Theater: the training ground for creative leadership

Will Peters

University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses

Part of the Leadership Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1188

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.
THEATER: THE TRAINING GROUND FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

By: Will Peters

Senior Project
4/23/96
Dr. William S. Howe III
LDSP 498
Section 03
INTRODUCTION

As our world races toward the twenty-first century, the demand for capable leaders has risen dramatically. Our new environment, saturated with futuristic technology, rapid change, and ethical failure is bellowing for a new type of guidance, one that will successfully match the needs of a new frontier. This fresh leadership will have many of its important roots within the dynamic realm of the arts. No other medium has the ability to maintain such a visceral connection with the public at large, nor the capacity to furnish such a vivid personal awareness and compassion for our fellow humans. Theater, in particular, allows the artist to understand and empathize with human behavior first hand. On the stage, through the convincing transformation of self into character, the actor advocates cultural and moral standards that provide audiences with new visions and deeper self-realizations. "I know of no better, more involving way to learn about yourself, and about the phenomenon of being alive, than acting." (Barton, 1989). The most talented actors have the captivating ability to lead audiences towards a greater development of society, thought, and selfhood.

To the student of leadership studies, or to anyone who is remotely interested in the fascinating process of leading individuals, this parallel between leadership and theater should strike a passionate chord. There must be some relationship between the leader and the riveting actor who has the capacity within her or his instrument to
audiences so completely that no matter where she or he leads them the audience will follow. At that one moment in time, the actor has the audience in the palm of his hand. He has created and nurtured a realm that students of the theater have been studying for centuries, a domain that students of leadership studies have scarcely heard of: the realm of suspended disbelief. The only way the audience is going to believe what the actor is creating on the stage is if they empathetically, and sometimes unconsciously, suspend their natural tendency to disbelieve. When the actor encourages this suspension, belief unfolds and he may begin to take the audience where ever he chooses. He now holds the key to motivation: conviction.

How does the actor go about leading an audience towards this realm of suspended disbelief, and what implications does this have on the process of leadership? The answers to these questions will be at the heart of my discourse. My main objectives are to illustrate the relationship between leadership and theater and to analyze how this comparison may lend itself to the effective training of leaders. It is my firm belief, through personal experience and years of scrutiny on this subject, that once the doors of the theater open and flood their creative forces into the rivers of leadership, what will ensue will be a reservoir of dynamic and captivating leadership possibilities. Now, let us embark on our journey to unlock these doors by taking another look at a crisis that brings each field, leadership and theater, to the forefront of humanity.
The Crisis of Leadership in the Arts

There is an uncanny parallel between our nation's waning embodiment of effective leadership and the mortifying lack of governmental support for the arts in our modern civilization. Where have all of the legendary leaders gone, and why is our country not producing the type leadership icons that thrived within the lives of our society's past generations? There is one possible answer to this pressing leadership question that is worth considering, if not promoting. One of the potential solutions may lie within the simultaneous downfall of the arts in our nation alongside the decay of quality leadership within the American culture. It should come as no surprise that some of the empires throughout the world's history that produced the most influential leaders did so during a time of great artistic achievement that seemed to be unique to that particular community. The Golden Age of Greece and the Renaissance Era in Italy are only a few examples of a creative culture producing powerful leadership. During these time periods of passionate artistic expression, the value of art within the lives of all human beings was fervently and financially advocated through the governing bodies of the empire. The government had a genuine concern for not only the survival of all of the arts, but also for the active role that the arts played in the souls of the people. The leaders of the time understood the valuable connection between artistic expression and the gentle spirit of the public. What resulted from these periods of
political concern for the arts were leaders who were well connected with themselves, their society, and their soul. Art taught them how to be creative and how to use their passion and emotional drive to appeal to reason, power, and most of all, to empathy.

Now take a hard look at the feeble endurance of the arts within the American culture on the brink of the twenty-first century. How many of us go to museums or to the theater at leisure in order to taste the political, social, and emotional reactions of creative artists to the every day events of our dangerously fast-paced culture? At a steadily growing rate, more and more Americans do not care, or do not take the time to care about the valuable lesson of life that the arts have the power to convey. What is an even greater tragedy is that the American government directly encourages this artistic lethargy by producing legislature that thwarts artistic expression. A prime example of this is our government's recent endeavor to eliminate the NEA and cut funding for the arts throughout the nation. Obviously, the arts are one of the last priorities in the eyes of the government. When spending cuts must be made, the arts are one of the first things to go. The mind-set behind this way of prioritizing is sending the message to the American public that the arts are trivial and frivolous. Subsequently, we are experiencing a tragic trivialization of the American culture. When you begin to eliminate the medium through which a people's culture is expressed, you start to rape the very culture itself. In the wise words of
Vaclav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, "The health of the culture determines the health of the nation." When culture becomes trivial so does unity, patriotism, and creativity. Former President John F. Kennedy echoed these sentiments during his address at Amherst College in October of 1963:

Art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstones of our judgement...I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of our citizens.

Clearly, Kennedy was a leader who understood the power the arts have to impact a nation and guide the human spirit.

In our post-modern society we are missing a vital part of the leadership equation: cultural and creative expression. This missing link is thoroughly described by renowned psychologist Abraham H. Maslow as the aesthetic need. In his book Motivation and Personality, Maslow sets forth his infamous Hierarchy of Needs theory. His theory lists seven basic needs for human survival and motivation as it implies that the emergence of one need to the next will not occur until some prior satisfaction of the previous need has been met. In order, the seven needs that Maslow describes are as follows: physiological needs (hunger, thirst, sex, sleep, etc.), safety needs (security, stability, structure, etc.), belongingness and love needs (friends, lovers, parents, children, etc.), esteem needs (self-esteem, respect for others, self-confidence, worth, etc.), the need for self-actualization (self-fulfillment, living up to one's potential, etc.), the need to know and understand (curiosity, philosophizing, learning,
experimenting, etc.), and last, but certainly not least, the aesthetic need (beauty, art, expression, creativity, etc.). When one analyzes the priority of these needs and compares them with creative leadership several questions arise.

While Maslow admits that the need for the aesthetic is among our survival needs as humans, he lists it as the least important towards the development of self. When one looks at the Hierarchy of Needs Theory through the lens of creative and artistic leadership, the most obvious questions have to do with the positioning of the aesthetic need within the hierarchy. It is certainly understandable that the physiological and safety needs must be satisfied before an individual can be concerned about the proceeding five other needs that Maslow describes. One must survive physically before one can begin to nurture higher and more developed mental capabilities. However, when it comes time to explore belongingness, self-esteem, self-actualization, and curiosity, one of the primary tools that humans have used for centuries to examine these ideals is listed last on Maslow's hierarchy.

Implied within the aesthetic need is the need for art. Artistic expression questions our ideas about ourselves and our relationship to our environment and those around us. It leads us to new conceptions about love, esteem, self-actualization, and curiosity. Yet, for some reason we are taught early on in life, through theories similar to Maslow's Hierarchy, that art is an end in itself rather than a means to an end. We tend to overlook the power it has to
teach us about humanity and we dismiss it as a leisure activity rather than considering the artistic process as a necessity for personal growth. Thus, it becomes an end value, falling quite low within the average individual’s list of priorities. It is my argument that leadership will thrive when the lessons of artistic expression are given a new level of priority within the eyes of the leader. In order for this to occur, the training of leaders must incorporate the vehicle of art as a viable means towards self-actualization and group motivation. One possible incorporation involves using aspects of theater to introduce students of leadership to the value of creativity.

THE ART OF ACTING AS IT RELATES TO LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

In his book The Drama of Leadership, Robert J. Starratt awakens his readers to the crisis of leadership in the post-modern world by boldly suggesting a new kind of leadership grounded in a "dynamic agency where the stakes are high, where the outcome is uncertain, and where there are underlying struggles over human values." (1993) The agency he describes involves the possible synthesis of drama and leadership within the training of leaders. He argues that the leadership we choose to inspire at the turn of the century will undoubtedly involve "challenges of dramatic proportions", challenges that must be met with "sober understandings and memories gained at such a cost in human lives and suffering." According to Starratt, drama is one
a possible medium that we should look towards when considering the issue of leadership education.

Concentrating more precisely on the art of acting as it relates to leadership training, Starratt digs deeper within his analogy between drama and leadership when he analyzes the leader as a player. Within this comparison he draws upon certain skills that actors must acquire in order to be successful, and he relates these competencies to leadership. One of the skills that he describes falls under the category of what I, as a performer, like to call empathetic altruism. This phrase denotes selflessness motivated through the understanding of and identification with another's situation, feelings, and motives. Empathetic altruism differs from regular altruism because it goes a step further to imply that the selfless act is done out of a true relation and understanding of another's sentiment, rather than action motivated from mere kindness. In order for the actress to effectively portray a character, she must be able to identify passionately with what that character is going through at that particular moment in time. Her genuine relation to the sentiment of her character must be apparent, and she must find a way to make the audience a part of this identification. The actress performs this task selflessly in two ways. First, she must be careful not to pull focus unnecessarily from the other players, and second, she must bring the audience to center stage through the medium of empathy.

In response to the first point, the actor should be
cautious not to steal the spotlight, or the play may become an isolated microcosm about one person. This folly not only steals attention away from the other crucial elements related to the emergence of plot, but it also denies the audience the opportunity to connect with the other characters on stage. The most intelligent actors know where focus should appropriately be drawn to and they do their best to lead the audience’s attention towards this focus. For example, when one actor (actor "A") is delivering a long monologue, the audience’s focus should undoubtedly go to that actor. The other actor (actor "B"), who is on stage with the actor giving the monologue, has the difficult task of doing his best to guide this focus towards actor "A". The way in which actor "B" is reacting to actor "A’s" monologue is going to direct the audience’s attention. If actor "B" appears to be completely engrossed by the monologue, every time an audience member looks at actor "B", they will be forced to look back at the speaker and attention will be properly distributed. The greatest compliment that I have heard an actor receive went something like this: "You looked so riveted by what everyone else was saying on stage that every time I looked at you my attention was immediately drawn back to whoever happened to be speaking at the time." When the focus of the play was not on this particular actress, she made sure the audience knew exactly where their attention should be concentrated. Thus, focus was directed appropriately. "An actor’s eye that really sees attracts the spectator’s attention and directs it where he wants." (Moore, 1960). For this appropriate
distribution to occur, the actor must constantly be aware of how the other players fit into the play as a whole.

As I mentioned earlier, the second way the actress may appear to be engaged in empathetic altruism is by bringing the audience center stage. I do not mean this in a literal sense, but in a metaphysical one. When the audience can picture themselves in the situation of the character being portrayed by the actor, and they are able to forget that the character on stage is only a manifestation of the imagination of the actor, the player has succeeded in the portrayal. He has brought the sentiment and empathy of the audience to center stage and has catalyzed a reaction whereby the audience has lost themselves in the character being depicted. Here we have empathetic altruism occurring on a higher level than previously described. Instead of selflessness in terms of thinking of the other players’ needs, a type of selflessness occurs whereby the actor’s self steps out of the way and yields to the persona of the character. How the actor himself would act in the given circumstances of the play may be completely different from how the character described by the playwright would react. Thus, the actor must make every effort to empathize with the character as that character fits into the world of the play. If this is done successfully, the audience may suspend their disbelief, and in turn be empathetically engaged in the action on the stage.

These two points, not pulling focus away from the other players and bringing the audience center stage, have
significant applications within the field of leadership training. According to Starratt,

As a player, the leader must become, as it were, all the other players in the game...[this] implies that leaders recognize the integrity of other players' parts and allow the space for their performance, often ceding them center stage. (1993)

During the leadership process, the leader must be able to identify with the follower in an empathetic manner the same way the actor must develop an understanding of his character through empathy. When the leader nurtures an empathetic relationship to the sentiment of the follower, she or he will have a more insightful view of exactly where the follower is coming from. As this mutual understanding unfolds, the leader's job is to step out of the way in order to bring the follower's creative ideas to "center stage."

Just as the intelligent actor directs attention away from himself at appropriate moments within the play, the leader must also selflessly give the follower a chance to shine.

Within his book Leaders, Fools, and Imposters, Manfred F.R. Kets De Vries warns his readers of what can happen when leaders become narcissistic and neglect to pay proper attention to the ideas of the follower:

Their [narcissistic leaders'] main concern is the preservation of their own position and importance, and they are contemptuous of the needs of others and of the organization. Their uninhibited behavior, self-righteousness, arrogance, inattention to organizational structure and processes, and inability to accept a real interchange of ideas impair organizational functioning. This behavior fosters submissiveness and passive dependency, stifling the critical function of subordinates. (1993)

When leaders become self-involved, the process of leadership becomes an "isolated microcosm" accelerated by personal
ambition rather than by empathetic altruism. If leadership is to be truly effective in terms of motivating individuals towards a common good, the leader must make herself scarce to allow room for the open flow of creative energy from the followers. If the leader is too much of a presiding force, the followers will act in accordance to this force rather than exploring their individual ability to think critically.

Going back to the leader/actor analogy, the only way the actor is going to be convincing is if he allows himself to step out of the way as he yields to the persona of the character. According to Eugen Herrigel, author of *Zen in the Art of Archery*, this is done through:

A state of true selflessness, in which the doer [leader/actor] cannot be present any longer as 'himself'. Only the spirit is present, a kind of awareness which shows no trace of egohood and for that reason ranges without limit through all distances and depths, with 'eyes that hear and ears that see.' (1981)

Too much of himself is present in the character, the actor's performance becomes a mere replication of himself, rather than a creative exploration of the humanity found within another’s soul. Within this exploration, there is an ironic element of finding yourself by forgetting yourself. Before starting work on her movie *Sophie's Choice*, Meryl Streep said of her characterization process, "First I’ll learn Polish. Then I’ll forget me. Then I’ll get to her. That’s my plan of action." Shirley Maclaine expanded upon this idea when she once said, "I’m interested in getting out of my own way and letting the character happen." In order to be effective, leaders must also selflessly "get out of their own way" in an attempt to empower the follower. But
how should the leader go about taking this difficult step away from self-ambition and towards follower empowerment? The answer to this question may be found within an analysis of the actor’s meticulous process of characterization. More specifically, within the infamous Stanislavski System of Acting, one of the most complete processes by which actors go about building characters.

THE STANISLAVSKI SYSTEM OF ACTING IN RELATION TO THE TRAINING OF LEADERS

Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski was a great Russian actor, director, teacher, and reformer of the theater during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. He co-founded the Moscow Art Theater in 1898, and in so doing changed the way actors worked forever. "He did as much for performance as Darwin, Marx, and Freud did for biological science, political science, and psychology." (Barton, 1989). His system evokes truth in acting with an emphasis on ethical behavior:

Ethics impregnate all of Stanislavski’s teachings and are indivisible from his technology. He believed that an actor without ethics is only a craftsman, and without professional technique he is a dilettante. (Moore, 1960)

It was paramount to Stanislavski that the actor combine disciplined ethical judgement with strong performance technique. Out of a deep frustration towards actors with sloppy performance technique and poor ethical behavior, Stanislavski sought to develop a system whereby actors could gain control over the phenomenon of inspiration in an ethical, more realistic way.

Simplicity and scenic truth became important
principles, and the Stanislavski System emerged as a vigorous weapon against overacting, cliches, and mannerisms. The System has become a creative technique for the truest portrayal of characters in any play. (Moore, 1960).

When it is taught within the classroom, the Stanislavski System is commonly broken down into ten basic steps that lead actors to what Stanislavski called "elements of an action" within character development. These steps include: the given circumstances, the magic if, the super-objective, the through-line of actions, the imagination, the concentration of attention, truth and belief, communion and adaption, tempo-rhythm, and emotional memory. For our purposes of synthesizing new and creative ideas in relation to leadership training, I will analyze five of these steps and compare them to the leadership process.

THE GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE MAGIC IF

The given circumstances of the play correspond to what students of leadership refer to as the leader’s ability to see the "big picture." For this vision to occur, the leader must take into account all of the internal and external forces that will effect the leadership process as it comes to fruition. In the same regard, the actor must consider all of the events, feelings, and ideals that have molded the character up to a particular moment of the play in order to obtain the "big picture" of the characterization. According to Stanislavski,

Given circumstances include the plot of the play, the epoch, the time and place of the action, the conditions of life, the director’s and the actor’s interpretation,
the setting, the properties, lighting, sound effects - all that an actor encounters while he creates a role.

Stanislavski’s theory of given circumstances rests on the idea that people, as well as groups, operate in direct reaction to a set of circumstances that happened previous to the present time. In other words, "a person’s psychological and physical behavior is subject to the external influence of his environment." (Moore, 1960). These prior circumstances or environmental influences mold how the person or group in question will react in a given situation. For example, if the character being portrayed just found out prior to the scene in question that he won the lottery, this circumstance is going to severely effect how he is going to act in the upcoming scene. A certain knowledge of these circumstances will help the actor (or leader) determine how the character (or follower) will react in a given situation. "Only after the actor has studied the given circumstances will he be able to select the actions which involve his emotions and other inner experiences." (Moore, 1960).

Now that the given circumstances have been researched and established, the actress asks herself how she would respond "if" she were the character. What if she lived through the given circumstances that the playwright provided? How would she react as that character? "This is the means of entering the character’s givens." (Moore, 1960). This is where the empathetic process begins for the actress. It allows her to imagine, as accurately as possible, herself as if she were in the position of the character. The "magic if" is most helpful to the actor when
the actor has the least in common with his character, or the character acts in ways that are completely foreign to the way the actor would act as himself in the same situation. When this breach between character and actor occurs, the actor must work harder to "leave behind his own experiences of disillusionment and scientific perspective." (Barton, 1989). The actor does this as much as possible to "stop feeling superior or judgemental, and to play the character from a full heart, in his own vision of reality." (Barton, 1989). Thus, the actor’s self, in terms of his own bias and prejudice, moves out of the way to make room for the character. The result of this empathy is the feeling that if the actress were in the character’s place, she would be bound to act as the character would.

When comparing the relationship between Stanislavski’s characterization methods of the "Given Circumstances and the "Magic If" to the leadership process, many applications arise. The most crucial similarity lies within the idea of the leader exploring the character of the follower by examining the given circumstances of the leadership environment. The conditions of life, world events, the leader’s vision, and the time and place that the leadership process is occurring in are each going to effect how the followers are going to react to the leadership situation. Where are the followers coming from? What circumstances have led them into the present time? Why are they there? The answers to these important questions will help the leader act from a stand point of empathetic concern for the integrity of the follower. It is only when the leader
understands the follower’s situation that he may begin to lead. Consider situational leadership as an example:

Situational Leadership assumes a dynamic interaction where the readiness level of the followers may change, and where the leader’s behavior must change appropriately in order to maintain the performance of the followers. (Hersey and Blanchard, 1991)

If the leader is going to adapt appropriately to the situation, she must make an honest attempt to guess how her followers are going to react when and if the situation occurs. This requires a certain knowledge of the character of the followers. When a leader understands this character, she may adapt her behavior in an interactive manner to incorporate and nurture the changing needs of the follower. The leader must ask herself how she would react if she were in the shoes of the follower, with full sensitivity to the given circumstances that have molded the follower’s reasons for being under the leader’s direction. Implied within this empathy is the leader’s ability to leave his own bias behind in order to uplift and analyze, without preconceived judgement, the character of the follower. When this characterization has been considered, the leader will have developed an empathetic position towards the follower that will make way for mutual influence during the leadership process.

IMAGINATION AND COMMUNICATION

Another important aspect of the Stanislavski System of Characterization as it relates to leadership studies lies
within the power the imagination has to create communion between actors on the stage. "An honest, unbroken communion between actors holds the spectator’s attention and makes them a part of what takes place on stage." (Moore, 1960).

Communion is yet another element that has the power to bring the audience center stage in the metaphysical sense that was mentioned earlier. When the audience is able to feel the chemistry created between the actors to the point where they share the actors’ thoughts, feelings, and motives, the communion is a success. Stanislavski believed that:

> To be in communion with another person on stage means to be aware of that person’s presence, to make sure that he hears and understands what you tell him and that you hear and understand what he tells you. This means mutual influence. (Moore, 1960)

Inherent within this communion is the actor’s ability to listen with energy, determination, and conviction. The mark of a poorly trained actor is one who believes that his performance is on hold when he is not speaking. On the contrary, while the actor is on stage in front of hundreds of people, someone is bound to be watching him at any given moment of the performance. Therefore, energy, conviction, and determination must be maintained throughout the production, especially when he is not speaking. If maintenance occurs, even the bad actor will respond, and the likelihood of communion will be greater.

If communion is to be genuine, the actress must look as though she is hearing what the other player is telling her for the first time. She can not let it show that she has rehearsed and performed a particular scene a thousand times over. This is where the imagination comes into play. The
actor's imagination must be active throughout the entire performance in order to keep concentration levels high and maintain relationships that are constantly on the cutting-edge. Within his discourse on the mastery of the imagination, Stanislavski discusses several techniques that actor's may use to keep their imaginations agile and vivid. One of these techniques relies on the actor constantly imagining what he would have to do in order to fathom a specific, physical response from the other player:

If an actor, while trying to influence his partner, strives to obtain a definite physical response (for instance a smile, a shrug of a shoulder, a movement of the spine), his aim becomes concrete; his imagination will be stirred and his attention concentrated, and he will achieve a strong communion. (Moore, 1960)

Imagining a certain physical response will keep the actor emotionally and physically engaged with his partner, which will greater the possibility of a powerful communion. For example, if an actor's text calls for him to cheer-up his partner on stage, the actor may try to imagine what he would have to do to make the other actor smile. This might involve him acting silly, affecting his speech to sound funny, or it may even call for the actor to find ways to make himself look worse than the other unhappy partner. All of these actions have the physical goal of making the other person smile. This imagined goal gives the actor something to work towards and it motivates him to dive into his own creative resources to find an innovative means to achieve the goal. Thus, not only does the goal have to be imaginative, but so does the way in which the goal will be accomplished.
No matter what the imagined response may be, the actor must choose a means to this response that is believable. The action must look real for the audience and the partner to believe it. The imagination of the actor is the key to this believability because it plays a dominant role in the actor's job of transforming the play into an artistic reality. It is through imagination that the actor is able to mesh together the director's vision and his own characterization and accompany them with believable actions.

The imagination must be developed; it must be alert, rich, and active. An actor must learn to think on any theme. He must observe people and their behavior, try to understand their mentality. He must be sure to notice what is around him. He must learn to compare. He must learn to dream and with his inner vision create scenes and take part in them. (Moore, 1960)

The nurturing of the imagination is one of the most critical processes that the actress will undergo on her road towards mastery. In her everyday life, the actress is constantly involved in creative conjecture that questions the bounds of human interaction and probes deep into the incentives behind social behavior. If she is going to recreate human motivation on the stage, the actress must observe it at a rational level and interject her own sense of imagination into what she discovers. To any creative artist, the following statement must ring true: "An act of the imagination makes being alive possible." (Shurtleff, 1978).

Just as actors must be in communion with one another in order to be effective, so must leaders be in communion with their followers. The route to this communion in both fields, theater and leadership, is extremely similar. As
stated above, the actress will achieve communion if she hears and understands what is being said to her and if she makes sure that what she is saying is heard and understood by the other player. In the same respect, the leader must engage in this reciprocal process of hearing and understanding the follower if their relationship is to be in communion. There is nothing more discouraging to the development of the follower than a leader who seems uninterested in what the follower has to say. If leaders do not listen to their followers with energy, determination, and conviction, the followers are less likely to develop confidence and voice their opinions. Leaders tend to forget how important their reaction to the ideas of the followers are to the overall evolution of follower empowerment. When the leader is an active listener, the follower is reassured that what he is saying is being given intelligent consideration. This courtesy establishes respect, confidence, and most of all, a powerful communion between the leader and the follower. The leader’s job is not over when she is finished speaking. The same energy she had when she was communicating her ideas must be maintained while she is listening to the reactions of her followers. If this maintenance does not occur, followers will notice the lack of alertness and concern within the leader and their energy will also plummet.

Implicit within the leader’s concern for the opinions of the follower is his ability to appear as though he is communicating his ideas for the first time. If the leader is going to spark interest and facilitate a communion with
the followers, his perspectives must be fresh, energetic. Usually, these perspectives are ones that the leader has expressed several other times before on various occasions within the context of a different environment. The same way the actor must use his imagination to maintain concentration levels and communion, the leader must think of creative ways to assert his ideas as though they are being expressed for the very first time. The cultivation of the imagination within the leader is the key to this crisp originality. If the imagination is "alert, rich, and active" the possibility of communion between the leader and the follower will be greater. The imagination stimulates spontaneity and inspiration, which lead to vital breakthroughs in the leadership process. Within his book Managing as a Performing Art, Peter B. Vaill analyzes the power these breakthroughs have to capture attention as they are demonstrated in the artistic realm:

The arts stand open to the possibility that the individual person is capable of spontaneously generating new material, material that goes far beyond what anyone imagined was possible. It might not be an exaggeration to say that the expectation of such periodic breakthroughs is the most powerful thing about the arts and what gives them their most profound human meaning.

The artistic process relies on the imagination of the artist to conceptualize dreams that others thought could never become a reality. When these breakthroughs occur, art evolves. Similarly, the leader must learn how to tap into these "new materials and breakthroughs" through the instrument of her imagination if communion within the leadership process is to thrive. Looking towards
Stanislavski’s techniques pertaining to the cultivation of the imagination may help leaders with this important process whose end result is communion with the follower. When communion is achieved, the course of leadership will have reached a level of mutual influence where the relationship between the leader and the follower is the most powerful link in the entire process. As James MacGregor Burns suggests:

We must see power - and leadership - as not things but as relationships. It lies in seeing that the most powerful influences consist of deeply human relationships in which two or more persons engage with one another. It lies in a more realistic, a more sophisticated understanding of power, and of the often far more consequential exercise of mutual persuasion, exchange, and transformation - in short, of leadership. When communion is established through the vehicle of imagination and compassion, the power of the leadership process will lie where it belongs: in the relationship between the leader and the follower.

**THE SUPER-OBJECTIVE**

A final, brief point I want to make in comparing Stanislavski’s System of Acting with the training of leaders has to do with what Stanislavski believed was the motivating force behind all human action: the super-objective.

Everyone has something she wants more out of life than anything else. For most of us this is the driving force, the cause we would go to the mat or even to war for. By moving through the character’s given circumstances and immersing yourself in the magic If, the super-objective may come clear. It should always be emotional rather than intellectual and strong enough to involve ‘our whole physical and spiritual being.’ The super-objective unifies all the tiny objectives that occupy moment-to-moment living. (Barton, 1989)
Stanislavski strongly believed that every action an actor chooses to make within the context of the character should be closely related to that character’s super-objective, or main goal of the play. The answer to the question: "What does my character want in this scene more than anything else?" should dictate the actor’s physical actions at any given moment. For example, if the character’s super-objective within the play is to prove his innocence to the other players, many of his actions are going to be directed towards this goal. Knowledge of the super-objective gives the actor a reason for any given action during the course of the performance. It helps him keep in mind the "big picture" in relation to the playwright’s purpose for including the character within the play.

In the same respect, leaders must constantly be in touch with their own super-objectives within the leadership process. A clear idea of purpose is necessary to eliminate superfluous activity and encourage focus within the followers. When leaders begin to delineate from their goals, attention is sacrificed and valuable time is lost. One of the leader’s main goals as the facilitator of the group is to keep the process of leadership on the right track towards the super-objective of the collaboration. This is especially true when the followers are empowered to a large extent. Empowerment can only be successful when it is directed towards the original purpose of the leader/follower relationship. When followers begin to wane from this purpose, the leader must step in and encourage
them to analyze how their efforts fit into the larger picture of the group's objectives. Just as the actor can not begin to act without a clear knowledge of his super-objective, the leader can not begin to lead without first conceptualizing her super-objective and then clearly communicating this plan to her followers. Without this organization of goals, direction will be lost and progression thwarted. Leaders must be trained to visualize the super-objective of their reason for leading and they must be able to direct all activity towards its fruition.

**THE DIRECTOR AS LEADER**

To conclude my discourse on the relationship of theater to the training of leaders I want to end with an example of a leader who, by the very nature of his crucial relationship with the actor, must embody each of the techniques that I have thus far described. It is the director of the theatrical production that must not only have an instinctive awareness of these principles, but must also have the unique ability to tap into the spirit and the potential of the actor in order to bring honest characterizations to the surface. The Italian sculpture, painter, architect, and poet Michelangelo has been quoted as saying of one of his most famous sculptures that he "merely took a slab of marble and trimmed away the access to get to the art." In comparison, it is the director's job to chisel away at obstacles that may hinder the actor's process of characterization. The director must find creative ways to
reveal a genuine work of art within the actor in the form of a character. Without the nurturing guidance of the director, the "breakthroughs" that are so vital to the actor's process of characterization will not have the stimulation they need to come alive.

The end product of any rehearsal process within the theater is complete empowerment of the actors, who for the purposes of our analogy, may be thought of as the followers. During the performance it is the actress, not her director who will be making the director's visions come alive on the stage. Hardly has the director shown the actress the right way when the actress must go on alone. With this in mind, the director must make every effort within the rehearsal process to allow the actors to eventually become self-directed. To do this, the director must

...rely on the actor's own sense of integrity, creativity, and intelligence to carry the drama to a humanly fulfilling conclusion. He or she does this by referring continually to the meaning and purpose of the drama itself, while encouraging the players to express the drama in their own terms. The director's job is to eventually become unnecessary, to turn the show over to the actors. (Starratt, 1993)

In order for the director to preserve the actor's own sense of "integrity, creativity, and intelligence" he must constantly be engaged in meaningful conversation with the actor pertaining to how the actor perceives his character in light of the given circumstances of the play and in relation to the director's vision. Before the first rehearsal even begins, it is wise for the director to sit down and discuss these issues with each actor so that both parties are clear about one another's individual ideas. As the creative
process unfolds within the context of rehearsals, the director constantly encourages the actor to try new approaches and to look at things from different angles. When one approach is not working, it is the director's job to suggest another method in order to fathom truth and believability within the actor's characterization. With every corner turned the actor, not the director, is the one who is making the new discoveries and breakthroughs. This requires the director to have an overly acute sense of the actor's individuality and it calls upon the director's imaginative ability to synthesize these individualities into a uniform, creative whole. "This, however, does not mean that he should adapt himself to an actor. The director should not demand the same colors from different actors. Neither should he demand definite results, a definite expression or gesture or intonation." (Moore, 1960). During the search for character development, the director runs the risk of being too specific and forthright in his requests for the actor's honest portrayal. When this happens, the actors become mere imitators of the director as opposed to creative, self-searching artists.

In the rehearsal process, one of the most negative, detrimental things a director can do to hinder the actor's process of characterization is to give him what is commonly known in the theater as a "line reading." A line reading occurs when the director reads the actor's text out loud exactly the way he wishes the actor to say it, with specific intonations, gestures, and expressions. As soon as the line
reading is given, the actress looses her creative opportunity to interpret the line because the director has already demonstrated exactly how he wishes the line to be acted. All hopes of empowerment and the preservation of individuality immediately go down the tubes and the actress becomes an imitator, mimicking the director’s translation. In addition, the character becomes ownership of the director and the actress becomes less likely to have confidence in her own capacity to create. To avoid this deconstruction, directors may ask their actors to read the line as if they were in a certain situation that may have evoked the same type of emotions that the text is attempting to convey. The director may even go as far to describe a certain scenario, vivid with images and personal attachments, that may lead the actor toward a desired response. Statements like, "remember the way you felt when you had your first kiss— that’s the same kind of feeling that this line is calling for" help the actor find a personal resource to fathom certain emotions. Instead of spoon-feeding the actor with an exact interpretation, the director must "balance control and guidance with freedom and responsibility" (Starratt, 1993) by allowing the actor to come to his own conclusions via the facilitation of the director.

This type of creative empowerment has tremendous applications to the leadership process. If the leader is to encourage the followers to eventually be self-directed, she must rely on their "integrity, creativity, and intelligence" to make certain decisions. Cultivating these constructive qualities requires that the leader be in constant
conversation with the followers, on an individual basis, inquiring how their perspectives fit into the leader’s vision. Just as the director must be overly sensitive to the distinctiveness of the actor, the leader must work to preserve the follower’s individuality at every level. "Line readings", or instructing the followers exactly how to act or think in a certain manner, are just as debilitating in the realm of leadership as they are in the world of the theater. The last thing the leader should want is a group of followers that can not think on their own, but require the approval of the leader in order to act. These followers are sheep, only capable of imitation. If mimicking occurs in the leadership process the leader must reexamine her methods of empowerment. Each follower will undoubtedly have strengths and weaknesses. It is the leader’s job to uplift the strengths of each individual so they counteract the weaknesses of the group.

Hence leadership in this sense is empowering; it is the ability to admit and even to celebrate that others have the ability and the skills to carry on the job with excellence in the absence of the leader." (Starratt, 1993)

When the followers become self-directed, fully capable of responsible, moral action without the influence of the leader, the leader has succeeded in what should be the super-objective of any leadership process: active empowerment.
CONCLUSION

The overall quality of leadership as we embark into the brave new world of the twenty-first century is going to rely on our approach to the training of leaders. At every level in our society, be it at the level of the family, the schools, the community, the government, or the world, we are going to need empathetic leaders who are capable of rising to the unknown challenges of a new environment. Implicit within this new horizon of leadership is the leader’s ability to explore unfamiliar territory and establish cohesive relationships in the midst of chaos, order, and angst. This is what the theater does. Through the art of characterization, the actress explores foreign concepts and finds a creative way to bring them to a level of balanced comprehension between herself and her audience. Via the strength of her imagination and the help of her director, she breaks through the walls of conventionality and creates a powerful communion that brings her audience center stage. In so doing, the audience suspends their disbelief and together, for that one moment in time, actress and audience walk on an empathetic journey towards mutual understanding.

In this age of permanent white water, where the basic viability and effectiveness of organizations are everywhere in doubt, we are in acute need of similar breakthroughs in all sectors of society. The performing arts demonstrate this, but they show additionally how an ethos of quality and creativity can pervade and undergrid an entire field or discipline, transcending time and space and welding thousands of people together in a shared adventure. (Vaill, 1989)

The motivational prowess of creativity must not be overlooked when sculpting the union between the leader and
the follower. If creativity is to be the backbone of the leadership equation, leaders must be trained to be in communion with their aesthetic needs. Theater is one possible route towards this interchange. It encourages the release of the imagination, the refinement of empathy, and the nurturing of compassionate relationships. Acting is a life-enhancing experience and leadership is a solemn attempt to improve the quality of life. When these two fields are synthesized at the educational level, leaders with keen creative and artistic instincts will undoubtedly flourish. There is no point in anticipating in thought what only experience can teach. If you are serious about your leadership position take an acting class, go see more theater, or get involved at some level in a theatrical production. Discover for yourself the values the theater has to teach us about leadership. Don’t take my word for it; after all, I have only touched the tip of this iceberg.

"Love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art."
-Konstantin Stanislavski

BY: [Signature]
BIBLIOGRAPHY


