process (Brown & Posner, 2001). Taken together, leadership can be viewed as more than “just an influence process” (Jackson & Parry, 2011, p. 31); it “develops in people over a lifetime” (Northouse, 2013 p. 254). With this in mind, the question becomes: How do we develop courage in our students?

Along with the many approaches to leadership, there are also many definitions of leadership. Bass (1990) writes, “The definition used in a particular study of leadership depends on the purposes of the study” (p. 19). For this paper, leadership will be operationalized using the language provided by the Virginia Tech Division of Student Affairs (VTDSA), with a special emphasis on courage. DSA (2012a) defines courageous leaders as individuals who are willing to challenge the status quo, have the fortitude to speak up when they witness an injustice, and reach
out to those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or in need of assistance. Based on this goal, and
our current understanding of leadership, it will serve individual leaders well if they can find
partners and develop relationships that can help them accomplish their common goals and bring
about social change. Although courage as a leader characteristic has been widely discussed in
popular press, it has received negligible attention in the scholarly leadership literature (Voyer,
2011).

Courage as a leader characteristic has been operationalized and discussed as early as
Plato, who posits that courage is a cardinal virtue that we look for in leaders (Neville, 1989).
More recently, Ricketts (1997) describes courage as the intangible leadership quality of which
greatness is made, and is demonstrated when a person exhibits perseverance or determination
when faced with an unusual challenge. Sen, Kabak, and Yanginlar (2013) write that “courageous
leaders are brave, they have heart, spirit, and exceptional and intellectual capacity to make
drastic changes” (p. 91). Kidder and Bracy (2001) describe courage as the firmness of spirit that
faces danger or extreme difficulty without flinching or retreating. Last, Neville (1989) describes
courageous leaders as individuals who have the ability to know what is right and have the
fortitude to stand up in the face of adversarial conditions. Despite the differences in the way
scholars describe courage, leaders, and leadership, the scholars express commonalities in the acts
of challenging the conventional wisdom and facing down adversity.

In the literature, this strength to take a stand for a more just and humane society has been
characterized as moral courage, which is different from physical courage (Kidder, 2005). In their
explanation of these differences, Kidder and Bracy (2001) assert that “physical courage acts in
the defense of the tangible, moral courage is concerned with the defense of the intangible; it is
not property but principles, not valuables but virtues that moral courage rises to defend” (p. 6).
According to Kidder (2005), moral courage exists at the intersection of applying values, recognizing risks, and enduring hardship. Thus, moral courage manifests from an individual’s values and “requires an actor to know what the "right" judgment entails, as well as the fortitude, which requires a sufficient level of moral courage, to overcome perceived threats while pursuing a moral purpose” (Neville, 1989, p. 23). In this context, courageous leaders know when it is time to take a stand that is different from other leaders. They are answering to a higher set of values, willing to withstand the risk of ridicule and contempt, and be prepared to persevere and stick with the “right” decision (Kidder & Bracy, 2001). Chaleff (2009) describes this as “the courage to be right, the courage to be wrong, the courage to be different” (p. 4). Thus, moral courage involves personal risk, but service to the common purpose justifies and sometimes demands acting or action.

Therefore, the question becomes: Can we prepare students for a life of courageous leadership? The answer is “yes” because the decision-making skills of a leader to follow through and go beyond merely thinking and talking about doing the right thing is what defines a courageous leader (Mullane, 2009). However, there are no instant-hero formulas; this skill is primarily learned, not innate; and, like any other skill, your ability to perform is a function of how much practice you have (Hoenig, 2000; Mullane, 2009). This notion is supported by Margolis and Stoltz (2010) who explain that each of us can train our capacity to get things done in the face of continuous change, and respond positively to difficulty. Thus, leaders can develop their capacity to act with courage in the face of adversity.

Moreover, Staub (2007) asserts that one cannot lead unless they find and develop courage in themselves and then encourage others. Additionally, Hannah, Avolio, and Walumbwa (2011) describe courage as a foundational characteristic of authentic leadership. These assertions are
valid in a wide range of contexts — from the military battlefield to residential colleges, where leaders’ and followers’ roles are fluid and individuals coalesce around a common purpose. This common purpose is powerful and has been described as the “atomic glue that binds” (Chaleff, 2009, p. 12). In their recent book, *The Power of Invisible Leadership*, Hickman and Sorensen (2014) address the power of this common purpose and write that deeply held beliefs about a common purpose — what they describe as *invisible leadership* — can propel individuals and groups to the highest levels of commitment, innovation, and success.

**Invisible Leadership**

Invisible leadership is defined as “leadership in which the common purpose, rather than any particular individual, is the invisible leader that inspires leaders and followers to take action on its behalf” (Hickman & Sorensen, 2014, p. 1). The authors further elaborate on this definition by describing invisible leadership as what exists in the space between people and their shared dreams; and although that space is completely invisible, the effect is immensely powerful. Thus, invisible leadership does not eliminate leaders, but rather can be used by courageous leaders as a way to highlight the common purpose of their endeavors in an effort to resonate with the values and motivations of others.

In the next pages, we describe a novel approach to understanding courageous leadership through the lens of invisible leadership by drawing from highlights of VTDSA Courageous Leadership Award recipients. Invisible leadership connects many leadership theories, including transformational, democratic, and shared leadership theories, which serve as the framework that undergirds this concept (Hickman & Sorensen, 2014). Invisible leadership does not seek to replace any of these theories of leadership. Instead, it serves to augment our understanding of their functionality (Hickman & Sorenson, 2014). In addition, we will describe practical
applications of the primary components of invisible leadership for use in student programming. These practical applications are organized around the three core components of invisible leadership: (1) a compelling and deeply held common purpose, (2) readiness to use individual strengths in leader or follower roles, and (3) strong shared bonds among individuals (Hickman & Sorenson, 2014).

**Compelling and Deeply Held Common Purpose**

“A great leader’s courage to fulfill his vision comes from passion, not position.”
– John Maxwell

The common purpose is the invisible leader that inspires action on its behalf (Hickman & Sorenson, 2014), and “courageous leaders are those who provide greater momentum toward a revitalized vision and a renewed sense of the group’s purpose” (Anfara, et al., 2008, p. 4). For example, courageous leadership award recipient Wes Williams describes this as “trust[ing] that the direction I feel called toward is also a direction worth bringing others to” (VTDSA, 2014c). Award recipient David Hernandez further supports the power of a deeply held common purpose by saying, “I've realized that supporting something you care about can inspire others to do the same …” (VTDSA, 2013). These individuals describe the influence of communicating common purpose on inspiring action; this process of clarifying purpose is a critical act of courageous leadership because “if the purpose is not clear and motivating, leaders and followers can only pursue their perceived self-interest, not their common interest” (Chaleff, 2009, p. 13).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2012), receiving buy-in or support from others requires an individual who is able to communicate an inspiring vision for the future. This ability to receive “buy-in” and establish trust with others is central to an individual’s success in developing a capable and motivated team. Individuals who inspire a shared vision are able to “visualize positive outcomes in the future and communicate them to others” (Northouse, 2013, p. 198). For
this reason, it is vitally important for a leader to inspire a shared vision of the future by giving voice to a movement. However, before articulating a compelling vision of the future, an individual needs to have the courage to serve and not be afraid of the hard work required to serve as a leader (Chaleff, 2009).

**Strategies for Identifying Common Purpose and Motivating Followers.** Drawing on our own passions and values to articulate a compelling and deeply held common purpose is the critical skill courageous leaders must possess to be successful in engaging others in leadership. Sinek (2009) has put forward a deceptively simple proposition for engaging individuals in a common purpose: Start with why. Sinek (2009) writes, “Whether individuals or organizations, every single [inspiring leader] thinks, acts, and communicates in exactly the same way. And it’s the complete opposite of the rest of us” (p. 37).

Most leaders — the rest of us — typically communicate by articulating the clearest message first, and then the fuzziest. They focus first on WHAT they want to do and HOW they plan do it (Sinek, 2009). Many leaders never reach the point of articulating WHY they do what they do. Yet, “people don’t buy what they do, they buy why you do it” (Sinek, 2009, p. 42). WHY drives behavior. The WHY is the core message of the deeply held, common purpose leaders must articulate.

Sinek (2009) gives the example of the perennial success of Apple to illustrate this concept. If Apple were like most computer companies, its message would focus on WHAT it does and HOW it does it. For example, “We make great computers. They’re beautifully designed, simple to use and user-friendly. Wanna buy one?” (Sinek, 2009, p. 40). This message is uninspiring because it fails to convey WHY Apple does what it does — and it does not drive behavior. Apple is one of those few inspiring companies who knows WHY it does what it does,
and is able to articulate that WHY in its marketing to drive behavior. Apple’s actual marketing message sounds like this:

Everything that we do, we believe in challenging the status quo. We believe in thinking differently. The way we challenge the status quo is by making our products beautifully designed, simple to use, and user-friendly. And we happen to make great computers. Wanna buy one? (p. 41)

Apple, like inspiring leaders, reverses the typical order of communication, beginning instead with WHY. Knowing WHY you do WHAT you do takes great effort, experience, and clarity of thinking. In order to be effective leaders — to convey a compelling and deeply held common purpose to drive behavior — we must reflect on why we do what we do. Sinek (2009) writes:

If the leader of the organization can’t clearly articulate WHY the organization exists in terms beyond its profits, then how does he expect employees to know WHY to come to work. If a politician can’t explain WHY she seeks public office beyond the ‘to serve the people’ … how will the voters know who to follow. (p. 66)

Starting with why is an effective strategy for courageous leaders to be successful at communicating the compelling and deeply held common purposes needed to unite others in leadership.

**Readiness to Use Individual Strengths in Leader or Follower Roles**

“*Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear — not absence of fear. Courage is not the lack of fear. It is acting in spite of it.*”

– Mark Twain

Individuals committed to a common purpose demonstrate a willingness to contribute to group success without recognition (Hickman & Sorensen, 2014). The announcement for VTDSA award recipient Daniel Evans reveals, “He doesn’t expect or even like recognition — he says
serving others is enough” (VTDSA, 2014b). This approach can generate a culture where leader and follower roles are fluid and members share equally in the group’s leadership. As evidence, award recipient Michael Smith explains how he uses his strengths to engage in shared leadership:

Initially people mistake my method of stepping back and letting others take the lead as being a poor leader, but … I am just looking at their strengths. Let people take the lead and see where they could use their leadership skills. (VTDSA, 2012b)

These award recipients’ approach involves facilitating the work of the group or organization, not taking control of it. Few leaders have the courage to surround themselves with other leaders, but the ones who do bring great value to their movement by creating an environment where leadership is shared and collective capacity is improved (IdeaBridge, 2014).

This practice involves engaging students in meaningful work and providing encouragement and opportunities for them to develop and use their strengths in pursuit of common purpose. Generating a culture where leader and follower roles are fluid permits members to share equally in the group’s leadership. Also, recruiting others that embrace the purpose can go a long way to help sustain a culture of shared leadership. This approach can help leaders and followers establish their credibility in a group, and provide opportunities to further develop their talents into strength, while at the same time serve as a medium to enhance self-awareness.

**Putting Strengths to Work.** In this era of conceptualizing leadership as a collaborative process where collective groups and teams assume leadership, individuals must know how to be a high-functioning member of a team, as well as how to assist others in effectively contributing to the team (Western, 2008). Those leaders with formal positions are encouraged to “assist in the emergence of leadership rather than creating change through executive orders and decisions”
(Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005, p. 331). Kellerman (2012) echoes this sentiment when she states leadership is about collaboration and cooperation, and “leaders should be team members rather than top down leaders” (p. 6).

This shared leadership approach relies on the use of individual strengths to accomplish common goals. Indeed, in an era when leader and follower rolls are more fluid, and so much is accomplished in groups, Rath and Conchie (2008) report that more than two-thirds of people have provided leadership in a group or team setting. Practitioners, then, have the opportunity to enhance students’ ability to be courageous leaders by facilitating the discovery of their strengths. Rath and Conchie (2008) explain that the “path to great leadership starts with a deep understanding of the strengths you bring to the table” (p. 3). Rath and Conchie (2008) stress the importance of developing well-rounded teams, rather than well-rounded individuals. This allows a team to maximize effectiveness by engaging the top strengths of its members. Students who know their strengths, and how to use them, will be better prepared to contribute to collaborative leadership.

Additionally, Rath and Conchie (2008) have identified two key practices for leaders who want to maximize their leadership ability in group settings. First, leaders who focus on, and invest in, the strengths of team members can expect an eightfold increase in engagement by group members when compared with leaders who do not (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Second, the best leaders surround themselves with team members who augment their own strengths in an effort to create a diverse, well-rounded team to accomplish the challenge at hand (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

By helping students discover and wield their strengths, practitioners can further prepare them to be courageous leaders.
Strong Shared Bonds among Individuals

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”
—Margaret Mead

Working together on behalf of a common purpose is one approach to creating strong bonds among participants (Hickman & Sorensen, 2014). Interaction builds trust, which is a necessary ingredient for effective leadership (Zornoza, Orengo, & Peñarroja, 2009). An example of this is highlighted in the VTDSA award announcement for Belinda Pauley, who “invests time and care in getting to know and understand her clients. By dedicating herself to seeing the Virginia Tech experience through the eyes of each individual’s point of view, she connects with them on a deep, human level” (VTDSA, 2014a). The importance of building community through shared bonds is also addressed by award recipient Kylie Gilbert who writes:

That is one of the main reasons why I am so passionate about building community in the residence halls. Sometimes it takes as little as a meaningful conversation at an ice cream social to make a student feel welcome and give them the confidence to be open to new ideas and take risks. (VTDSA, 2014d)

These types of strong bonds, forged by a convergence of the common purpose, collective work toward the purpose, and the creation of trusting and cooperative relationships, form the “power” of invisible leadership. This supported by Eagly (2005) who describes leadership as being created by individuals together. Legitimacy is established through trusting relationships, which is a byproduct of communicating a compelling vision and establishing oneself as a courageous leader.

Developing relationships, which can develop into strong bonds, speaks to the relational nature of leadership and the need for practitioners to focus on “helping people understand how to
When is Courageous Leadership Invisible?

relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives” (Day, 2001, p. 586).

**Strategies for Developing Strong Bonds.** The initial step to building relationships is through networking, which is defined as the ability to create and maintain an effective, widely based system of resources that works to the mutual benefit of oneself and others (Byrum-Robinson & Womeldorff, 1990). In the leadership development context, networking is a particularly useful development tool because it provides a means for the individual to develop social capital through interaction with individuals who occupy common roles (Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman, 2010). Providing students with networking opportunities is “an important component of [leadership program] curricula because they are the medium through which a variety of information is disseminated, issues are addressed, relationships are built and change can occur” (Fredricks, 2003, p. 50). Others advocate deliberate networking because it can “develop leaders beyond merely knowing what and knowing how, to knowing who in terms of problem solving resources (Day, 2001, p. 597).

In the leadership development programming, strong bonds are developed through a series of interactions characterized by contact, assimilation, and identification experiences (Bilhuber & Müller-Stewens, 2012). Thus, a focus on networking can help students understand “how to bridge their networks and build movements for social change by supporting self-organizing around passions, interests, and shared purpose across silos, sectors, race, and other boundaries” (Meehan & Reinelt, 2012, p. 7). Developing strong bonds through networking can improve capacity for collective leadership by increasing perceived opportunities for cooperation, influencing an individual’s willingness to share knowledge, and enhancing concern for collective
processes and outcomes (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Finally, strong bonds can serve as a relationship governance mechanism that predisposes individuals to cooperate, restrains opportunistic behavior, and reinforces trust (Burt, 2000; Nardone, Sisto, & Lopolito, 2010).

Conclusion

Collective leadership is not about slogans or motivational talks, it is about a commitment to commonly held, meaningful goals that inspire courageous leadership. This cannot be trained or forced, and will not happen by memorizing rules, tricks, or techniques. This type of leadership is achieved by each individual clearly knowing the value and scope of his or her contribution to the goal, and sharing a common understanding of the team’s significance.

In terms of practical and pedagogical implications, the core components of invisible leadership have value because they call on individuals to articulate the WHY to increase group momentum, and revitalize the mission and sense of purpose. Hickman and Sorensen (2014) explain, “the mission is a core driver as why I am passionate about the work I do, and why I feel I am leading a movement and contributing to meaningful work” (p. 65). The practices of strengthening groups by developing a culture of collective capacity, and sharing leadership in order to accomplish common goals can facilitate the development of courageous leaders who serve as change agents and make the world a more humane and just place.

So, when is courageous leadership invisible? It is invisible when there is collective action toward a common purpose, yet it is difficult to identify an individual leader of that collective action. Why might that be a good thing? It is a good thing because it creates a space for more people to engage in courageous leadership. There is no need to make courageous leadership a rare occurrence, limited to a few prominent individuals. Instead, our courageous
leaders can be anyone who holds dearly to the reasons WHY they are involved in social change WITH others.
WHEN IS COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP INVISIBLE?

References


WHEN IS COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP INVISIBLE?


