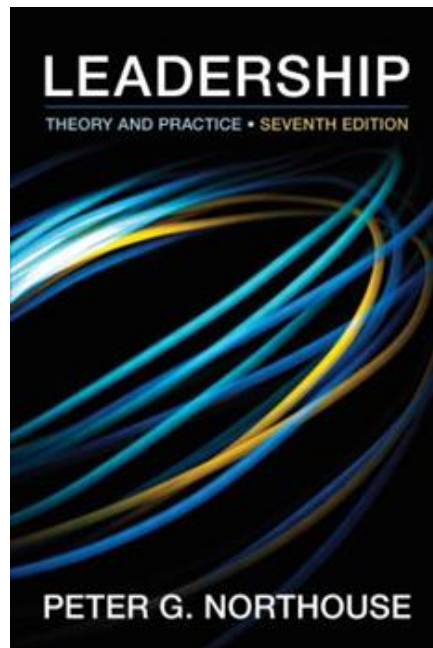# JEFFERSON
EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

Book Notes:
Reading in the Time of Coronavirus

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Leadership Part Four:
Integrity: the Heart of Leadership

Northouse, Peter G. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th Edition (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016).

In the long ago and faraway, I competed in high school NFL tournaments. No, not the National Football League, but the *National Forensic League*. Again, no, it was not training for future crime scene investigators. In this context "forensic" meant "argumentative or rhetorical." Participation in "forensic contests" honed the art of arguing, the art of advocating a position "suitable to courts of judicature or to public discussion and debate." [1]

The NFL sponsored high school debate and public

speaking competitions. Although a current events nerd who enjoyed debate, I specialized in oratory and extemporaneous speaking. In oratory, annual topics were assigned. My junior year, I think, the topic was "The Choice Is Clear."

Some 57 years later, I couldn't tell you under threat of death what choice we advocated that year, but memory suggests it was a choice rich in ethical and moral implications. Getting it right seemed crucial to the community's well-being.

Next Tuesday, on Nov. 3, 2020, Americans will make a "choice." Getting it right is "crucial to the community's well-being." The community – the nation – will choose a leader. While I am not endorsing anyone in this writing, there are, however, some questions I'd like you to consider as you exercise your "elective franchise."

The questions have to do with leadership. In a series of earlier*Book Notes,* we explored the nature of leadership, and I had noted my years of having taught on the subject, from undergraduate courses to grad classes to my time now at the JES facilitating the Raimy Fellowship Program. Not so much how it is done but what personal qualities signify a distinguished leader – a leader you can trust.

They all come down to character.

Is the person an individual of integrity?

Is the person someone who can be trusted?

Peter G. Northouse's *Leadership: Practice and Theory* is the text of choice for almost every introductory leadership course. It is a one-volume "Leadership: 101." It is almost painfully neutral as it surveys leadership's every variety and permutation.

Given that neutrality, as you ponder your electoral choice, it might be helpful to ponder the questions in Northouse's *"Perceived Leadership Integrity Scale" (PLIS).* [2] As he writes, "The **PLIS** attempts to evaluate leaders' ethics by measuring the degree to which coworkers see them as acting in accordance with rules that would produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people." [3] An admittedly utilitarian ethic, its non-ideological perspective is welcome given our current noisome partisanship.

Northouse implicitly contrasts the ethical leader with the toxic leader. So, before exploring the **PLIS**, let's ask, "What is a toxic leader?"

A toxic leader exploits the techniques of leadership for his or her own self-aggrandizement at the expense of the common good. Toxic leaders are by definition "destructive leaders." They flourish in an environment Northouse calls "The Toxic Triangle." [4]

Destructive leaders tend to be charismatic; that is, they emit a sense of energy, but its locus is personalized power, not the common good. They are narcissistic – they are self-centered and think of only their own welfare and interests. They epitomize "it's all about me." They focus on life's negative themes, life's darker currents as they seek to hold power by dividing the group's members against one another. Often, they pursue that division by advocating an ideology of hate and distrust against certain members of the group seeking to create an "us against them" mentality.

In order to do that, they depend upon "susceptible followers" who are either *conformers* with unmet needs, low core self-esteem and low maturity, and/or *colluders* whose ambition, similar worldviews and questionable values ally them with the leader.

All of this must find a conductive environment characterized by *instability*, a *perceived threat* to the group's members from both within and without the group, a *clash over cultural values,* and a lack or *weakening of institutional checks and balances* on the leader's quest for personal power at the expense of the group.

In short, toxic leaders seek only their own personal advantage. They do not care for others and see them in a purely instrumental light, as they ask "Who can I dupe, or who can I use to advance my own interests?" They flourish in times of organizational or social instability, exploiting the discontents of the present to their own advantage.

The toxic leader's mantra is *"It's all about me."*

In contrast, the Ethical leader," regardless of the environment in which he or she operates, *respects others, serves others, shows justice, manifests honesty*, and *seeks to build community.*

"Respects others" – Ethical leaders treat team members and members of the larger organization as individuals and not simply "as the means to another's personal goals."

"Serves others" – Ethical leaders "place their followers' welfare foremost in their plans."

"Shows justice" – Ethical leaders "are concerned about issues of fairness and justice."

Ethical leaders seek to treat all members equally and when they must treat members differently, they strive to be "clear and reasonable" basing their actions on "moral values." They *manifest honesty.* That is more than simply telling the truth, which is a core value, but it also entails "being open with others and representing reality as fully and completely as possible."

Ethical leaders s*eek to build community* by taking "into account their own and their followers' purposes while working toward goals that are suitable for everyone. Which means, that ethical leaders work for the common good – "they search for goals that are compatible with everyone." [6]

OK, these are ideals from a textbook. In the "real world," how do you measure whether your boss or any candidate for public office is a t*oxic leader* or an e*thical leader*?

We're back to the **PLIS** – the Perceived Leader Integrity Test – and measuring if your boss or a political candidate works to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Which, by the way, in every instance means working to preserve the organization, city, county, state, or nation and its inherent purposes and values. In fact, the ethical leader's over-arching purpose ought (which is a moral word) to be to preserve and advance the organization's or the nation's inherent values, ideals, and beliefs.

A high score on the **PLIS** is not a good thing, as you will see. The higher the score, the more toxic the candidate.

So, as you prepare to exercise your "elective franchise" and pick a candidate for President of the United States, state senator, or township clerk, how do the candidates score on the following questions? [7] Northouse does not prescribe any answers. There are no right or wrong answers. Based on your knowledge of the candidates, you are simply trying to assess which is the most ethical candidate.

Regarding the **PLIS:** Remember these are not forced-choice, binary questions. Rate each on a simple Likert-type scale of 1-4. You know the drill from endless customer surveys: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Barely, 3 = Somewhat, and 4 = Well (which means often or most of the time).

A high score means the candidate is more toxic than not; a low score means the candidate approaches ethical leader status.

The Perceived Leader Integrity Scale (PLIS) Questionnaire

Question (Q1): Which candidate "puts his or her personal interests ahead of the organization?"

Q2: Which candidate "would risk other people to protect himself or herself in work matters?"

Q3: Which candidate "enjoys turning down requests"?

Q4: Which candidate "deliberately fuels conflict between other people?"

Q5: Which candidate "would blackmail an employee if she or he thought she or he could get away with it?"

Q6: Which candidate "would deliberately exaggerate people's mistakes to make them look bad to others?"

Q7: Which candidate "would treat some people better if they were of the other sex or belonged to a different ethnic group?"

Q8: Which candidate "ridicules people for their mistakes?"

Q9: Which candidate "can be trusted with confidential information?"

Q10: Which candidate "would lie to me?"

Q11: Which candidate "is evil?" (APR aside: a loaded question).

Q12: Which candidate "is not interested in tasks that don't bring personal glory or recognition?"

Q13: Which candidate "would do things that violate organizational policy and then expect others to cover up for him or her?"

Q14: Which candidate "would allow someone else to be blamed for his or her mistake?"

Q15: Which candidate would deliberately avoid responding to email, telephone, or other messages to cause problems for someone else?"

Q16: Which candidate "would make trouble for someone who got on his or her bad side?"

Q17: Which candidate "would engage in sabotage against the organization?"

Q18: Which candidate "would deliberately distort what other people say?"

Q19: Which candidate "is a hypocrite?"

Q20: Which candidate "is vindictive?"

Q21: Which candidate "would try to take credit for other people's ideas?"

Q22: Which candidate "likes to bend the rules?"

Q23: Which candidate "would withhold information or constructive feedback because he or she wants someone else to fail?"

Q24: Which candidate "would spread rumors or gossip to try to hurt people or the organization?"

Q25: Which candidate is "rude or uncivil to coworkers?"

Q26: Which candidate "would try to hurt someone's career because of a grudge?"

Q27: Which candidate "shows unfair favoritism toward some people?"

Q28: Which candidate "would steal from the organization?"

Q29: Which candidate "would falsify records if it would help his or her work situation?"

Q30: Which candidate "has high moral standards?" [8]

The procedure for scoring your results is in the **End Notes**. Regardless, I think you get the drift.

If thinking about this in terms of the Presidential Election annoys you, think of it in terms of a boss or coworker. For whom would you want to work? A person who is a hypocrite, a person who puts their interests so far above your own that you cease to exist for them, a person who would falsify records, a person who plays favorites, a person who passes the buck, and a person who carries a grudge? Or, would you prefer someone who does none of these things, or who most of the time can be counted on to do none of these things? And on the comparatively rare occasion when they do, they own it, accept responsibility, and apologize?

The answer is clear. You and most reasonable people prefer coworkers and bosses, prefer local and national leaders who can be trusted, who treat people with empathy and respect, who accept responsibility for their actions and who put the common good before their own.

No leader is perfect; no one earns a perfect score.

Fortunately, only a few miserably fail the PLIS. If it's only a boss, you can always leave and find another job.

But when an unethical person seeks high office, they endanger us all.

Sometimes in life, "the choice is clear."

All you need to do is recognize the "choice" you must make, understand its terms, and exercise sound judgment.

Just as in that long-ago high school oratory competition, the "choice is clear."

Choose virtue and honesty over villainy and deceit.

Or, as I've told generations of students, the true measure of a person is how they treat people who can't do anything for them or anything to them; choose the candidate who meets that test.

Choose, as in Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 7:12, An-Nawawi's Forty Hadith 13 (p.56), the Mahabharata 13.114.8 (Critical Edition), and all the world's great faiths, choose the candidate who best understands "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Really, it's just that simple.
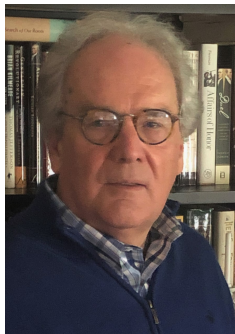
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End Notes

1. *Forensic, adjective,* in **Merriam-Webster** available at https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/forensic accessed October 26, 2020.
2. Northouse, Peter G. *"Perceived Leader Integrity Scale (PLIS),"* in **Leadership: Theory and Practice**, 7th Ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), pp. 355-358.
3. Ibid., p. 355.
4. Ibid., p. 339-341.
5. The entire discussion on toxic leadership is based on Northouse, pp. 339-341.
6. The entire discussion on ethical leadership is based on Northouse, pp. 341-348.
7. All questions are from Perceived Leader Integrity Scale in Northouse, pp. 356-358.
8. *"Perceived Leader Integrity Scale,"* Northouse, pp. 356-357.

How to Score the Perceived Leader Integrity Scale, from Northouse pp. 357-358.

Scoring: The PLIS measures your perceptions of another person's integrity in an organizational setting. Your responses on the PLIS indicate the degree to which you see that person's behavior as ethical.

Score the questionnaire by doing the following: First, reverse the scores on items 9-30 (i.e., 1 becomes 4, 2 becomes 3, 3 become 2, and 4 becomes 1). Next, sum the responses on all 30 items. A low score on the questionnaire indicates that you perceive the person you evaluated to be highly ethical. A high score indicates that you perceive the person to be very unethical. The interpretation of what the score represents follows.

Your score is a measure of your perceptions of another person's ethical integrity … the following interpretations can be made about your total score:

30-32 High Ethical: If your score is in this range, it means that you see the person you evaluated as highly ethical. Your impression of that person is very trustworthy and principled.

33-45 Moderate Ethical: Scores in this range mean that you see the person as moderately ethical. Your impression is that the person might engage in some unethical behaviors under certain conditions.

46-120: Low ethical: Scores in this range describe people who are seen as very unethical. Your impression is that the person you evaluated does things that are dishonest, unfair, and unprincipled almost anytime he or she has the opportunity.

In Case You Missed It

Women, Baseball & Poetry written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Andrew Roth**

Foreign policy: The point is not just to compromise, but to appreciate others Part Two written by Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education **Rev. Charles Brock**

Major Reforms Led to New County Government written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Judith Lynch**

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