

Building Intelligent Leaders for Tomorrow's World

Colin Power, President World Education Forum, Australia

William Oats Memorial Lecture
University of Tasmania, Hobart, 22nd August 2006

Honora Deane Memorial Lecture
University of Tasmania, Launceston, 24th August, 2006

Abstract

The modern world presents huge challenges to leaders at all levels. Indeed the very health of the planet, as well as valued processes of democracy and peace in our times are at issue. In this address, it is argued that it is possible for each person and organization in civil society to exercise leadership and to contribute to meeting the challenges facing us.

What then will be the demands and opportunities for leaders of all ages in tomorrow's world.? How can society achieve the necessary leadership at all levels and all ages? What are the implications for all places of learning as well as for organizations, government officials and civil society?

Introduction

It is indeed a great honour to be invited by WEF Tasmania to deliver the William Oats and the Honora Deane Memorial Lectures. I should also like to express my gratitude to the sponsors and the University of Tasmania. I have chosen to speak on building intelligent leaders for tomorrow's world because Bill Oats and Honora Deane personify what I mean by "intelligent leadership." They were passionate about building the values and commitment to service that characterise such leadership.

I will argue that we desperately need intelligent leadership if we are to respond to challenges facing us in the 21st century. Firstly, because the very health of the planet as well as our democratic way of life are at stake. Secondly, because we face a leadership crisis in contemporary society. Third, because it is both necessary and possible for all of us to exercise the intelligent leadership needed to restore the health of our fragile planet and our ailing democracy.

Building intelligent leaders demands that we systematically develop the qualities that underpin sustainable development. The alternative is a continuation of the drift towards a materialistic, self-centred consumer society, towards an increasingly unequal, violent and unsustainable future.

Intelligent leadership rests on having a strong sense of purpose and direction. This, in turn, rests on facilitating the capacity to "think clearly, act with integrity, make decisions, be sensitive to the needs of others, be strong in service and hold a global perspective" (Oats, 2001).

Those of us who were privileged to know Bill Oats will recognize that these are the very qualities he sought to develop at The Friends School. In other words, the first step in building intelligent leaders for tomorrow's world is that of "nurturing the human spirit." As the Delors' Report (UNESCO, 1996) put it, there is a treasure within each one of us.

We need to ensure that our schools and universities unlock that treasure, the human spirit. It is that spirit that empowered and gave direction to the greatest and most intelligent leaders of our times - to Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Mandela, Havel, Brundtland - and to Bill Oats and Honora Deane. It is the development of that spirit that is most under threat in the post September 11 world.

Intelligent Leadership

The Oxford Dictionary defines a leader as one who guides actions or opinions, especially by going in front. Much has been written about leadership - about famous religious, political, military and corporate leaders. Some of these have made the world a better place. Others, in their quest for power and money, became ruthless tyrants or heartless capitalists.

“Intelligent Leadership” is the title of a book by Alistair Mant (1997). The book is about the sort of practical intelligence and leadership which capitalises on opportunities to build a better world and steers around potential blunders. Mant argues that the *sine qua non* of intelligent leadership lies in the capacity to move groups and systems in “intelligent directions.” Intelligent leadership requires “practical cleverness.” It means avoiding “systemic stupidity,” the ways in which otherwise smart people are rendered apparently stupid by dysfunctional and amoral economic, social and political systems, pride and immediate self-interest.

The leadership crisis

Mant suggests that one of the reasons behind flagging confidence in our leaders is that they seem to suffer too often from “systemic stupidity.” Undoubtedly, our leaders are generally smart people. But too often we end up with the short-sightedness that leads to crises. The sort of short-term thinking that condones the destruction of old forests and fragile ecosystems. The sort of leadership that imprisons women and children fleeing from oppression and hides the truth about what is being done to asylum seekers. The sort of leadership that unleashed the dogs of war and led to the mess we now face in Iraq and Lebanon, to cluster bombing, landmines and detention centres.

At the international level, faith in the capacity of multi-lateral organizations like the World Bank, the IMF and WTO to provide a sensible direction for trade and development is waning (Stiglitz, 2002; Saul, 2005). Their policies have ended up exacerbating the problems of environmental destruction, illiteracy, health and poverty in developing countries.

Confidence in our political leaders has fallen to the point that the democratic process itself is under threat. Levels of trust in our political

leadership are about 35%, half those of Norway and much lower than there were in 1960s and 70s (Davis, 2001). We are tired of the broken promises, the lies, the buck passing, the spin doctors, the pork-barrelling, the power games, the lack of forward thinking and proactive policies to deal with the problems created by alcohol and substance abuse, gambling, and violence on our streets. We yearn for the statesmen of old, the intelligent leaders. As someone once quipped, we know what a statesman is – it's a dead politician. And, we surely need more statesmen.

Confidence in the morality and capability of business leadership has also diminished in the wake of spectacular collapses, weaknesses in corporate governance and corruption. Our corporate barracudas seem to abide by only two commandments: thou shalt be seen to make money, and thou shalt not be found out.

Confidence in the media also is falling. The agenda of ethically impaired media barons seems to be denominated by violence, sex, greed and consumerism. News too often equates to the shallow treatment of deep matters and the incessant repetition of “safe” information. Sure, we have more and more choice, but almost nothing worth choosing. The subjugation of the human spirit by the media is precisely what Orwell predicted in **Brave New World**. The consumer culture and the media are about passivity, not about “life be in it”.

Confidence in public education, health, social services and security organizations also has been shaken. The new breed of political appointees to leadership positions cannot provide independent advice. Many have trouble in articulating a sensible direction for the future and struggle to lead complex systems in uncertain times.

I must add that there maybe something quite sinister behind what seems to be the lack of “intelligent leadership.” We must think critically about the direction being taken by what Pilger (1997) describes as *The New Rulers of the World*. Pilger sets out to explain the motives behind the obscene expenditure on arms by the world's single superpower and the war on terror. He links these to the ideology of the free-market and the rejection by the new rulers of the world of their social and environmental national and international responsibilities. Pilger believes that underlying goal is global domination and social control. He is convinced that we must break the silence that protects great power. We need a new breed of intelligent leaders with the courage to challenge the abuse of power.

Similarly, Chomsky (2003) argues that the US and its allies have been aggressively pursuing policies intended to achieve the global dominance that ultimately threatens our survival.

In any event, Australia is in danger of becoming what Zakaria (1997) calls an “illiberal democracy.” His argues that what governments do in countries like Australia is increasingly determined by hidden agendas. We do not have government by the people or for the people. Increasingly since September 11, the system of checks and balances designed to protect our rights and to limit the power of the State has been eroded.

Whatever the reasons for the leadership crisis, we feel alienated. We seem powerless to influence the directions taken by government, bureaucracies and corporations. We can vote, but that’s about it. It seems to matter little which party ends up in power. So is there any hope for the future?

Demands and Opportunities for Leadership in Tomorrow’s World

The demand for leadership in tomorrow’s world stems from the lack of intelligent leadership at the top and the many challenges we face at all levels of society - local, national and global. The opportunities stem from advances in knowledge and technology. Opportunities are also are being created by institutions and voluntary groups determined to create a better world.

To give one example, new opportunities for intelligent leadership are being created by the coming micro-energy revolution. The filthy and inefficient way we use energy is the most destructive thing we do to the environment. With enough clean energy, most environmental problems can be tackled. Vaitheeswaran (2003) describes the surge of innovation in hydrogen fuel cells, hybrid cars, micro-power heat and energy units in buildings and industrial plants. He contrasts the ethically encumbered energy barons with the few intelligent leaders in the energy industry. The latter understand the opportunities created by technologies that reduce our dependency on coal and oil. Similarly, new IT technologies create opportunities for the intelligent and creative leadership needed to improve the quality of life of the disabled and those living in remote communities.

As one who has worked with many illiberal democracies, I have been struck by the critical role played by non-government organizations (NGOs) exercising ‘intelligent leadership.’ They do not moan about the

ills of government and corporations, but courageously set about the task of working together to identify unmet needs and to meet them.

As Saul (2003) put it: “What we have seen over the past decade is a renewed and growing desire to build our societies at all levels with our own hands – that is, to find ways to be involved. For example, *Medecins sans frontiers* was born out of the unwillingness of young doctors to remain passive.” The same can be said of the NGO movement in general, and of organizations like Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Oxfam, UNAA, Oaktree and WEF in particular.

To cope with the challenges facing our society in the 21st century, we need leadership. We need leadership not just from those in positions of power, but from ordinary people, whatever their age or position in society. We need to steer our families, schools, universities and community groups in “intelligent directions” using our own experience, common sense and ingenuity.

Intelligent Directions for the Future

In *Towards a Global Community: Educating for Tomorrow’s World*, Jack Campbell, Nick Baikaloff and I outline the results of a global project undertaken on behalf of the World Education Fellowship (WEF). The WEF study sought the views of 183 leading thinkers from 36 countries about a preferred and achievable future for tomorrow’s world. We also asked them about the changes needed if education is “to empower young people to live well both as individuals with unique potentials worthy of fulfilment, and as responsible members in a very diverse and restless global community.”

As with the UNESCO (1996) Delors Report, we were about setting an intelligent direction for the future. About building responsible global citizens. The challenges facing us identified in the WEF Study fall into eight clusters:

1. *Meeting Basic Human Needs of All*
2. *Global security and peace*
3. *Social Justice*
4. *Participatory Democracy*
5. *Bio & cultural diversity*
6. *Sustainability of earth*
7. *Effective international bodies*
8. *Caring and humane world.*

Setting an intelligent direction for the future is about dealing with such challenges. I do not have time to spell out details, but I would like to highlight one of the challenges, that given highest priority by young people in our region, the problem of sustainable development.

Australia has rich natural resources, resources that have provided the basis of the high standard of living enjoyed by most of us. However, its agricultural, forestry and mining practices have often had disastrous consequences. Since European settlement, half of our topsoil has been eroded, two-thirds of our original forest destroyed, most of our rivers and lakes polluted, many of our species of plants, animals and birds have been lost. We have the second highest level of greenhouse gas emissions per capita in the world. And these are just a few of the environmental challenges we must face.

Our young people are acutely aware that if we do not take a more intelligent direction, Australia faces a bleak future. Fien et al.(2002) surveyed over 2,000 Australian secondary students. For them, the most important goals for Australia were:

- Protecting the environment (77%)
- Preventing war (58%)
- Reducing unemployment and poverty (50%)
- Creating a fairer and more humane society (49%).

The most important national environmental issues for students were cutting down of forests, destruction of the ozone layer, soil erosion, endangered species and water pollution. Most (72%) wanted to be involved in improving the environment. Many were involved in household action, but few in civic activities.

Intelligent leadership in public organizations

International agencies, government departments and universities can be mysterious places to outsiders. But the solutions to improving their performance is not. What is required is the recognition that improvement is possible and that leadership needs to be fostered.

I have to say that the picture is not all black. Many public organizations are doing a good job. They are headed in intelligent directions, despite sudden shifts in political agendas, cuts and the odd blunder. Most of the international agencies I have worked in and with have contributed to the progress being made in health and education and in the struggle to protect

human rights and the environment. We have also been fortunate in the leadership of at least some of our state and national public organizations, even if it often seems to be lacking in some of them today.

Education For All (EFA) – A Personal Example

When I joined UNESCO at the beginning of 1989, the education systems of the developing countries were in a state of crisis. There were an estimated 905 million adult illiterates. The number of children with no access to schooling stood at about 130 million. Levels of functional illiteracy stood at between 10% to 15% in most developed countries.

Within the UN system, the responsibility for education rests with UNESCO. Thus on joining UNESCO, I was expected to lead the global education for all campaign. But UNESCO had neither the financial nor the human resources to achieve our goals. Thus the Director-General and I sought to forge an international alliance in support of EFA and involving all the key players concerned with education and development.

The EFA World Conference was held in Thailand in March, 1990. Immediately after the Conference, an International Consultative Forum comprising representatives of all stakeholders was set up to maintain the alliance and to promote EFA.

My final days as DDG in UNESCO were spent heading UNESCO's role in supporting these efforts and running the World Education Forum in Senegal in April 2000. The Forum focussed on the extent to which the six goals set for basic education in 1990 were being met nationally and internationally.

The results showed that the number of illiterates had fallen to 717 million and the number of children out of school to about 113 million. Nonetheless, most developing countries did find it difficult to expand the school system quickly without reducing quality. Moreover, progress towards closing the gender gap in education has been “excruciatingly slow” (UNESCO, 2005).

I am not sure if this is a good example of “intelligent leadership.” But I do know that many ordinary people like me and my staff working in the UN are very passionate about EFA. I also know that it takes courage to confront authoritarian regimes. It takes expert knowledge to know what strategies are likely to be effective. One also needs determination to keep

on track when government and agency priorities shift and leaders come and go.

Another example of moving in an intelligent direction is to promote university-community engagement (Eidos, 2005) and to ensure that policy is informed by research and evidence by establishing new mechanisms for linking University researchers with policy makers in government. This is precisely what those of us who have been behind the establishment of Eidos in Queensland have been doing. For details, see the Eidos website (www.eidos.org.au).

I have learned that within public organizations, there are many intelligent leaders, not always at the top. Indeed were it not for thousands of intelligent grass-roots leaders, EFA and many Smart State initiatives would have failed dismally.

Competent, hard-working and committed ordinary people are providing the type of leadership needed to create a more peaceful and sustainable future. They are working hard to ensure that the organizations for which they work are faithful to their mission. Behind the scenes, they are creating road maps for the future, setting priorities for action and ensuring the efficient delivery of the programs for which they are responsible.

They are intelligent leaders in their field, creative problem solvers not bureaucrats. They are courageous and resilient in the face of adversity. Interestingly, the attributes of intelligent leaders in public institutions are very similar to those that the research indicates are characteristic of effective leaders in the private sector (Ostroff, 2006).

Grass-roots intelligent leadership

Let me repeat. My message is that all of us can and must become intelligent leaders. We need to look at ourselves and how we might acquire the qualities necessary for intelligent leadership in our own lives. Most of you who know me, know that I like to tell stories to illustrate what I mean. So let me give some examples of grassroots leadership.

I have already mentioned one – Bill Oats. He provided intelligent leadership at The Friends School and beyond. Not just another mission statement but an active program to put the values and beliefs central to the purposes of his school into action. Thus the emphasis on weekly gatherings, community seminars, the programs to deal with moral dilemmas and to serve others. The same spirit of searching for purpose

and meaning in life has inspired the intelligent leadership shown by Chris Strong and those responsible for programs on global education at the University of Tasmania.

Last time I was in Tasmania, a team of students from Launceston Grammar joined us at a WEF meeting. They gave an account of their prize winning project for the Young Entrepreneurs Competition. The project was about a clever way of harnessing water energy in the home, a micro-energy innovation. The students developed a strategic plan for promoting their invention, one demonstrating consciousness of economic reality as well as many elements of empathic intelligence.

At UNESCO, I established a grassroots program called “The power of one.” We are encouraging UNESCO Associated Schools to support their students’ efforts to generate programs aimed at addressing key issues in the local community. We selected projects initiated by students from 90 countries, and then brought the 2,000 young people and 4,000 teachers and parents involved to a Millennium Dreamers Summit at Disneyworld.

These young people and others like them around the globe are our intelligent leaders of tomorrow. They demonstrate the power of one. They show that each of us has within us the spirit, the capacity to become “intelligent leaders for tomorrow’s world.” If these 12 to 15 year olds can do it, so can you.

Let me tell a couple of their stories:

Jesus Tserenhihi Mahortoeo (15 yrs, Brazil) Jesus is a member of the ancient and nearly extinct Xavantes tribe deep in the heart of Brazil’s rainforest. Proud of his heritage but concerned that his tribe’s ancient culture was being destroyed, he wanted to do something to preserve his people’s story and to teach others about his culture. His inspiration came when he was invited to participate in an exchange program at a school in San Paulo. There he saw a computer for the first time and quickly adapted to the high tech world. He created a CD-ROM which recorded all aspects of his tribe’s history and unique language. Since then, his work and continuing efforts have built a new bridge understanding and acceptance between his people and the rest of the community.

Jozica Zupancic (12 yrs, Slovenia) Jozica decided to help Kosovo children refugees during the summer of 1999. First, she convinced her family to take in Kosovo children and care for them in their home. She rallied the rest of her school friends to do the same. She helped

innocent war victims to find peace and affection. Her school was designated a UNESCO School of Peace. She shows the type of intelligent leadership and compassion that is so evidently lacking in our government's policy towards asylum seekers.

Hallmarks and Qualities of Intelligent Leadership

The WEF Study was concerned with the attributes necessary if our students are to be empowered to create preferred futures. Participants gave high priority to values and action competencies, that is, to the qualities crucial to “intelligent leadership”

The WEF Study indicated that intelligent leadership is about the development of supportive and collaborative relations with others; commitment to universal values; taking moral responsibility for one's actions; concern for minorities and human dignity; human rights and social justice; non-violent strategies for resolving conflicts; wise use of earth's resources and habitats.

Of course, there have been many studies of effective leadership. But in essence the studies I have cited and the examples given boil down to a few key principles, namely

1. **Strong Foundations:** Intelligent leaders have solid foundations. Deep moral commitments. They know what they are good at and their limitations. They inspire others with their grasp of issues to be addressed, their courage and determination. They create unity and trust. Building a strong foundation is synonymous with learning to be and learning to care.
2. **Clear purpose and mission.** All the effective leaders I have known have a very clear sense of purpose. Their behaviour is consistent with their core values. They are passionate about what they do, be it providing a community service, teaching or protecting a natural heritage site. Their passion is infectious. They generate shared enthusiasm. They bring out the best in us. Effective organizations similarly have a very clear sense of mission, one that is understood and shared by their members.
3. **Team building.** However important it is to have intelligent leaders at the top of the pecking order, it is even more vital to build a strong team. Intelligent leadership is about effective team work. About recognizing the leadership role

that each member of the team can play. About valuing the contributions and expertise within a team. About understanding that each one makes a difference. About a happy team, one in which everyone feels valued and proud to be there.

4. **Strategic planning.** Intelligent leadership demands both vision and strategy, being clear on where we are, where we want to go and how to get there. Key elements include predictive skills and creativity, engagement of team members in clarifying goals, setting priorities and targets, brainstorming about strategies, SWOT analysis (assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), reviewing research, gathering relevant data or information, agreeing on timelines and responsibilities.
5. **Effective delivery.** Intelligent leaders are determined to ensure the effective implementation of programs and delivery of services. They follow through. They make adjustments in the light of feedback. They listen to members of the team, clients and stakeholders. They are prepared to take calculated risks, to accept setbacks and are honest when things do not go according to plan. They remain true to their core values and mission. They are leaders not bureaucrats.
6. **Evaluation and Follow-up.** Intelligent leaders are goal-oriented. They want results. They ensure appropriate mechanisms for evaluating performance are in place. They take performance data seriously, but are driven by the mission of the organization. They look beyond the metrics and league tables to see what improvements are needed.

Conclusion and Implications

I began this talk by describing what is meant by “intelligent leadership” and with the assertion that we face a leadership crisis. When those at the top fail to provide intelligent leadership, the basic conditions necessary for people to realize their potentials and to live with dignity and meaning are not met. The gaps tend to be filled by voluntary organizations. In the end, then it is people power that matters. And people power is about each of us exercising “intelligent leadership.”

At a practical level, all of us (students, teachers, workers, retirees, whatever) need to seek out opportunities to exercise leadership in confronting the issues important to us. To make a difference, we need to

join forces with others sharing our passion to create a better world. We need to join voluntary organizations or groups whose mission matches the things we care about.

Given the need to build grassroots intelligent leadership, it would make sense if the enlightened corporations, organizations and education institutions like those represented here join forces. Collectively they are capable of providing the leadership training needed by their members, staff and students. Leadership training that focuses on intelligent directions. Leadership training that leads to action. Leadership opportunities for ordinary citizens as well as those in senior positions to exercise and hone their leadership skills.

In particular, I have stressed the need to ignite the passion for making a difference that is latent in our students. To encourage them and support their efforts to serve the community. Far too much of what we do in schools and universities is about compliance, about exams and league tables, about learning to know - but not learning to do, to be, or to live together. We need rethink our assessment priorities, curricula and extra-curricula programs. We need to focus on building in our young people the attributes we find in intelligent leaders. We need to provide opportunities for them to exercise that leadership.

As Fien et al. (2002) concluded:

(our students) need to be shown that there are pathways out of our current predicament. They need to be shown how prevailing norms and systems can adapt...They need to be shown how small changes can lead to larger changes...how to participate actively in such changes. They especially need to be given hope. They cry out for leadership.

Are we smart enough to give it?

REFERENCES

- Campbell, W.J., Baikaloff, N. & Power, C.N. (eds) (2006) *Towards a Global Community: Educating for Tomorrow's World*. Dordrecht, NL: Springer.
- Chomsky, N. (2003) *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Davis, G. & Weller, P. (2001) *Are you being served? State, Citizens and Governance*. Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Eidos (2005) *Beyond Rhetoric: University-community engagement in Victoria*. Brisbane: Eidos.
- Fien, J., Yencken, D., & Sykes, H. (2002) *Young people and the Environment: An Asian-Pacific Perspective*. Dordrecht NL: Kluwer.
- Mant, A. (1997) *Intelligent Leadership*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Oats, W. n. (2002) Nurturing the human spirit. In W.J. Campbell (ed) *Creating Our Common Future: Educating for Unity in Diversity*. Paris: UNESCO/Berghahn..
- Ostrow, F. (2006) Change management in government. *Harvard Business Review*, May 2006, 141-147.
- Pilger, J. (2002) *The New Rulers of the World*. London: Verso.
- Saul, J.R. (2005) *The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World*. London: Penguin Books.
- Stiglitz, J. (2002) *Globalisation and its Discontents* London: Penguin Books.
- UNESCO (1996) *Learning: The Treasure Within* (the Delors Report). Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- Vaitheeswaran, V. (2003) *Power to the people: How the coming energy revolution will transform an industry, change our lives, and maybe save the planet*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Zakaria, F. (1997) *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. NY: W.W. Norton & Company.