

“The Great Crusade”: Ike and the Men of D-Day

Activity C: Eisenhower on Leadership

Dwight Eisenhower knew a great deal about leadership. After all, he led the Allied Forces to victory during World War II and then became the 34th President of the United States from 1953-1961.

In 1965, Eisenhower wrote an article for *Reader’s Digest* on the question of, “What is Leadership?” Eisenhower’s article focused on several key points of leadership, providing examples and definitions of what it takes to be a good leader. Eisenhower’s examples all were based upon his own career as the Supreme Allied Commander during World War II, as well as his two terms as President of the United States.

Below are the 6 key aspects of leadership that Eisenhower specifically mentioned in his article, as well as one or two quotes from the article defining each one.

Activity: Working individually or in groups, have your students read through the leadership traits and quotes below and answer the questions below each leadership trait. Then, as a class, answer and discuss the Wrap Up Questions provided below. You may also want to break your class into six groups and assign each group one of the leadership traits, having that group focus exclusively on that trait and then sharing their thoughts before engaging in the all-class discussion/wrap-up questions at the end.

Selfless Dedication

“Perhaps the greatest of these qualities is single-minded and selfless dedication to the task at hand. Any leader worth his salt must of course possess a certain amount of ego, a justifiable pride in his own accomplishments. But if he is truly a great leader, the cause must predominate over self. An old and respected commander of mine used to say, ‘Always take your job seriously, never yourself.’”

Define Dedication, and what it means to be “Selfless.”

Do the words “selfless dedication” go together? Can you think of an example in your own life that shows a dedication to something that helps others, or something bigger than yourself?

Courage and Conviction

“Our country, of course, has no monopoly on such dedication.”

Eisenhower cited Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany after WWII, as an example of someone who had both courage and conviction: “. . .he was firm in support of his convictions, as any real leader must be. Most important of all, his every thought and action were directed toward the restoration of his country to an honored place in the society of nations. He never deviated from this high purpose, and personal ambition never clouded his view.”

What does it mean to be courageous? Identify a time in your life when you had to be courageous.

Define “conviction.”

Fortitude

“Closely related to dedication is another vital ingredient of leadership: fortitude of spirit—the capacity to stand strong under reverses, to rise from defeat and do battle again, to learn from one’s mistakes and push on to the ultimate goal.”

Define “Fortitude.”

Examining Eisenhower’s Definition of Fortitude, what are some other words that might also this trait?

Humility

“A sense of humility is a quality I have observed in every leader whom I have deeply admired.”

“My own conviction is that every leader should have enough humility to accept, publicly, the responsibility for the mistakes of the subordinates he has himself selected and, likewise, to give them credit, publicly, for their triumphs.”

Define “Humility.”

When have you or when have you seen others display humility, and why do you think this is such an important trait for good leadership?

Thorough Homework

“Another quality common to leaders is their willingness to work hard, to prepare themselves, to know their field of activity thoroughly. I have often heard it said of some individual: “Oh, he’ll get by on his personality.” Well, he may “get by” for a time, but if a charming personality is all he has, the day will come when he will find himself looking for a job.”

How does homework help prepare you for school?

Are there other areas in life where thorough homework can be of help?

How can you prepare yourself for success?

Power of Persuasion

“A trait always noticeable in a successful leader is his ability to persuade others. There are times, of course, when every leader must make a decision and see that it is carried out regardless of what others may think. But whenever men can be persuaded rather than ordered—when they can be made to feel that they have participated in developing the plan—they approach their tasks with understanding and enthusiasm.”

What is the difference between persuading someone to do something and ordering them to do something?

Define “persuasion.”

Heart and Mind

“I learned a long time ago that the qualities of leadership wear no single outward badge. . . . It would be hard to imagine two men more unlike, in external traits, than General Marshall and Winston Churchill. Marshall was remote in manner, often abrupt. I knew no man who could call him an intimate friend. Churchill was convivial, outgoing, full of humor. The give-and-take of conferences delighted him; he liked people, and people instantly liked him. Yet both men had the same inner qualities of heart and mind that made them great leaders.”

In the context of this quote, define heart.

How can we show our heart and characters to others?

At Every Level

“I have been talking here about leadership in military and government service, but the same fundamentals apply at every level, in every walk of life. In the Army, good leadership must go down through the ranks to the youngest corporal; in business there is always need of men who can direct others effectively; in community life we need men and women who, by right thinking and sound deeds, influence others. This is the way leadership works in a democracy. And from the ranks of little leaders eventually come big leaders.”

What does Eisenhower mean when he refers to “little leaders”?

How can we be leaders in our communities today?

How can we positively influence others as leaders?

Conclusion

“Any man who does his work well, who is justifiably self-confident and not unduly disturbed by the jeers of the cynics and the shirkers, any man who stays true to decent motives and is considerate of others is, in essence, a leader. Whether or not he is ever singled out for prominence, he is bound to achieve great inner satisfaction in turning out superior work. And that, by the way, is what the good Lord put us on this earth for.”

All Class Discussion and Wrap-Up Questions:

Which of these traits do you think is most important for a leader to possess?

Can you think of a moment in your life when you have had to be a leader? If so, did you use any of the traits listed above?

Who do you know that is a good leader? What makes them so?

Are there any qualities of being a good leader that Eisenhower did not mention in his article?

What do you think of Eisenhower’s definition of a leader?