

Analysis of the Shadow Side of Leadership

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Johnson (2012) highlights Parker Palmer is literally work with the metaphor of light and dark with by emphasis on the tint of shadow in describing ethical and unethical leadership. Leadership can also be viewed as white like sparkling clean, black as toxic and gray as on the verge of getting toxic. In general, leadership has a positive connotation because leaders influence followers. The number of followers a leader has is an indication of the influence that leaders have on their followers.

Reflection on the real life experiences of good and bad leaders coupled with movie clips, Johnson (2012) draws the curtains down about good and bad leadership. It is insightful to understand the dark side of leadership in order to understand the light side of leadership.

In general, everyone wants to do the right thing and be good people. This is a core attribute of the human nature. What makes good people to make bad decisions? How does the environment have an influence in making ethical and unethical decisions? Are these decisions learned or innate? Let us dig deeper to find the answers outlined in *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light or Shadow...*

Parker Palmer brings into surface the importance of “Leading from Within.” It is very important for a leader to know himself before leading others. I view myself as a role model in my personal and professional life. I have a moral obligation to take care of myself, my family, conduct myself no matter in which environment or under which circumstances. Serving as an early childhood administrator, I have personally and professionally faced situations and asked myself, “is this the right thing to do? “ As an example, when I had to document staff members on

their work performance which impacted the lives of children negatively when the safety of the children were compromised, I was faced to following protocol with disciplining and or terminating staff members. Another example is when I experienced toxic leadership, I have pondered on the question, "Was that a right decision that my supervisor made?" I knew in my gut my supervisor acted on self-motivating interests. According to Palmer, "the difference between moral and immoral leaders is as sharp as the contrast between light and the darkness (p.3)."

It is the expected norm that leaders carry on the calling for the good of others rather than self-interest. As an early childhood administrator of the profession of early childhood education, I think of the influence all adults (parents, teachers, administrators...etc.) have on the youngest members of our community: the children. Children look at adults for sense of direction to lead their way in the journey of life. In a child's mind, every adult is a leader because he learns from all of the sensory stimuli around him. Adults as role models and aspiring leaders pave the path for growth and development of all children.

In his, literally masterpiece Johnson (2012) acknowledges the influence of Palmer on his work. In our day-to-day life, we come across people who lift us up and people who push us down. Parker along with other researchers urges leaders to pay close attention to the negative, toxic, and the dark side of leadership and lists seven habits of bad leaders: Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular and Evil. Leaders who exhibit these habits are called toxic leaders. We meet these leaders in our day-to-day lives in person and through the media. Individuals with these habits are representative of the political, educational, medical sectors from private and governmental entities.

According to Johnson (2012), we take on a unique set of responsibilities when we function as a leader. These responsibilities are beyond the expectations of what is expected of us. “These dilemmas involve issues of power, privilege, information, consistency, loyalty and responsibility” (p.7). When we are faced with challenges, how we conduct ourselves with each of this dilemma is viewed as casting shadows in leadership. When each shadow gets darker, the leadership turns in to a toxic situation and when the shadow gets lighter, the leadership turns in to a positive experience. In analyzing each of these dilemmas explained by the author, my mind wondered with names of many leaders who failed in their positions and became successful in their leadership position comes to my mind. On an international level, a Adolf Hilter tops the list for toxic leadership and Mother Theresa tops the list for positive leadership.

Johnson (2012) shared leaders cast shadow in their followers due to unhealthy motivations, mistaken assumptions, lack of ethical expertise and setting personal priorities. In analyzing each of these shadow casters, unhealthy motivations top the list for me. In one of my previous positions as an early childhood administrator, I faced a sticky situation. My boss had a misunderstanding about me. My immediate supervisor who used to be my colleague took me out for a cup of coffee and shared with me about my boss’s concerns. My immediate supervisor had diffused the situation and explained to my boss (her immediate supervisor) about my intentions. My immediate supervisor and I have developed a professional relationship and she knew my motivation. My supervisor said, “Shine, everyone has an agenda at work and people are motivated for a variety of reasons.” I replied, “My agenda is to show up to work and do the very best job I can because my motivation is impacting the lives of children positively.” She

appreciated me repeating these as she had heard these before and she had relayed these to my boss already.

Johnson (2012) takes us down the journey of the greed exercised by the financial brokers during the recent international financial crisis. These brokers represented all levels of the banking and financial industry: from the mortgage Loan Officer to the Chief Executive Officers of world-renowned corporations. Along came Bernie Madoff, who paralyzed the financial stability of thousands of families and leading them down the path of hardship. These two examples reflect of the shadow of bad motivation of leaders.

How do we step out of the shadows? Johnson and Palmer prescribe to look within us to address our motivations, improve other ethical decision making skills and resist negativity. In analyzing each of these resist negativity grabbed my attention. I have been complimented many times for my cheerfulness and positivity. Both my parents instilled positivity and the set the ethical compass in the right direction to siblings and me. I have faced many hardships and I have always believed that things will work out with God's grace because this is what I was taught when I was growing up. I model positivity because I know my positive behavior is rewarded by positive outcomes. As a result, I always feel great about doing the right thing.

It is important to understand negative and dark leadership according to Johnson (2012). Stepping out of the shadow in to the light has to be developed within. Each of us are responsible to sharpen our leadership skills so that we can continue make an impact as educational leaders.

References

Johnson, C. E. (2012). Meeting the ethical challenges of leadership: Casting light or shadow (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.