

# Today's Crisis in Leadership is Tomorrow's Challenge, Too

Hi folks,

My name is Patrick Sciarratta and I am proud to have been chosen to address you today at this leadership conference.

One of the more pressing roles I have as a 'leader' is acting as a volunteer Board Member on the NGO Executive Committee related to the United Nations Department of Public Information. My specific focus is on Fund Development and Youth Involvement. One major task I have is to help plan the major conferences, like the NGO Conference at the time of the General Assembly, where leaders of nations gather with their counterparts in the nonprofit sector to discuss some of the most pressing issues before us.

You, as youth leaders, should ALL be there. Last year we helped host over 100 student leaders to attend. I hope you will choose to learn more about the United Nations in general as youth leaders and choose to join us next fall in New York.

But I bring up the United Nations because in September 2003, the topic of discussion will be: Human Security in the search for global survival.

Think about it: Human Security, not national or regional, nor militaristic. What is it that we need from our leaders to feel secure? Two things that may lead to a better understanding of human security are: cooperation and compassion. These are two very difficult qualities for leaders to develop and I wish you well on identifying these two qualities: cooperation and compassion.

Last year, the UN's NGO/DPI community brought leaders from around the world to discuss these aspects in terms of rebuilding peace in regions emerging from conflict. It was called "Rebuilding Societies Emerging from Conflict: A Shared Responsibility". Our organization led the large youth contingency of over 100 in discussions, performances, and other youth-oriented events there.

I decided to call this talk: The Crisis in Global Leadership. As someone who leads others in the workplace, at the United Nations, and at the university where I teach, it is more than finger-pointing: it is an indictment against my own complacency and ineffectiveness too. And it has been a long time coming.

Back in the 1960's, with America on the verge of another unjust war, I searched for remarkable leaders in the political world. Several had been murdered: John and Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr, - the rest seemed very corrupt. It reminds me now of an Elvis Costello song I heard many years later: "So where are the trusted, where is the harmony, the sweet harmony? Every time I feel it slipping away, there's just one thing I want to know: what's so funny 'bout peace love and understanding."

What's so funny 'bout peace love and understanding?

So years before I ever heard of the rock music of Elvis Costello, I found my leaders outside of the diplomatic circles that had traditionally spawned them in the past. In the arts, in sciences, at universities and among a community of do-gooders that later became the NGO movement worldwide, I found more good leaders than anyone could ever hope to meet.

By the time of that tune, I had realized that leaders are not only in the political arena; indeed they are often elsewhere. They exist around us as good community leaders, good parents, good teachers, and good people in all walks of life.

Leaders compel, they force, they assist, and the good ones make demands of themselves, often far greater than they make of those they lead. So this talk then is about the leaders I have met or learned of, why I feel we are in a crisis of leadership, and what you might do in order to better accept the responsibility of leadership.

*A leader is a dealer in hope.*  
~ Napoleon Bonaparte

You have all been asked to come here due to your recognized leadership potential. Now how do you make the most of it? Why is leadership important? Why should young people adopt the mantle of leaders? What do you do to make the world, or your part of it, a better place after you leave than before you arrived? What is the mechanism for change that leaders affect? Do we define leaders as the ones in charge or the ones who take charge? You know what they say about leadership: Some people are born into leadership, some people have leadership thrust upon them, and still others receive it as a present from their rich families when they graduate college.

I meant that as a joke, but as Will Rogers once said:  
*The trouble with political jokes is that very often they get elected.*

Is there a direct path to leadership, to learning how to lead? Well the answer to the last question is: no. Thankfully. Leaders need a wide pool of experience that is not best gathered in a direct, or clear path. It is the culmination of a life of choices that others understand and choose to emulate, or follow.

But what about the answers to the other questions? Leadership is important - well of course it is, without it there is chaos - and most important in crisis, near the edge of chaos.

There is a great marketplace of commodities offered by peddlers trying to get young people to be consumers on the one hand or suicide bombers on the other. Therefore it is essential that young people understand the benefits, responsibilities, and effects of taking on leadership roles, or not.

In a world where most of the people who die and kill in wars are young people, and particularly here in the West, where so much is marketed to young people – and through young people so that several major industries full of adults can stay afloat – the question of leadership is a vital topic for each and every one of you ... and your friends and your families. But friends and families are most likely not leaders – you are. They might become the willing victims of rampant capitalism or radical fundamentalism, but each of you could be different.

You have a right and a duty to make sense out of radical thought, new thought, and classical thinking for yourselves. To renew what reality means for those who admire you or soon will. Harnessing the great power of rational thought that empowers free association and questions authority might be an interesting quest for young leaders.

For ultimately, leadership is a challenge to order life in some way that is meaningful to the leader and those they serve.

Yes, those they serve.

Leaders serve. They are educators who inform and allow the best ideas to emerge. The best ideas then lead the leaders. Just as the best teacher is one who educates, and doesn't merely 'teach' the facts, a leader too is a follower as much as a director of events. She or he follows their hearts and the collective thought of those they lead. The best leaders carry messages of hope and challenge us to be better tomorrow than we are today.

Unfortunately we see today many leaders on the world stage who seem only to serve shallow self-interests. Their leadership puts their own people and worth at risk, mostly in the name of pride, and greed, and fear, and ignorance.

Examples? Do we hail George Bush, whose unilateral and unidimensional views of the world have led us to the brink of war, or Saddam Hussein, an erratic despot who shoots guns from his balcony and murders his own people; Ariel Sharon or Yassir Arafat, two life-long warriors pretending to search for a road to peace, or leaders in North Korea, Venezuela, Northern Ireland, Turkmenistan, East Timor, or Iran, where ideologies or the cult of personality comes first, foremost, and only? In this world today, where are the trusted?

In South Africa, President Mbeki refused to accept help in combating HIV infection due to his own personal distaste for admitting it exists in black South Africa. He is the elected leader. Nelson Mandela, a true leader, who is retired, will not give up in his fight to force the current president to accept the truth about AIDS and get on to the road to recovery. Now whether Mr. Mandela is right or wrong, he is the proven true leader because he is following an approach that brings together the people and a situation, without the prejudice of our private fears of accepting obvious information. This is the critical difference. The true leader may be right or wrong but makes decisions based on the best available information, does not bring a predisposition to the material, and then does what he or she thinks is best for those they lead, without regard to its look or sound or feel to others, elsewhere.

So, I lead this company called Friendship Ambassadors Foundation. We believe that peace and mutual understanding come from cultural exchange. I also believe leadership flourishes in such environments, too. At our inception in 1960, we traveled a young boy from Ghana who returned home to become a leader in the field of tourism. He later came back again to the United States, went to work at the United Nations and became Secretary General Kofi Annan, recipient of the 2001 Nobel Prize for Peace.

We have also helped arrange cultural exchange opportunities for senators, astronauts, and world leaders from other countries. However I am most proud of the leaders I meet throughout my talks worldwide who tell me that they traveled on an FAF tour when they were in college. I see them in business, education, law, and the especially in the arts – some are even in diplomacy!

It is clear that cultural exchange and global travel brings an educational perspective to a leader that is undeniable. Is it any wonder then that Bill Clinton has traveled the world over throughout most of his life, while George Bush has limited travel experience, and more than half of the Congress does not even have a passport? Is it any wonder why America's elected leaders pursue an America-first agenda, unilaterally and continually?

We lead how we live and we preach what we know.

As leaders we must recognize that too much of our time is spent with the verbs: 'to want', 'to have' and 'to do' and very little is spent on: 'to be'. Leaders must find the ways 'to be' an example and directing points for those they serve through their leadership.

So the final question is; what does this have to do with me, a young person at this Leadership Conference? *You* need to answer that, but you are here this weekend to examine possibilities for leadership, how other young leaders think, and maybe even to examine how leadership flows.

Let me close by telling you about my acceptance of leadership when I was young. It may prove a useful example ... In my last year of high school, I realized I wanted to make radical changes in the school environment and so I ran for office. It was contemplated for a long time and then I finally decided to run. But I ran as a joke, never thinking I could really be a 'leader'. I wrote crazy things but professed them passionately. I promised to deflate all the basketballs, make every one wear evening gowns and tuxedos (though every one knew I really wanted an elimination of all dress codes), and I had friends draw cartoons of people tattooing themselves with my name in strategic places, and big signs of me asking people to use their common sense and vote for someone else.

I won the election, in the nations largest catholic parochial high school, by 76%. But once I became the student president, I realized that I had to learn what leadership meant and what I could and could not do in this role.

It was only much later, after I had studied art and public policy in college and during my masters, that I came to appreciate the ways in which I could combine my own personal interests in art and culture, into discussions on diplomacy and public policy from a leadership position.

Since then, I helped form a major theatre company, called the Bond Street Theatre Coalition. Its focus has been to present challenging theatre, free to a wide variety of audiences. I am currently now retired from active duty with them and contribute my time as the Chair of the Board of Directors. They recently had a wonderful write up in the *New York Times* and have just returned from performances in Afghani refugee camps in Pakistan. They intend to perform on tour throughout the United States in the coming year, so keep an eye out for them!

With Bond Street, my partner Joanna Sherman and I won a MacArthur award for recreating the home of America's first arts colony; then I moved on to FAF and the United Nations, all the while teaching young people who take my classes at Purchase College (State University of New York) how to effectively lead NGO's into the future.

I have raised some points you may wish to ask about or question. I would love to speak with you now about those questions, concerns, or ideas this talk may have spawned. I invite your comments; it would be helpful for you to open up some issues now that might be able to be further explored in the coming days.

In any case, I thank you all for our time and attention and I leave you with two final thoughts, one from Winston Churchill, who said: "I know I am a leader and history will be kind to me, for I intend to write it."

And lastly, with an old Chinese proverb, that all leaders ought respect:

If you want 1 year of prosperity, grow grain.  
If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees.  
If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people.

Thank you and good luck.

Delivered by  
Patrick L. Sciarratta  
Executive Director,  
Friendship Ambassadors Foundation

January 25, 2003  
Georgia International Leadership Conference, Madison, Georgia

