Using Film to Teach Authentic Leadership

Abstract

The purpose of this innovative practice session is to explore the use of the film, *Iron Jawed Angels,* in a personal leadership development course at [STATE] University as a tool to help students synthesize course concepts. The film facilitates the lesson as students critique, identify, and analyze Alice Paul's leadership.

Introduction

Developing authenticity, or being true to the self, is the first step toward becoming an authentic leader. Self-awareness, self-acceptance, and authentic actions and relationships all play a role in the movement toward authenticity (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). The effectiveness of participative, achievement-oriented, transactional, supportive, and other forms of leadership are likely enhanced when a leader's actions are genuine and focused on the development of the self and others. Heightened levels of self-awareness are required for authentic leadership, leading to authentic leaders knowing where they stand on important issues, values, and beliefs (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

As part of an undergraduate leadership program at [STATE] University, students have the opportunity to enroll in a personal leadership development course (Pennington & Weeks, 2006). The personal leadership development course is designed to teach authentic leadership development, a key component for collegiate-level leadership programs. Self-exploration, understanding one's true self, and recognizing one's values are all components of authentic leadership development. Enhancing self-awareness through an exploration of personal values and then aligning behaviors with identified values are the intent of the course (Pennington, 2006). The use of films is one of the many delivery methods employed in the course to help students move toward authenticity. The purpose of this innovative practice session is to explore the use of *Iron Jawed Angels* in the last weeks of the semester as a tool to help students synthesize what they have learned throughout the course.

Review of Related Scholarship

Teaching leadership at the collegiate level poses a challenge for many leadership educators because it involves explaining abstract concepts and theories to students (Halpern, 2000; Williams & McClure, 2010), making it even more important to explore new, innovative teaching methods to convey course content (Williams & McClure, 2010). Class discussions, projects and presentations, self-assessments and instruments, critical reflections, media clips, and other signature pedagogies are used in the leadership classroom to help students become self-aware and develop as leaders (Jenkins, 2012). In fact, research points to the success of integrating popular culture artifacts, such as movies and television clips, into leadership education. They are not only easily obtained and widely recognized, but they are also readily understood, allowing students to relate to and identify with characters and trends as they process leadership concepts (Callahan & Rosser, 2007; Callahan, Whitener, & Sandlin, 2007).

Using films in the classroom is a good approach when teaching today's Net Generation of students who are digitally minded, because it appeals to their multiple intelligences and learning styles, resulting in increased student success (Berk, 2009). In fact, research points to a relationship between the media and the intelligence of students (Gardner, 2000; Veenema & Gardner, 1996). Additionally, Lavelle (1992) identified three reasons supporting the use of films in college classrooms: a) viewing films stimulates student interest to research and read about a subject more, b) films trigger class discussions, and c) they make abstract concepts more concrete and convincing. Films capture the attention of students, helping to outline issues. However, they are not a substitute for scholarly work, but they can frame questions for those sources to answer (Harper & Rogers, 1999).

The successful use of films in the leadership classroom is supported by several research studies (Callahan & Rosser, 2007; Callahan et al., 2007; Graham, Ackermann, & Maxwell, 2004; Graham, Sincoff, Baker, & Ackermann, 2003; Wimmer, Meyers, Porter, & Shaw, 2012). Students are able to learn from characters in media clips, making a connection with real-life events as they think about how they would act in similar situations (Wimmer et al., 2012). Additionally, films in the leadership classroom can be used to teach leadership lessons through situations that may be difficult to replicate in real-life (Wimmer et al., 2012). Movies also stimulate emotional intelligence development among leaders, as they allow students to construct personal meaning as they move toward authenticity (Graham et al., 2004).

Description of the Practice

The final lesson of the personal leadership development course at [STATE] University requires students to synthesize the concepts learned about authentic leadership throughout the semester. The film, *Iron Jawed Angels*, facilitates this lesson, as students are asked to apply what they have learned to the characters in the film. Using films in the classroom should be driven by specific objectives related to teaching and learning, linking them to the course curriculum (Duhaney, 2000). Three objectives guide the final course lesson:

1. Critique Alice Paul's leadership as it relates to the components of the Discovering Leadership Framework (King, Altman, & Lee, 2011) by creating a Discovering Leadership Framework for Alice Paul.
2. Identify key film scenes, quotes, and characters, applying them to course concepts by composing short essay responses to specific questions as they relate to Alice Paul.
3. Analyze Alice Paul's leadership as it relates to authentic leadership development by composing short essay responses to specific questions about Alice Paul's leadership.

Four class meetings are designated for the final lesson. Components of the lesson include: viewing the film with guided note-taking and assignment of Discovering Leadership Framework homework (Days 1 and 2), class discussion over Alice Paul's Discovering Leadership Framework assignment (Day 3), class discussion over Alice Paul as an authentic leader and essays assignment (Day 4).

Viewing the Film (Days 1 and 2) The first two class meetings are reserved for viewing *Iron Jawed Angels.* The film is relatively new, as it was released in 2004 and features names such as

Hilary Swank, Anjelica Houston, and Patrick Dempsey, all actors familiar to the majority of undergraduate students. *Iron Jawed Angels* follows the story of Alice Paul and Lucy Burns as they advocate for women's rights in the early 1900s.

Before beginning the film, students are instructed to take notes about Alice Paul's leadership as it relates to the components of the Discovering Leadership Framework. They are encouraged to note specific scenes and quotes to support their analysis of Alice Paul's leadership. After viewing the film, the students are asked to complete the first assignment for homework, a Framework for Alice Paul. The following instructions are provided:

> Draw and complete the Discovering Leadership Framework for Alice Paul based upon what you observed during the movie. An example of a completed model can be found on page 150 of *Discovering the Leader in You.* Make sure you include **all** components of the model including what you think the character's purpose (center of the model) and impact and legacy will be/was.

Alice Paul's Discovering Leadership Framework (Day 3) During the third class meeting, the instructor facilitates a class discussion about Alice Paul's Framework and the film in general. The discussion helps the students synthesize and apply course concepts to an observed leader.
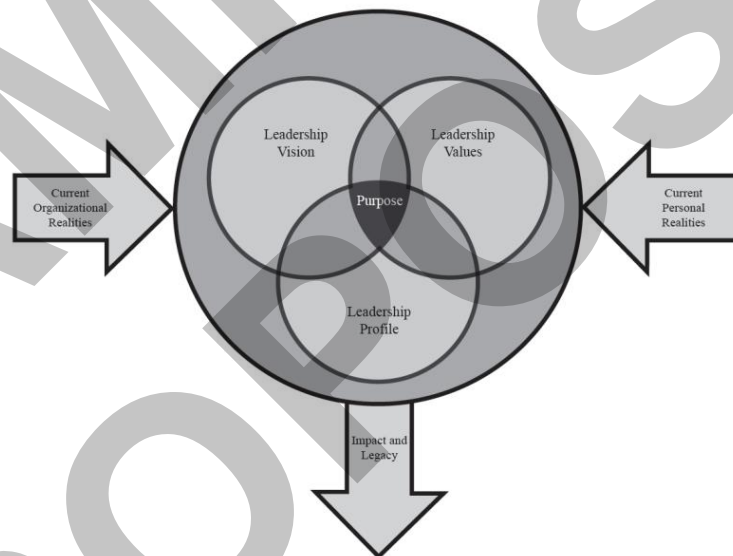

Figure 1: Discovering Leadership Framework. Adapted from *Discovering the Leader in You* (p. 153), by S. N. King, D. G. Altman, & R. J. Lee, 2011, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2011 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Adapted with permission.

One of the course textbooks serving as the foundation for the course curriculum is *Discovering the Leader in You*. The text utilizes a systematic approach to help students understand how leadership fits into their lives, what unique leadership qualities they possess, and the impact they want to have as a leader (King et al., 2011). King et al. (2011) created the Discovering Leadership Framework to provide a visual interpretation of how an individual's leadership vision, values, skills, and motivation align with organizational and personal realities (King et al., 2011). The Framework is based on five main topics: current organizational realities, leadership

vision, leadership values, leadership profile, and current personal realities (King et al., 2011) (Figure 1). These topics serve as the foundation of the personal leadership development course as the students move toward authenticity.

Putting it all Together—Alice Paul and Authentic Leadership Development (Day 4)
The fourth and final class meeting is devoted to the second assignment, five essay questions requiring the students to consider the concepts they have learned about authentic leadership development. The students are instructed to apply both course concepts and scenes and quotes from the film as they relate to Alice Paul's leadership. The students are provided the following questions to consider regarding Alice Paul:

1. Topic: Main View of Leadership and Costs of Leadership (Chapter 2)
   Explain Alice Paul's main view of leadership, as well as the costs of leadership that impacted her situation. Use ideas from the text.

2. Topic: Vision (Chapter 3)
   How did Alice Paul create congruency of direction (defined on p. 51)? Describe both her personal vision and leadership vision. Evaluate Alice Paul's leadership vision based on the 3 criteria listed in the text on page 53.

3. Topic: Motivation and Values (Chapter 4)
   Identify Alice Paul's motivation to lead. How does it relate to the reading? Also, identify what you believe to be 3 of Alice Paul's core values. Explain.

4. Topic: Leadership Competencies (Chapter 5)
   Identify 3 of Alice Paul's leadership competencies. Select from the list of 11 competencies in the text (p. 100). How did Alice use each of these competencies to carry out her leadership tasks? Explain.

5. Topic: Leadership and Balance (Chapter 6)
   Discuss leadership and balance as it relates to Alice Paul. Did she use any of the strategies described in the text? Explain. If not, what strategy do you think she could have used? Explain.

Essays are worth 20 points each and are graded given the following criteria: a) overall writing quality and depth of thought, relevant use of scenes from the film, use of course concepts, and ability to analyze the film based on the course (five points per essay); b) appropriate use of at least three key terms and at least two key phrases or sentences per essay from the course readings (15 points per essay); and c) key terms and phrases/sentences must be in bold print.

Following discussion of the requirements for the essays, students are given the opportunity to work in small groups to discuss the questions and begin formulating their responses. Students are split into five groups, with each group assigned one of the questions to consider. The students are given approximately 25 minutes to work together to formulate ideas to include in their response. The groups write their answers on a large post-it pad and present their ideas to the class. After all groups have shared, students are given the opportunity to take a picture of the five post-it sheets

so that they have ideas to help them formulate their responses. Students are given one week to complete this second assignment which serves as the culminating piece for the personal leadership development course.

Discussion of Outcomes/Results

The Discovering Leadership Framework assignment was used to complete lesson objective one:

1. Critique Alice Paul's leadership as it relates to the components of the Discovering Leadership Framework by creating a Discovering Leadership Framework for Alice Paul.

Student synthesis of Alice Paul's leadership was evident. The Discovering Leadership Frameworks created by the students included all of the components and they were able to successfully evaluate Alice Paul's impact and legacy. A sample of student work is provided in the Appendix.

The five essay questions assignment was used to complete lesson objectives two and three. Students were instructed to use bold print for course concepts. Excerpts from past student essays are given to support each objective:

2. Identify key film scenes, quotes, and characters, applying them to course concepts by composing short essay responses to specific questions as they relate to Alice Paul.

The final **cost of leadership** Alice faces is **infrequent relief and its strain on your family**. For Alice Paul, obtaining suffrage and equality for women was her number one priority. This even continued to the point that she left no time for a personal life or family. At one point Alice's friend Lucy even asked her if one day she would eventually get married and Alice responded, "I'm busy that day."

Demonstrating integrity is all **about doing the right thing.** Alice shows this competency continuously by sticking to what she believes in, from not paying a fine that she did not deserve to persevering after Inez's death.

By creating a hunger strike, throwing her shoe out the window and singing during lunch, Alice gave the others alternatives to proceed in their life and eventually this helped her get out of prison. Alice's **command** is seen every day. Alice can **take control of a situation and make decisions.** She never takes no for an answer and expects things to get done. This is shown in her demand for the letter to be typed by the senator's wife.

3. Analyze Alice Paul's leadership as it relates to authentic leadership development by composing short essay responses to specific questions about her leadership.

Alice also always knew that gender equality was what she wanted to achieve, and even at her lowest moment when speaking with the prison psychiatrist, Alice illustrated the **authenticity of her vision** when she was baffled by the psychiatrist asking why she was doing this, and she replied that she simply wanted the same thing anyone else did.

Ms. Paul also was very prominent about being **authentic and anchored to who you are as a person.** She never once pretended to be someone she wasn't. She was **always one to let her actions speak for her, over her words,** and her actions were always to help benefit the name of her cause.

Being **authentic** means it must **reflect your values of leadership.** Alice had the same **passion** from the first day she became a leader until the day that she reached her goal. This included the time that she was in prison and became very weak during a hunger strike. They put her into the psych ward and even had a doctor talk to her during her stay there. Throughout this time she **stayed true to her vision** and even then was focused on the end.

Because suffrage was Alice Paul's whole life, it was utterly **authentic** and was such a deep part of her **identity** that Alice Paul and women's suffrage are nearly synonymous.

The majority of the students wrote well-developed essays. Students were able to apply what they learned over the course of the semester to Alice Paul. Instructors believe that this is a result of the class discussion and the small group work that took place prior to the submission of their essays.

Reflections of the Practitioner

Over the course of the semester, students practice writing essays using course concepts and analyzing leaders through film. Students complete three short essays on topics related to concepts covered in the course and compose essay responses to one question each on two exams. After watching films on Temple Grandin, Dan West, and Katie Davis, students assess these leaders in regard to course concepts from specific chapters. Leadership competencies and strengths, congruency of values and behavior, and personal leadership vision are three of the concepts students have experience evaluating. Seeing actors they know and are able to connect with makes it easier for the students to understand the leadership concepts. As a result, the students are prepared for the final lesson, which pulls together writing and analyzing as they explore Alice Paul's leadership through course concepts.

Recommendations

Use of films in the leadership classroom is recommended, as it continues to be an effective way to teach leadership concepts. For leadership educators wishing to implement the *Iron Jawed Angels* lesson in their personal leadership development classroom, we offer the following recommendations. The activity is not designed as a stand-alone leadership lesson. The lesson has been created to fit within a personal leadership development course. The success of the *Iron Jawed Angels* lesson is due in part to activities utilized to teach the Discovering Leadership Framework, helping students move toward authenticity. While two class meetings are reserved for viewing the film, educators not wishing to devote instructional time to viewing could require students to purchase or borrow the film for viewing outside of class. Alternatively, viewing times could be scheduled for the students to come and view the film as a group. Finally, the success of the final lesson is based upon leadership educators purposefully preparing students throughout the semester for the final leader analysis project.

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Appendix

Recreated Student Example of Alice Paul's Discovering Leadership Framework

Alice's role model was Inez.

Alice connected with people by her outlook on life and courage.

Alice conflicted with almost all men.

Alice was overpowered by not giving up.

VISION

Alice's motivation was being able to make an impact.

Alice impacted men by convincing them that women have the right to be equals and have the right to vote.

Alice's core values include:
Influence
Compassion
Freedom

PURPOSE
Equality

VALUES

Inez's death.

Alice becomes the leader of the suffragists for the new organization.

WWI begins.

ORGANIZATIONAL REALITIES

Alice's role was to keep up the spirits of the NWP women.

Alice's leadership competencies include:
Demonstrating Integrity
Communicating Well
Building Teams

PROFILE

Leadership costs: physically and emotionally harmed

Leadership benefits: got liberty

Sacrificed having a romantic relationship and a family.

PERSONAL REALITIES

Alice impacted everyone in the US after prison, leading to the success of her cause.

Her legacy is the 19th Amendment being passed, which led to the right for women to vote.

IMPACT & LEGACY