

Student Leadership Training Speech

I am honored and flattered to be able to speak to you this evening. I have been asked to speak briefly about a few of my thoughts on leadership. As I started to think about this topic, I thought about the many experiences that I have had in leadership positions, and what I have learned from the accomplishments, obstacles, and challenges that I have had along the way. I also reflected on why the triumphs and successes that I have had turned out the way that they did. For this speech, I will focus on what makes leaders successful. I believe that leaders that are the most successful are the ones that have a few key qualities that keep them trusted to remain leaders.

I am positive that many of you could be at this podium offering words of wisdom on the topic of leadership. It's no doubt that you are an impressive and talented group of students. You all in one way or the other are stand outs. You are making your mark on campus and in the community, and throughout the world. You are accomplished, in that some of you are pioneers, and you have sought out new opportunities to change the status quo. You are an innovative bunch. You have spent countless hours dreaming, creating, and convincing others to hear you, to listen to you, to consider your ideas.

But these qualities you have are individual qualities. The question I have for you this evening is this: How do these

qualities transfer into your being effective and dynamic leaders?

There are thousands of definitions of the term leadership, but for the purposes of this student leadership training, I believe that being a leader or demonstrating leadership is a quality that one possesses when one is able to influence behavior for an intended purpose. A leader subscribes to making a personal commitment to something, be it an organization, a cause, or an idea. A leader takes responsibility for guiding others where they need to go. A leader doesn't have to be an officer of an organization, but someone/anyone who is willing to adopt an attitude about how to approach the needs of an organization, and providing whatever talents and energies are necessary to move the organization forward in a positive way.

I believe that the first and perhaps the most important quality that leaders must have is a vision or a dream, which is drawn from a concept or an idea. The best and brightest leaders always look toward and beyond the horizon. They envision the future with a positive outlook.

You all should dream and should think about the "what ifs" and all the possibilities that will improve and invigorate your organizations and especially your lives. How will you ever be able to realize your organization's full potential if you don't have a vision or a dream?

The most successful people in leadership positions always have a clear vision about how things should be and are able

to communicate that vision to others, and then are able to get others to work together toward achieving the vision.

I have learned from many experts on the topic of leadership, but for years, I have been a student of the teachings of Warren Bennis, who is an expert on leadership. In his book On Becoming a Leader, Mr. Bennis states that “leaders are people who are able to express themselves fully...They also know what they want, why they want it, and how to communicate what they want to others, in order to gain cooperation and support.”

Leaders should not place themselves in haughty positions where they are not able to listen to or to negotiate the details of the vision to others. Leaders should always listen to others and be flexible to others’ opinions. If your vision is on target, then the points representing the “big picture” to your vision won’t be lost.

Effective leaders are passionate about the cause they are promoting. They get others motivated by convincing them that the impossible is possible, and a good leader will take the first step themselves. A leader’s passion must be a quality that is sincerely and deeply felt, and is not self-absorbed. When someone is passionate about something, others are able to sense and feel it. A leader’s sincere passion about any matter can penetrate the very core of those who are listening, and can motivate others to do things beyond their belief. Leaders who are passionate about their ideas display a commitment that goes beyond

their own self-gratification. They also want others to share in their enthusiasm.

Effective leaders must have a philosophy and must lead with honesty and integrity. Leaders are clear about their personal values and beliefs. They keep people and projects on task by remaining consistent in their beliefs and values and by modeling how they expect others to perform. The best leaders build credibility by maintaining consistency between their words and their deeds.

Good leaders learn from failure, and always try again, sometimes in a different way. Effective leaders make a commitment to become lifelong learners, and when things don't turn out as planned, good leaders use what they've learned and try a different approach.

Good leaders also understand that team members sometimes will fall short of the mark—they will fail; instead of penalizing team members that fail, good leaders help them learn from their mistakes. Penalizing failure creates an atmosphere where team members become unwilling to, one, take healthy and strategic risks, and two, initiate new ideas, and an organization's ultimate success is dependent on these two key ingredients.

I also strongly believe that every great leader always has a great mentor or mentors that have been influential and have touched and cared about you personally. I hope that each of you has found people that you can call mentors. Great mentors care about who you are and what you might

become, about what you did and how well you did it. Mentors encourage you to take it to the next level.

Mentors come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and ages. That special person may be a professor, a dean, a coach, a parent or a fellow student. If that person does not listen, guide, support, nurture, say gentle words of encouragement, or tough words of love, then your mentor is not serving you in the best way possible.

Never underestimate the importance of mentors in your lives. Mentors affirm that you are valuable to society and to the lives of others. Mentors often give you advice or encouragement during crucial personal or professional moments.

I have found that the most memorable and fulfilling experiences that I have had were in part the result of listening to advice from my mentors. Even though I sometimes didn't realize the full meaning of their contributions until later in my professional life, my mentors opened up a whole world of knowledge to me then, and they continue to do so even now.

There is so much written and theorized about leadership. "Leaders are born, not made, the old saying goes." People are led to believe that leaders are born and not developed, and that not everyone has the potential to become an outstanding leader. I personally don't believe that. Everyone has the potential to lead others.

My challenge to you is that you continue to develop the tools you have to become an effective leader, and work to become a better listener, observer, and a believer in human achievement and human worth. This is what real, bold, and competent leadership is all about. This is what my colleagues and I expect, and this is what your aspirations should be.

As I close, please consider these final points:

- Own the fact that you are a leader.
- Show up. Leaders are there when they are needed, not just when it's convenient.
- Recognize the influence and power you have to set the tone, direction, and aspirations for your group or organization.
- Recognize the impact that your actions and the decisions you make have on you personally, on members of your group, and on the Yale community.
- Listen. More times than not, there will be others in your group who will have a better idea than you.
- Learn from your mistakes. When you don't succeed, find a different solution.
- Remember that there are many good leaders, but few GREAT leaders. In my opinion, the greatest leaders have the ability to surround themselves with exceptional people who contribute to the group's success.

So go forth and lead—boldly, with a vision, with passion, with integrity, and have fun. Thank you.