Business Institutions Program: 394

Leadership, Ethics, and You

Fall Term 2015
Class Starts: Sept. 22nd, 2015
Tu & Th.: 3:30–4:50 pm
Univ. Hall 121

Professor: Verinder K. Syal
v-syal@northwestern.edu
Cell: 847.975.6054

TA: Carol Chen
carol.chen@u.northwestern.edu
Cell: 224.425.6473

“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power” – Abraham Lincoln

“What luck for rulers that men do not think.” – Adolf Hitler

“All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” - Edmund Burke

“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.” - Leo Tolstoy

“Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.” - Carl Jung

**Course Overview:**
Who is a leader and what is leadership? Are leaders born or can leaders be made or make themselves? What does it take to become a leader?

Some leaders have conquered vast lands; others have produced profound thought. Some assimilated all that they encountered; others destroyed everything they touched. Some were heroes; others despots. Even today, some build their people and institutions; others focus on their ego and their net worth. Some serve, some take. Why?

We will search for answers by studying historical and current leaders, their character, traits, and methods. In our quest for clarity we will ask: Are there any Universal Principles of Leadership (“UPL”)? We will examine the role ethics, integrity, and character play in leadership? Are these a handicap or are they the very essence of leadership, and perhaps even life?

We will use real life case studies to think about situations that you are likely to encounter in the actual world that awaits you out there. We will think about ethical challenges, crucibles, and grappling with the purpose of leadership and life. We will discuss some of the necessary tools for leadership including Vision, Aligning, Motivating, and Execution (as in getting things done).

But the most important question that you will address will be about yourself: **“What kind of leader do I plan to be?”** Ultimately life is not about what others do, or what is done to you; it is about you, what you do, how you choose to lead, and how you choose to live your life. Yes, it is a choice. And you make the choice.

“It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.” – Sir Edmund Hillary
Course Syllabus:
The mind map below lays out the course work pictorially. The details for each class, papers, team projects, grading – you get the idea – will all be found on Canvas.

“Participant Centered Learning” will be our philosophy. All that matters is your learning. It has been shown that when students participate actively and vigorously they learn more. So everyone will need to step forward and get onto the playing field. There will be no place to hide; the workload will occasionally be daunting but, if you are like my past students, you will be energized. Don’t get sidetracked by political correctness; speak your mind but always with civility.

Norms:
Besides the usual University norms, here are a few quick operating rules.

- Being absent is an absolute no-no. The class generally has 100% attendance.
- Classes will start and end on time. Doors will close at 3:30 pm; coming in late disturbs everyone. Come early.
- Participation, and even more importantly CONTRIBUTION, is the key to this class. If you are absent you can’t obviously do either. Please stay healthy. There are only 19 classes. (I do not understand Reading Week.)
- Make a concerted effort to get to know everyone in the class. These are some of the best contacts you will even make in your life. Trust is the key ingredient to making this class successful. (A comment from a previous class: “The other nice thing about this class is, even as a senior who has rarely throughout his career at Northwestern hung out with kids from classes, you really can make some friends in this class and have a lot of fun with it. We organized our own parties 3 times and perhaps surprisingly they were all a lot of fun.”)
- No laptops are allowed in the classroom except when your team makes a presentation. Turn cell phones off.
- Water and beverages are acceptable; but please do not bring, or consume, any food in the class.
- Attendance at the first class, and at the final exam (Dec 7, 11:30 – 2:30 pm), is mandatory. No exceptions.

Grading (details on Canvas):
While a grade is required, why not approach this class with a desire to learn lessons that might just last you a lifetime. The key components of the grade are:
• Final Paper: “The Leader I Plan To Be” – 10 pages. 40%
• Related 5-minute presentation on Dec. 7th 5%
• One other paper: UPL, “Peeling Back The Onion” 15%
• One Team Presentation including a 2-page write-up 10%
• Class Attendance & Contribution 20%
• Online Participation 5%
• Homework (before every class) 10%

**Team Presentations:** We will have about 8 teams, with 3 people each. As a class we will study nine leaders: 5 Historical, and 4 Business. About half of the presentations must be of certified "bad" leaders. The contrast allows us to better understand the differences between the good and bad leaders. You will choose from a list that will be posted on Blackboard well before class starts. **Why not choose your team before the first class?**

**Required Texts (Available from Amazon or Norris):**
1. **Good to Great** by Jim Collins. An absolutely terrific book on leadership, its qualities, and its impact on developing a great company. None of the leaders of these great companies got, or sought, much press.
2. **True North** – Bill George. Without a compass can you really navigate leadership or your life?
3. **How Good People Make Tough Choices** by Rushworth M. Kidder. While deciding between Right and Right decisions can be tough, why do so many have a tough time between Right and Wrong decisions?
4. **How Will You Measure Your Life?** by Clayton M. Christensen. The ultimate question, perhaps.
5. **Give & Take** by Adam Grant. Some people are Givers, some Takers, and others are Matchers (quid pro quo). Which one are you? And who amongst these is the most successful? Be prepared for a surprise.
6. **Winners Never Cheat** by Jon Huntsman. In this day and age of optional ethics, we need to revisit age-old wisdom. A student, from our last class, recommended this book to me.
7. A Case pack from Harvard Business Review Online: **Details will be posted on Canvas.** Please bring a hardcopy of the case, to be discussed, to the class. You will need to refer to it from time to time.

**Why not read a few of these books before school starts?**

**Final Thought:** This course is ultimately a journey in introspection, something that is alien to most of us. We keep thinking that leadership is about leading others, but how can we lead others without first learning to lead ourselves? Furthermore, how can we lead ourselves without understanding who we are and where we want to go?

As scary as this may sound on the surface, is this not the purpose of life? “Know thyself,” the sages say. “Be thine own self be true.” This will be a rewarding journey; of that I am certain. The more you are willing to be honest with yourself and open in class, the more fulfilling it will be.

What are we most scared of? The opinion of others, of being found wanting, of not being good enough? Darkness can only be dispelled by light. Together we must create the conditions that will allow each of us to step forward. Sensitivity and honest feedback can co-exist; from travails and despair, perceived or real, insight will appear.

Even though I do not know any of you, I already know that you are leaders. What kind of a leader you will be – that is yet to be determined. You must take the time and make the effort to get to know each other. Most importantly, you must get to know yourself.

I am excited to take this journey with you. My job will be to support you when needed, cajole you when necessary, and push you when called for. I hope you will explore and embrace those great capacities that surely lie within you.

**Professor Verinder Syal**