



LEADERSHIP – A FASCINATING ISSUE –

(Briefing paper to be presented by Lois Clark McCoy at the NIUSR Seminar, “Outdoor Leadership for Indoor Executives” in Santa Barbara, CA. April 8-10, 2008)

Leadership is neither Command nor Control.

However, without Leadership, Command will have no Control.

The qualities that “make” a leader; in fact even the question of whether leaders are “born” to it or whether or not the necessary qualities can be instilled if not native, continues to be debated.

It is the feeling of this speaker that:

LEADERSHIP is not a TOPIC that can be “LEARNED” through reading a book. LEADERSHIP is a SKILL that can be “TRAINED” through exercises, repetition and experience. Some will be lucky enough to find a mentor that they desire to emulate.

There is a qualifier here. It is possible that those with more natural ability, when also trained, will out-perform as leaders those without that indescribable native ability. When the cylinder is shaken the larger pebbles always will rise to the top.

Let us take a look at the present situation of Leadership in times of disaster and risk in the United States today.

For the last 20 years we have confused “Management” with “Leadership”. These are not the same. They are two DIFFERENT, both honorable capabilities. Management takes place in overseeing routine activities for which one is responsible. Leadership is a quality that enables one to gather followers, who willingly espouse your ideas or actions.

For the last 40 years we have also confused “Stress” with “Fear”. They are not the same. Stress is what you feel when you are uncomfortable after reaching Shelter. Fear is what you feel while alone in the dark and no one seems to be coming to help.

In military terms, Stress is what you feel when you are returned home from the front lines. Fear is what you experience while hunkered down with “incoming”.

In the attempt over the last 15 years to clarify these often disputed definitions of what makes or trains Leaders, various law, rules and proclamations have been put forward to answer these questions relative to emergency situations.

Nevertheless, in times of great stress and great need, the failure of civil Command continues to haunt the largest and greatest of our national need. If there is no leader in the times of the emergency (i.e. unplanned) situations involving risk) there is chaos.

At present, where the laws and regulations are breaking down, is in the exercise of the Command function. Often, too often, the person who is legally “in charge” proves incapable of executing that function in the time of need. So, the real question is “Why”?

In a word, that person is not, on that occasion, in that need, able to Lead. to take Command and obtain Control. That fact seems simple and is obvious enough to the many television viewers watching from afar on that particular catastrophe.

But why? Why? Having recognized the dysfunction across our nation, why does it continue year after year? We can pick out exceptions to the rule. The one that most quickly comes to mind is that of the Mayor and Governor of New York in the World Trade Center massacre. Yes, their trained First Responders and the citizens involved performed ably. But it was the calm determination of those two LEADERS in the face of the unthinkable second plane and then the collapse of the first tower that **reassured** the world that New York would stand. They were “fighting” mad and we needed to see that.

On the negative side are instances from bridge collapse to levee failures when this was not the case. It is not a good thing when the Vice President has to make a visit to decide if a Presidential appointee must be ordered in take Control. That person was chosen for his demonstrated ability to Lead.

Now we who are meeting here today have “set our stage”. We understand the root of the need. Let us discuss possible remedies. Discussion that brings action is valuable. Talk alone is an enjoyable, game, but is like Jergen’s lotion. It feels good as you wring your hands, but does little more.

We are clear that in times of emergency the person in charge is the highest ranking LOCAL official until he asks up the chain of command for assistance. He then may hand-off the execution of Command and Control to higher authority, such as a region, state, or federal entity.

Military resources may also be requested but those assets within the United States remain “in support”, neither in Control nor Command.

In order to bring some cohesion to this gaggle of support raining down upon the stricken area, we have in this country established the Department of Homeland Security. But that is not a Response Agency. It has no manpower to save life and property other

than its fine but limited number of Urban Heavy Rescue Task Forces. Unfortunately, in most cases to date their duties have been body recovery.

So who is in charge of the relief to the misery of the people affected by the calamity? Well, actually -- nobody. Police are responsible to maintain Law and Order in the Community. Fire is responsible for controlling fires. EMT's and Paramedics are responsible for providing immediate emergency care and transport to sites of more definitive care.

Relief of the misery of the well, such as food, water, cots, blankets, heat, and evacuation are largely taken over in the onset of these catastrophes by the churches, Red Cross and other non-profit civilian groups in an ad hoc manner. Often this supports a limited local government action that is inadequate for many reasons. The local government is also under the same difficulties that are being experienced individually by its citizens.

By law the primary function of any government is to insure the continuity of that community. Government buildings, sewage plants, roads, and other infrastructure are often the primary focus of the government response. People are assumed to be able to weather the emergency unless injured. This is the pioneer heritage of which we are so proud in our culture. Unfortunately the newer generations, raised in the "Service Society" of the last decades, have not had, nor needed, this hands-on experience or training.

Suddenly our world has changed.

In today's world, Leadership by these legally "in charge" government agencies is essential for success in stemming the escalation of the initial problems of the calamity.

All the previous discussion brings us to the true knot in the problem. Why is local leadership so often missing in the face of crisis? To date, most of our problems have been Mother Nature. She has always been our worst terrorist. The good thing about acts of Mother Nature is they tend to be self limiting. A flood comes; a flood recedes perhaps to come again next year but perhaps not. An earthquake comes, a wildfire breaks out. All are eventually controlled. Terrorism is a horse of a different color. Today it is living with us waiting to strike. But that is a subject for another day!

Today our need is to explore greater ways to encourage better Leadership among our Leaders. These present-day leaders were chosen by us or appointed by us to lead. They are neither witless nor uncaring. Why do they fail?

Let's look at some of the reasons.

The first one is obviously SHOCK. We all experience it. Training in emergency decision making limits the span of the duration of shock. The astronauts on Apollo 13 experienced shock. It is a human reaction. Fortunately for their survival, their training limited that span of time to minutes, perhaps seconds.

Why does it appear that people with military and law enforcement backgrounds usually perform better than the average Joe? Residual memory of their training days. Why do mothers often perform better in the immediate response to the calamity? Overriding the shock is the inborn genetic code of the maternal instinct. That quickly Overrides the instant shock factor. And “quickly” is the operative word. Speed of initial reaction, whether to take control and lead, or to save your children or family is essential.

However, undisciplined speed is also a hazard. How do we “train” our civic leaders who may be for 356 days out of the 365 in a year, deeply into the desk work of budgets and bureaucracy? How do we train them to instantly become wise and judicious decision makers under shock and stress? How do we do that?

Well, not very well to date. Or have we even tried? Have we even looked closely at the root cause of the failure of so many of our non-uniformed people at every level that are by some law or budget “in charge”?

Here is a quote that brings to mind how business often steps forward in the delay or absence of Government Leadership in times of disaster. This quote is from the top regional CEO of Wal-mart in Katrina.

"A lot of you are going to have to make decisions above your level," was Scott's [the regional CEO of Wal-Mart] message to his people. "Make the best decision that you can with the information that's available to you at the time, and above all, do the right thing."

In this case the Wal-Mart people in the Katrina region had top direction to “do the right thing”. What does an employee do without the reassurance from above? In America most people “do the right thing” – eventually. But remember the old saying: “No good deed goes unpunished.” Today, at every level that action will be closely scrutinized. NIUSR is proud of having stood between injustice and folks who indeed did the “right thing” “ There are many times we never were aware of the situations folks faced for using the sense God gave them, above the rule.

Our NIUSR Seminar, being held in Santa Barbara on April 8-10, 2008 will address these questions in the effort to find ways to fill this gap in our present response to disasters--primarily those that are multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional all at the same time. If we can handle those, the other 356 days of the year should be a snap.

Stand by. A full report of the findings of this meeting will be published within two months of the date of the meeting.