

## Youth Leadership

Perhaps there has never been a generation of youth so acutely aware of the dangers threatening its future. Among an estimated world population of seven billion, youth make up 1.2 billion or 18 per cent. What do young people think about a world whose leadership they are about to inherit?

## Leadership

Leadership is required in many aspects of day-to-day life, at school as well as in family and working life. We can be effective in leadership roles only when we are capable.

So how do we become effective leaders? What qualities should we strive for? What capability does Nature require from us to be useful and effective leaders? Someone who has moulded his/her own character can influence others very profoundly through leadership.

### **Qualities, attitudes and principles that are important in leadership:**

- \* **Obedience.** In order to lead others, first we must learn to obey. Obedience is a necessary quality for a good leader.
- \* **Service in leadership.** "He who serves is served, but he who seeks the service of others is ill-served."
- \* **Wisdom in leadership.** Wisdom in leadership involves knowing how to nurture the qualities of others, encouraging the skills and supporting the weaknesses in others.
- \* **Nurture and teach others.** "Teaching begins with positive instruction", "The best teaching is assimilated when it is not taught"
- \* **Be a role model to others.** Leading by example has often been advocated as an effective form of leadership. As any parent knows, it does not work to tell children to do one thing and then do another yourself. People learn by example.

**Swamy Vivekananda** as a role model. Many Indian Pioneers as role models for us in leadership. Reading and learning about their lives can give great insight into how to develop leadership qualities.

\* **Capacity.** Leadership involves using a capacity that can influence the lives of those around us. "Having a capacity can be a danger if it is not used in the right way, because if it is not used in the right way it is used in the wrong way." Therefore, we have a responsibility in leadership to mould our own character, so that our capacity is used in the right way.

\* **Courage.** "Courage is not in not being afraid, courage is in being able to overcome fear. People think that a courageous man is never afraid. Nonsense! Most courageous men are always afraid, but when it is necessary not to be afraid, they are able not to be afraid at that moment.....So our qualities, our capacities, our strengths must manifest at need. If it is not there when it is needed, it is useless. Whether it is there or not is immaterial."

\* **Choose what is good.** "There is a famous principle in life, that we have always to choose between the pleasant and the good. It is a continuous principle, whether it is for children or adults, it is the same. It is always pleasant to be idle, but it is not good to be idle. It is pleasant to eat, it is perhaps not good to eat. It is pleasant to play the fool, it is not good to do it. So always remember when you are faced with a choice ..... which is pleasant, which is good. Decide what is good and do it. It is a very simple principle to follow."

\* **Tolerance.** "Tolerance is perhaps the most important spiritual quality as it seems to embrace, and emanate out of itself, the other virtues such as understanding, charity, and even love itself. I have often been told that love begets tolerance but, perhaps, the reverse that tolerance begets love, is true.

.....In the widest understanding of the word, tolerance implies that everything has a place in the universal hierarchy, and it is the understanding of this basic truth of creation that tolerance reveals. Tolerance thus reveals the correct perspective in the universal scheme of things. ....Tolerance can give us that quantum of time which will permit us to probe below the surface and see the underlying truth. This is a minimum benefit that tolerance confers - time to study and understand things. And inevitably when the externals are ignored and we penetrate deeper, then understanding, true understanding, comes and we find that persons are other than what they appear to be."

\* **Faith & Patience.** "True faith is... the dauntless courage which leads us on to success, it is that ubiquitous force which makes our path smooth, it is in fact the only thing that solves our problem of life."

"One who can wait is really a man who has faith in the process, in the guru, and therefore that faith yields us the ability to wait, which is nothing but what you call patience. So, if there is something which is the symbol of a spiritual person ..... it is his ability to wait. .... So the ability to wait shows patience and faith. Ability to wait for long periods shows greater and greater faith. Ability to wait infinitely shows infinite faith. So this is the capacity we must develop."

\* **Discrimination.** We often think that discrimination is there for choosing what we do about other people and external events. However, the "real form of Viveka (discrimination) is that when a man begins to realise his own defects and shortcomings and the bottom of his heart feels repentant for them." So discrimination requires looking at yourself first, and instigating change from the inside. This is more productive than blaming, judging, criticizing, commending or idolising others.

\* **Flexibility.** Leadership requires the ability to make decisions and plan, but also to be able to change plans when required and maintain flexibility.

\* **Humility** and an ability to learn from anyone and any situation. Leadership does not invest the leader with superiority. An effective leader will learn from anyone, and will always be open to new ideas. Humility is one of the most loveable qualities in a leader and inspires love in others. Studying the lives of the Pioneers shows this quality very clearly.

\* Ability to **accept criticism graciously.** Being human means that inevitably we are always learning, and one way to learn is from the comments and observations of others about us. This includes criticism. Leadership does not make someone immune from criticism. On the contrary, a good leader will always stay open to criticism from others.

\* **Ability to listen.** It is often easy for a leader to give orders, instructions and advice. It is often more important to listen to others and try to see things from many perspectives first.

- \* **Humanity vs Efficiency.** Sometimes we get so caught up in wanting to achieve goals and do things efficiently, that we forget about the people we are working with.
- \* **Inspire trust and loyalty in others.** In order to inspire trust and loyalty in others, we first need to show trust and loyalty towards them.
- \* **Inspire teamwork and brotherhood.** A good leader is able to build a team spirit, and encourage others to work together. This is best done by example. Then, everyone in the group will have their will firmly behind the common goal. There will be less friction and tension. This does not mean that everyone in the group has to agree on things all the time. On the contrary, different views are healthy, like different flowers in a garden. They add richness. The leader has the role of integrating all points of view.
- \* **Goal and vision.** It is useful for a leader to keep an overview of what the group is there for - what goal are they working towards together? The leader can bring everyone's attention back in focus if members of the group are diverted from the common goal. The leader is the person who most needs to keep a vision of the common goal active, and put his/her will behind bringing this about.
- \* **Enthusiasm.** Enthusiasm is a quality of the heart. It inspires others and is infectious. It can overcome difficulties and negativity.
- \* **Willingly accept responsibility and make decisions.** Leaders must be willing to take responsibility for the decisions they make and the work that is done by their group.
- \* **Work without worrying about results.** Often, worrying about success or failure stops us from really working for something in a heartfelt way. Because we are concerned about the result. We fear failure. Fear blocks the heart. Fearless work, without concern for results, yields the best approach in a leader.
- \* **Love.** If a leader follows the above principles, he or she will be leading from the heart, with love.