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The Meaning of Leadership Today

Definition of leadership: an act or instance of guidance or direction. That was the definition given to me by a dictionary, but what does a leader look like and what are his or her qualities? What separates a leader from a regular person? What is the true meaning of leadership?

To identify leadership in the present, I looked to the leadership of the past. Out of all the great leaders of our world, three stood out to me. Eleanor Roosevelt lived in an era where white males believed they ruled the world, yet she managed to make an impact on the lives of so many that desperately needed someone like her. She believed small minds discussed people, average minds discussed events and great minds discussed ideas. She traveled to help prisons, hospitals, and tenements during the depression. She also helped spread the word of her husband's "New Deal". So as you can see, she wasn't just one of the "ladies sipping tea." She took action in what she thought was her obligation. "Remember always that you not only have the right to be an individual, you have an obligation to be one." (Eleanor Roosevelt)

"We will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends...Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did what no one had the courage to do; he broke the silence. He not only broke the silence, but he began an uprising for those who had been treated unjustly for such a long time. He was part of the Montgomery Boycott, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Albany Movement, and the Birmingham Campaign. What truly leaves me in awe about him is how he managed to do it. He never used force, but instead used words to manipulate the thoughts and actions of others.

"Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person" (Mother Teresa). How many times have we said "you can go first", or "I'll go last"? Mother Teresa would've been the one to say "I'll go first"!

Mother Teresa noticed the lack of clinics, hospitals and facilities for the poor. She learned basic medical techniques and began to assist those who couldn't afford medication. Her actions influenced her former pupils to form a group known as "Missionaries of Charity". This group built facilities for the poor, and it inspired people to donate to the cause. She didn't wait around for someone to take a stand; she took it. By doing so, she opened the doors for those who needed someone to "go first". Sometimes that's all that people need to make great things happen.

There are endless qualities to a good leader, for example, confidence, tolerance, commitment, patience, determination, courage, inspirational, and humbleness. The quality that makes a GREAT leader is compassion. Compassion is what makes people want to follow. It's what makes others respect you, rather than fear you. I know that I'd rather listen to a friend than be forced to follow a tyrant.

So what separates a leader from the rest of us? Leaders know where they stand, and they

don't let anyone shake their beliefs. They dare to have a voice for those who are too afraid to speak. They are the ones who "go first" and the ones who contradict what was expected. That's what leadership has been in the past, what it is today, and what I believe it will be in the future.