

CHAPTER ONE

THE ESSENCE OF LEARNING
LEADERSHIP

Think of the word *leader*. (Don't spend more than five seconds letting images flit through your consciousness.) What pictures does this word conjure up? Do you see a man? Or do you see a woman? Is that man or woman adopting a posture that seems strong, confident, bold, assertive? What do those attributes look like in your mind? Is the person you're thinking of White? Is she or he wearing a suit or uniform? Stephen Preskill (Stephen P) grew up in the United States, and the leader who most quickly jumps to mind for him is Franklin Delano Roosevelt, declaring to the American public that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. Stephen Brookfield (Stephen B) grew up in England, and a picture of a cigar-chomping Winston Churchill bedecked in military regalia jumps into his head. If you are a White person (as the two of us are), the chances are you have been so successfully socialized by patriarchy and White supremacy that these are the sorts of people you will think of. If you are a union member or socialist, you may also think of other people—Eugene Debs, or Aneurin Bevin, for example. If you are African American, Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Paul Robeson, Ella Baker, Marcus Garvey, Septima Clark, W.E.B. DuBois, Angela Davis, or Martin Luther King may be the names that pop up. Or perhaps women such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, or Margaret Thatcher suggest themselves. Interestingly, on the basis of a wholly unscientific polling one of us did of his women friends and colleagues (all of whom had graduate degrees, knew of the insidious nature of patriarchy, and considered themselves feminists), not a single woman

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was mentioned in the first three names of leaders each of these women gave. Churchill, John Kennedy, and Joseph Stalin were the most frequent.

Our contention in this book is that the images of leadership—indeed, the very words *leader* and *leadership*—have been culturally framed to equate effective leadership with authoritarian control imposed by those at the apex of a hierarchy. A smooth and seamless ideological manipulation has ensured that those we automatically think of as leaders are precisely the people who represent the interests of the status quo: males from upper-class families who function as protectors of wealth and privilege. One need only think of the Bush dynasty in the United States; in the last twenty years it has produced two presidents and the governor of a swing state that ensured the election of his brother to the presidency in the face of allegations of serious electoral fraud. The Kennedy dynasty had the project of combating Jim Crow practices forced on them by events, but they too were drawn from the same narrow spectrum.

Churchill, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Bush, Stalin: these figures represent a distressingly narrow view of how people in organizations and communities get things done. According to this view, leaders are highly directive people who relay commands to their subordinates, expecting them to be carried out with dispatch and efficiency. Typically, leaders are also the people who have titles—CEO, president, chairman of the board, and principal being some of the familiar designations. In this perspective, leaders are thought to be ahead of their followers and in some important way distant from them. It is no accident that the Kennedys were portrayed as living within a magical bubble (Camelot) in much the same way as monarchies have been portrayed throughout history. Leaders are presented as being somehow higher, smarter, and more advanced than their followers, with a breadth of experience and depth of wisdom they use to help followers see the light of the leader's more progressive vision. Yet, ironically, leaders are also very often associated with maintaining the status quo, with creating an environment where stability and harmony are the highest values.

The conventional concept of leadership comprises the four elements critiqued by Raelin (2003) in his analysis of a culture

that prizes and practices directive, top-down leadership. In Raelin's view, people automatically assume effective leadership to be serial (exercised by one person at a time, passing the baton on to the next generational leader), individual (only ever exercised by a single individual), controlling (fiercely pursuing the leader's vision of how others should live and how a community or organization should function), and dispassionate (viewing as necessary "collateral damage," the wrecked lives of those individuals, cultures, or communities that are uprooted, excluded, or disenfranchised in the pursuit of a set of desired goals). Conventionally defined leadership is practiced by a single, distinct figure positioned at the top of a hierarchy, what Foucault (1980) called sovereign power. This person directs the organization or movement's operations, relying minimally on subordinates, and imposing his or her vision on others. He or she is determined to be perceived as unemotional, confident, unwaveringly commanding, and bordering on arrogant. Separate and mysterious, conventional leaders avoid getting too close to their constituents so as to keep them subordinate.

Our contention is not only that leadership doesn't have to be this way but that it can't be sustained this way if meaningful and lasting changes for the common good are going to occur. In an era in which people routinely expect to be lied to by those in power, we need leaders who strive to place learning at the center of their work. Such leaders know in their bones that they have much to learn and that the people likely to be their best teachers are the co-workers they see and collaborate with everyday. They also see encouraging the learning of others as the central responsibility of leadership.

Our assumptions about leadership are (as you will no doubt have gathered by now) radically different from the conventional model. Our chief claim is that leadership can be practiced by anyone in any kind of movement, community, organization, or institution. It is part anarchist, part collective, part democratic, and constantly rotating. Leadership is not necessarily a function of a hierarchy or bureaucracy; nor does a single person in a position of authority have to exercise it. It is, rather, a relational and collective process in which collaboration and shared understanding are deemed axiomatic to getting things done. Leadership has little to

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do with formal authority or where one is in the chain of command, and a great deal to do with forming and sustaining relationships that lead to results in the common interest. Furthermore, leaders are not necessarily the most prominent or vocal members of a group; they are often quite deferential, leaving space for others to voice their concerns and contribute their ideas.

Leadership as it is explored here encourages change, even pushes for it, especially when the status quo demeans people or fails to give them opportunities to employ fully their experience and talents. The leaders the two of us prize most (once we've done some ideological detoxification on the automatic images that come to our minds) are critically aware of our failures as a society to serve all people well. For Stephen P, a prime example would be Ella Baker because in her quest to make American society more just and equal she never drew attention to herself, acknowledged the thousands of others who contributed to this ongoing struggle, and demanded that power be centered in the group, not the individual. For Stephen B it would be Paul Robeson or Nelson Mandela because of the strength they displayed in their unwavering commitment to combating White supremacy and global capitalism (in Robeson's case) and White supremacy and the complete economic and political disenfranchisement of his country's majority population (in Mandela's case). Both men paid a heavy price for their commitment. For Robeson it was the loss of livelihood, public vilification for much of his adult life, and increasingly debilitating depression (which his son argues was the result of the CIA and FBI's administration of drugs and covert encouragement of "treatment" by electro-shock therapy). For Mandela the price was spending most of his adult life in prison, unable to see his children and then grandchildren growing up, and unable to grow old with his wife.

The leaders we are interested in know that a vision for more humane and just communities is desperately needed and that leadership entails people coming forward who are able and eager to work with others to create such communities. They also know that leadership is often facilitative rather than directive, and that good leaders learn to create an environment conducive to people's growth and inviting of everyone's participation in the fashioning of change to promote the public interest. But more

than anything else, the leaders we are interested in are learners. They revere learning, they learn from their experience and from their co-workers, and they are constantly sharing with others the fruits of what they have learned. They also regard as paramount the responsibility to encourage the learning of others.

Because leaders who learn know how beneficial and broadening learning is for everyone, they work to create mechanisms, structures, strategies, and opportunities to support individual and communal learning. Although they express a variety of motives for wanting to lead, these learning leaders communicate clearly and often that learning isn't only a means to some end; sometimes it is an important end in itself. Co-workers who are leaders can be threatening to entrenched administrators because they often use cogent, well-prepared arguments to challenge things as they are. They have an excellent grasp of the relevant facts and they know how to use them to make the best possible case for how things might be different. Under the best of circumstances, such leaders are invaluable to organizations and institutions. Yet because they seek to question and even overthrow the status quo, those who resist change view them with suspicion, particularly the unrepresentative minority whose interests are threatened. On the other hand, those who lead by virtue of learning encourage and support such co-workers and find multiple ways for them to have an impact on the direction of their shared enterprise.

What are some of the ways learning leaders demonstrate their commitment? Well, they listen with close attention, observe with a discerning eye, and read texts of all kinds—including the texts of people's experiences—with critical acumen. They are constantly on the alert for new information, novel insights, deepened understanding. For these learning leaders, everything learned is potentially grist for the leadership mill. They try constantly to make connections between what they have learned, the issues that matter to them most, and the goals they are trying to achieve as leaders. Nothing is too trivial or insignificant, at least at first, to be taken into account and used in some way to lead more effectively or to bring about change more proactively. Such leaders do not hide their enthusiasm for what they are learning, either. They eagerly and overtly share their reflections on experience, what they are reading, what new ideas they are coming up with, what interesting

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connections they are making, and how they are revising earlier ideas and practice because of new learning. They do this in part because they are unabashed lovers of learning. But they also do so for strategic effect, to stir up their co-workers' excitement about their own learning and its potential for stimulating creativity and furthering change.

The *raison d'être* for modeling a public commitment to learning is to induce co-workers to launch their own learning projects. Everything that learning leaders do should be linked in some way to supporting other people's learning. This includes supplying resources, bringing compatible collaborators together, connecting learning to purposeful and meaningful work (paid and unpaid), and offering ongoing incentives for this learning to continue. These actions are intended to induce some change deemed important by the community, movement, or organization. This kind of intrinsic reinforcement should never be underestimated by learning leaders, particularly when it is linked to proof that an act of learning is contributing to something that matters to the community as a whole. Most significant of all outcomes, perhaps, are the long-term relationships that occur as a result of working together on learning projects. Such relationships not only increase one's willingness to learn and lessen one's vulnerability about admitting ignorance but also fuel future projects and public work. As relationships deepen, the distinction between leader and follower blurs, with so-called positional leaders and followers freely exchanging roles as leader-follower, teacher-student, and speaker-listener. In this way shared, openly displayed learning is beneficial to the whole community.

FOUNDATIONS OF LEARNING LEADERSHIP

The idea that leaders should place learning at the center of their practice is not new or original. Learning as a defining component of leadership has been practiced and conceptualized in all kinds of social movements, revolutions, and organizations. In this section, we review five of the most frequently cited models of leadership that we feel contribute to this idea: transformational, symbiotic, developmental, servant, and organic leadership.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The relational emphasis we have outlined is central to James MacGregor Burns's original formulation of transforming leadership (1978). In contrast to transactional leadership (which he characterized as an exchange that is temporary, instrumental, and nonbinding), transforming leadership signifies a long-term relationship between leaders and followers that produces significant change, raises leaders and followers to higher levels of motivation and morality, and encourages followers to assume leadership roles themselves. Transactional leadership leaves the power relations between leaders and followers unchanged. Transforming leadership produces a climate in which followers are constantly becoming leaders by virtue of the ideas they put forward, the actions they take, and the learning they engage in. Burns indicates that one of the markers of transformational leaders is their capacity to learn from their followers, to be willing students to their followers' teachings. Such leaders have developed the seemingly paradoxical ability "to lead by being led" (p. 117) as they unite with followers to pursue goals that transcend self-interest and that seek to further some notion of the common good.

SYMBIOTIC LEADERSHIP

Building on this reciprocal conception of leadership, Matusak (1997) contends that "the relationship of leader and follower is symbiotic; that each role benefits greatly the interdependent nature of the relationship; that the leader today may be the follower tomorrow" (p. 27). For her, leadership is at its best when leader and led feel inspired and energized to do great things together, to scale new heights of collective accomplishment, and to share roles of responsibility that reflect much more positively on the group as a whole than on any one individual. Leaders who learn carefully cultivate a dynamic in which everyone enjoys the opportunity to be a leader at least some of the time. This dynamic is collective and requires a partial submerging of the self inside the group, a losing of oneself for the sake of the whole. It means that anyone can contribute at any time as leader, follower, innovator, protégé, mentor, guide, witness, or scribe. All of these roles are necessary

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and valued, and who does what is irrelevant as the group becomes a collective unit. In a collective dynamic, individual interests are fused with a sense of the common good, and identity is derived from participation in a shared, mutually satisfying endeavor.

DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP

Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) augment these notions of reciprocity and collectivity in their book *A Tradition That Has No Name*. Here they explore the implications of what they label developmental leadership, a tradition that focuses on quietly and self-effacingly developing the leadership potential in others. Developmental leadership targets the silenced and overlooked members of communities, to help them find their voice and take a more active role in shaping their individual and collective destinies. Enthusiastically open to the contributions of others, especially those who have repeatedly been displaced and ignored by the majority, developmental leaders are disciplined learners, eager to reexamine old assumptions and reconsider ingrained practices. They take the lead in questioning, reevaluating as they try to see things from new vantage points, and working tirelessly “to get others to do the same. They are such good listeners, because they see themselves learning from everyone, no matter how young, inexperienced or silenced a person might be” (p. 272). Developmental leaders value constructed knowing, the process by which groups of people come to new understandings about themselves and the larger world through the give and take of spirited dialogue. Such leaders are drawn from both genders, with Myles Horton (founder and creator of the Highlander Folk School) an exemplar of the process.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Still another leadership practice that underscores learning leadership is servant leadership. The servant leader stands in sharp contrast to the conventional leader. The conventional leader aspires to lead because of a need for power or material wealth or for some other extrinsic desire. Such a leader is a leader first. The test of leadership of this kind may be found in such things

as productivity figures, movement up school league tables, or the volume of legislation signed into law. The servant leader is a servant first and reluctantly accepts a leadership role in order to support and assist those who remain unserved. The test of the servant leader's effectiveness is the extent to which followers' actual needs (which may differ markedly from official definitions of what these needs are) are realized. Robert Greenleaf (1977), one of the leading articulators of this theory, says that the key questions for the servant leader are: "Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?" (pp. 13–14).

With regard to servant leadership, we caution against overemphasis on autonomy; it can undercut the collective dynamic referred to earlier. But we affirm the importance placed on furthering the interests of those most disregarded by the majority. We are also aware that there are situations in which meeting people's felt and expressed needs is the last thing we should be doing. In a consumer society in which people judge their own, and others', worth by the amount of goods they possess, we must challenge the need to engage in the pursuit of ever more expensive designer possessions. In a racist society, the last thing we need to do is affirm White supremacy by supporting the needs of those who wish to overturn affirmative action, which they view as discriminating against White males.

One of the defining qualities of servant leaders is their inclination to listen first. Listening, according to Greenleaf, is a discipline that must be steadfastly practiced and, despite lack of immediate results, consistently employed. It is the central practice of servant leaders because "true listening builds strength in other people" (p. 17). On a related note, servant leaders use words sparingly. They have learned how inadequate speech can be, how feebly it captures the richness of lived experience. Their art is learning how to say just enough, without excess or embellishment, to help the listener connect the words that are spoken to her or his own experience. O'Toole (1996) argues that even some leaders typically viewed as distant and charismatic were noted for their listening ability and for their willingness to take dissent seriously.

He makes this case for such Rushmorean figures as Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and, to a lesser extent, Theodore Roosevelt. O'Toole observes that these presidents listened "to their followers and encouraged dissenting opinion among their advisors." Accordingly, they all chose their cabinets carefully to reflect a broad range of opinion and used them "to test ideas, explore all sides of issues, and to air the full range of opinion" (p. 29).

Matusak (1997) adds that leaders who listen must do so fully and genuinely. When leaders are authentic listeners, they remain open to new and different ideas. They convey that they believe what another person has to say is important, that they are interested in it even if they disagree with what is said. They strive to understand this person's rationale and realize that it is valid within the speaker's frame of reference. This is a leadership implementation of the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas's ideas (1973) regarding the four validity claims that must be met for communication to be authentic. Habermas believes that to communicate authentically speakers strive to use language that stands the best chance of being understood by hearers; this is the claim of *comprehensibility*. Authentic speakers also do their best to give the fullest possible information about the matter under consideration; this is the claim of *truth*. The extent to which speakers follow the rules of talk that prevail in a discussion community is a third feature of authentic speech; this is the claim of *rightness*. Rightness is crucial because communication is impossible without people observing the intuitively understood norms and rules governing speech, a sort of broadly accepted road map of talk. Finally, we need to know that the people speaking to us are sincerely interested in making themselves understandable and in understanding us in return; this is the claim of *authenticity*. To Habermas and Matusak, meeting these claims is crucial to establishing and sustaining trust.

Embedded in the practice of servant leadership is a criterion by which societies are judged. For Greenleaf, "caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built" (p. 49). The test of the servant leader is the extent to which this person is generous and giving, so that her effect is an enlargement of kindness and joy. At the center of such leadership are the intertwined notions of collectivity and compassion. Compassion is, after all, a collective

phenomenon, rooted in the sense that others' flourishing and one's own happiness are inseparable. But caring and compassion are not to be sprayed indiscriminately; rather, they are to be directed specifically at the most marginalized, underserved, and despised sectors of the populace.

Servant leaders view diversity as a strength to be savored and appreciated, not a problem to be overcome. For De Pree (1989), "an understanding of the diversity of people's gifts, talents, and skills" underlies every interaction and decision. Understanding diversity includes knowing how diminished we all are when voices go unheard, and how important it is "to begin to think about being abandoned to the strengths of others" (p. 9). A thoughtful approach to diversity calls on us to celebrate the talents and gifts each person brings to the community, and challenges leaders, in particular, to learn that "the art of leadership lies in polishing and liberating and enabling" (p. 10) those talents and gifts for the benefit of all. Again, in servant leadership the importance to genuine diversity of the least heard voices is paramount.

ORGANIC LEADERSHIP

The idea that all have something to contribute to leadership is at the heart of the thought of the Italian political activist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci was a founder member of the Italian Communist Party, a journalist for socialist newspapers, and a strategist for the factory council movement in 1920s Turin, which advocated direct worker control of industries such as the Fiat motor company. In 1926, while a Communist deputy in the Italian parliament, he was arrested by the fascist government (Mussolini had come to power in 1922) and placed under police supervision. In May 1928, he was tried as a political prisoner, with the prosecutor reportedly declaring "for twenty years we must stop this brain from working." He spent the rest of his life in prison, interspersed with brief spells in hospital, until dying in 1937 in a sanitarium days after his full release finally became legal. There could hardly be a more dramatic illustration of Zinn's (1990) observation that "how we think is . . . a matter of life and death" (p. 2).

Gramsci developed the concept of the organic intellectual to describe the kind of people we profile in this book. Where

he talks about organic intellectuals, we talk of organic leaders, drawn from a movement or community, remaining tied to it even though their work may take them out of it, and spending their life fighting a war of position (as Gramsci called it) on their group's behalf. Organic intellectuals were "elites of a new type, which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them" (p. 340). These leaders are able to formulate and communicate a strategy for political revolution in terms that the working class or racial minorities can understand, because they are themselves formed by working-class culture or their racial membership. The end result of this effort is establishment of a new hegemony reflective of working class interests.

Building on Marx, Gramsci contends that unless a cadre of organic leaders emerges to act as a catalyst for revolutionary change, a group, class, or race will remain one *in* itself (one tied together by virtue of habit and culture) rather than one *for* itself (with a self-conscious awareness of its interests that is held by the majority of the group). Organic intellectuals bring the necessary leadership to help people realize their true situation of oppression and to prompt them to decide to change this through organized, mass political action; in other words, to become groups for themselves. The existence of organic leaders is crucial to the awakening of revolutionary fervor. In Gramsci's view, the dynamics of a large-scale political movement are such that "innovation cannot come from the mass, or at least at the beginning, except through the mediation of an elite" (p. 335). Organic intellectuals have the responsibility to help people understand the existence of ruling-class hegemony and the need to replace this with a hegemony that reflects the wishes of the majority. This is precisely how Nelson Mandela framed his life's work: to ensure that the majority of South Africans constituted a government reflecting their interests.

To lead effectively, organic intellectuals need the capacity to empathize with the condition of the oppressed. They must be capable of "feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 418). This is why it is so difficult for well-meaning middle-class radicals to become organic leaders. Despite Paulo Freire's oft-quoted injunction (1973) for middle-class activists to

commit class suicide so they can work in an authentic way with the peasantry and other oppressed groups, this transition is highly problematic. What of attempts to commit racial, rather than class, suicide? How can White adult activists ever experience the systemic racism visited daily on people of color? As Holst (2002) points out, discussions of organic leaders in the civil rights struggle that focus on Martin Luther King (the emblematic organic intellectual, in Cornel West's view) tend to ignore how the Civil Rights Movement "produced organic intellectuals from the Black share-croppers and working class throughout the South" (p. 85). Also, from an Africentric adult education perspective (Colin, 1988, 2002; Colin and Guy, 1998) racial suicide by Whites is a meaningless idea. The central definitional component of Africentrism (Asante, 1998a, 1998b) is that its proponents exhibit racial membership of the African Diaspora, a membership that ties them together by culture, tradition, and the experience of racism. Of course, Whites can be supporters and allies of struggles of people of color, and they may sometimes be invited to participate in them, but they cannot be movement organic leaders in Gramsci's terms.

As we think of leaders embedded within social movements, Gramsci's adumbration of the leader as organic intellectual has been helpful to us. To him the job of a leader who is an organic intellectual is to "organize human masses and create the terrain on which men [sic] move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle etc." (p. 377). There is no pretense of neutrality or objectivity here, no compulsion to see the oppressor's point of view. The intellectual as organic leader works to galvanize working-class opposition and translate this into the formation of an effective revolutionary party. In this analysis, education is a site for political practice in which organic intellectuals can assist the working class in its revolutionary struggle.

Our emphasis in this book is on leadership that places learning at its center, and this certainly encompasses many of the ideals and practices encompassed in the preceding five models. For example, learning leadership involves placing one's own agenda and persona in the background and the goals of the movement, community, or organization in the foreground. The first priority of learning leaders when allocating resources is the development of their staff, and they themselves will willingly forgo personal

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opportunities to make sure others get what they need to meet new challenges. Studying the lives of such leaders as Ella Baker and Jessie De La Cruz, Ellen Cantarow (1980) summarized well what sets these leaders apart: “They have been behind-the-scenes leaders who have worked to build strength, self-confidence, skills, and commitment in others. [They] believe that while organizers and leaders may inspire people, help them think through problems and shape goals, it is finally the people themselves, at the grassroots, who must bring a future that is still only in our imaginings” (p. xli). This gives a clue to how middle-class White radicals can work as leaders. They can use their privilege explicitly and purposefully for the good of groups other than those they are drawn from, and they can work to place ego gratification aside as they pursue these purposes.

What is distinctive about learning leadership is that it highlights in bold relief commitment to, and practice of, learning. A capacity to learn from experience; desire to explore new areas of knowledge and practice; readiness to critique, revise, and sometimes even abandon past assumptions in light of new events or insights; and concern for the learning of members as the most important purpose of an organization, community, or movement—these things are what make learning a way of leading. In our view, an important practice of learning leaders is to consistently and publicly model their own commitment to and practice of learning. Some elements of this are difficult; you can’t really invite colleagues over to your house to watch you read, or to see you come to fresh insights as you take a shower. However, you can speak in meetings or informal conversations about this reading or these insights and how they have affected your thinking and therefore your practice. In organization newsletters or movement rallies, you can reveal how your learning has challenged or confirmed assumptions you have about the way your community, organization, or movement can achieve its goals.

Perhaps the most important element of learning leadership, however, is being open to learning from the people around you and letting them see how crucial this is for your own practice and development. This last point cannot be overemphasized. Leaders love to learn from the people to whom they are responsible. They would rather learn than teach, rather listen than speak, rather

absorb new ideas than unfurl the latest innovation. Such leaders are committed to collective group leadership, to leading by virtue of bringing to the forefront the multiple talents found throughout the community, not through the brilliance of the authority figure at the top. It is not easy to lead in this way, accustomed as so many are to a culture that says the leader is the one who takes charge and tells everyone else what to do. But it does not take long, if the leader is consistent, to lead by drawing on the group's strengths and by taking seriously their pent-up ideas for making change.

THE NINE LEARNING TASKS OF LEADERSHIP

In this book, we tell the stories of many actual community and organizational leaders who share a commitment to leading through learning. We have found that their success as learning leaders is dependent on a number of dispositions, capacities, and public practices. We have described these, using the language of learning, as the nine learning tasks of leadership as we conceive it. The first of these tasks, the one that is foundational for all others, is *learning how to be open to the contributions of others*. Once one is able to practice this habit, then the second learning leadership task—*learning how to reflect critically on one's practice*—becomes possible. Our contention is that critical reflection is intrinsically a social learning process in which the perceptions and interpretations of others are crucial. Only if one is open to the contributions of others can one gather the perspectives needed to practice critical reflection. A third leadership task is *learning how to support the growth of others*. In terms of what we wish for those whom we serve, the enhanced capacity for them to learn is paramount. From this perspective, the focus of traditional performance appraisals becomes not “How well did you do your job this year?” but “What and how did you learn this year?”

Connected to supporting the learning of others is the fourth task, that of *learning how to develop collective leadership*. Collective leadership flows from a culture in which engagement in, and sharing of, learning is an expectation and a priority. As people learn new skills, dispositions, and epistemologies, they inevitably

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become aware of how individual learning is both premised on and contributes to the learning of others. We cannot learn to be critically reflective, analyze experience, question ourselves, practice democracy, sustain hope, or create community without the necessary involvement of others. Once we start to see that the collective is the source of so much of our learning, our strength, and our identity, it is but a short step to realizing that leadership also resides in the collective. When our perception of learning as an individual phenomenon changes to one of learning as a group process, then the idea that leadership is like learning—something that moves around the community and is dependent on the involvement of others—becomes commonplace.

Task five, *learning how to analyze experience*, is a leadership practice that all the leaders profiled in this book exemplified to a high degree. One of the most difficult dimensions of this task is when its practice leads us to challenge old assumptions and then to reconfigure accepted practices. In the conventional notion of leadership, a leader is not supposed to change her mind too much. She should create a vision, commit to it, and then relentlessly pursue it through hell or high water. Changing your mind is not an option in this model because to do so is perceived as a sign of weakness, an indication that you don't have the guts to push your agenda, or that you must have misdiagnosed the situation to begin with. We are particularly intrigued with those activist leaders who manage to engage publicly in reflection on experience—especially when their analysis led to radical shifts in direction—without weakening people's confidence in them.

Learning how to question oneself and others is the sixth task, and once again we contend that it is impossible to practice this alone. First, one learns questioning by seeing how others do it. This is where an organization like the Highlander Folk School was so influential on generations of activists. In Highlander workshops, practically the only action that facilitators took was to ask an occasional question. Ella Baker, Septima Clark, and other women activists (Lewis, 1998) lived this task throughout their lives, though McDermott (2007) cautions that Highlander itself was not immune to internal sexism. Baker was never satisfied with her efforts to promote a bottom-up approach to learning and social change and continuously questioned how she could involve

ordinary people in making important organizational decisions for the NAACP and SCLC. The environmentalist Aldo Leopold was also driven to constantly question his own ideas and get his students to reconsider how their assumptions about the natural environment often had multiple unforeseen consequences. The questions learning leaders pose challenge their followers to see complexities and interrelationships in major social issues and launch inquiries that stretch the bounds of their worldview. Moreover, this work is never done. What is learned one day is used the next as a bridge to considering a new set of understandings and challenges.

Learning democracy is the seventh task of learning leadership, and one that, like learning to question, never ends. Learning democracy requires, in the opinion of the adult educator Eduard Lindeman (Lindeman and Smith, 1951), studying a number of democratic disciplines. To live democratically one must learn to honor diversity, live with the partial functioning of the democratic ideal, avoid the trap of false antithesis (where we are always forced to choose between either-or, mutually exclusive options), accept the compatibility of ends and means (where we avoid the temptation to bypass the democratic process in the interests of speedily reaching a decision regarded as obviously right and necessary), correlate the functioning of social institutions (health, education, and social services) with democratic purposes, develop collective forms of social and economic planning, live with contrary decisions, and appreciate the comedy inherent in democracy's contradictions. For Lindeman, learning democracy was not just a leadership imperative; it was the central task of adult life.

When efforts to live democratically fail to reach full fruition (as is inevitable), then the eighth task—*learning to sustain hope in the face of struggle*—comes in to play. One of the dangers of learning leadership is that the longer one learns about leadership practice the more one becomes aware of just how deep and strong are the structural forces that oppose attempts to change the status quo. The development of radical pessimism (where realizing the forces ranged against us causes us to lose hope) is a danger facing all those who think and act critically. Prime examples for us of leaders who sustained hope in the face of unbearable animosity and political isolation are Paul Robeson and Nelson Mandela. As a result of being pilloried in the public press for his support of the

Soviet Union and his commitment to anticolonial struggles across the globe (as well as fighting White supremacy in the United States), Robeson was deprived of his passport and livelihood, forced to defend himself in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and labeled a traitor. Yet despite all these pressures, he remained steadfast in the certainty of his belief, his radical hope that the dawn of a nonracist, democratic socialist society was just around the corner. Mandela's imprisonment was not sought as an act of martyrdom; in fact, he went to great lengths to hide his identity so as to avoid capture. But when the government repeatedly promised him freedom so long as he refrained from political organizing, he consistently refused. Throughout his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (Mandela, 1994), he writes again and again of how his hope—his faith even—that the dawn of a properly democratic South Africa was inevitable never wavered. Che Guevara is another who, though mired in the Cuban jungle, hopelessly outnumbered, plagued by illness, and working with a few comrades and hopelessly outdated weapons, never lost his conviction that his guerrilla army would win the support of the mass populace and lead to the inevitable overthrow of the Batista regime.

Our ninth and final learning task is *learning to create community*. The leaders we profile in this book all seek to build community and teach the value of community-based decision making and leadership. Each of them has an intense interest in building communities where people's experience and knowledge are honored and where opportunities for members to develop their talents and capacities are limitless. When Aldo Leopold spoke of the biotic community, he meant an environment in which each organism contributes an irreplaceable element and in which the loss of any part somehow diminishes the whole. This is how Myles Horton, Ella Baker, Mary Parker Follett, and Eleanor Roosevelt regarded communities of human beings. They set out to create conditions for every person to add something invaluable to the community of learners. In so doing, the group's success became dependent on each individual's contribution. Building communities in which the members of those communities are authentically empowered to make important decisions for themselves and their neighbors remains a chief objective of the work of leaders who learn.

In the first half of each of the following nine chapters, we share at some length our understanding of what each of these learning tasks involves and how leaders practice them. Our objective is to show as clearly and straightforwardly as we can how leaders, particularly those pursuing social justice, place learning at the center of practice. We explore in specific, concrete terms how learning leaders continue to engage, challenge, and appreciate their collaborators, as well as stimulate them to meaningful action. Our belief is that when leaders make learning the most salient habit in any community, movement, or organization, the members are much more likely to claim their own empowerment and change the world. A small part of this first section entails introducing remarkable learning leaders, nearby and distant, well known and anonymous, who have been highly successful in keeping their own learning going while also doing everything possible to sustain the learning of their comrades.

In the second half of each of these chapters, we explore at much greater length the story of a particular learning leader who exemplifies the learning task that is the focus of the chapter. Our objective is not to offer full-scale biographies of these leaders and activists but to include highly focused vignettes or portraits of those who saw learning as a central part of their quest to create a more just and equitable society. For these leaders, learning was not a byproduct of the social justice struggle, nor primarily a personal characteristic worth cultivating. Learning was central to that struggle both in moving it forward and as evidence that it was making a difference for those committed to it. These learning leaders constantly brought attention to their own learning when recounting their efforts to foment change. Furthermore, they saw their leadership as including a strong teaching component. Yet the most important parts of their teaching were learning how to ask stimulating questions and being open to the teachings of their students, members, and followers. Such an attitude, incidentally, aligns perfectly with Burns's contention that transformational leaders always remain open to being led by their followers.

The leaders we profile all stand out as thinkers and activists in pursuit of some kind of social transformation. For Ella Baker, the goal was to end racism and ensure that African Americans and oppressed peoples everywhere enjoyed all the rights and

privileges to which they were entitled. For Septima Clark, it was to allow Black people the freedom to educate themselves and be full, active members of a democratic society. Jane Addams wanted everyone to have the basic necessities, which would allow them to take full advantage of all available educational opportunities and learn to work together in communities of learning. Paul Robeson, like Ella Baker, sought to end racism and ensure that people of all colors and classes identified their common interest in creating a democratic socialist society. Aldo Leopold's objective was to help people learn to conserve and appreciate the natural environment and develop the critical skills needed to oppose those bent on its destruction. Mary Parker Follett saw participatory democracy as the only sensible response to society's problems and wanted everyone to understand fully its many advantages. Cesar Chavez sought economic and social justice for farm workers and never wavered in his belief that with work and persistence that day of justice would eventually arrive. Nelson Mandela wanted nothing less than to overthrow White supremacy in South Africa and make it possible for Blacks to participate without restriction in the life of his country. Myles Horton sought to use progressive adult learning methods to help poor people from all over the south gain greater control over the economic, social, and political forces shaping their communities.

As we have said, all of these leaders put learning at the center of their efforts. They gauged their progress by the degree to which their constituents, collaborators, and colleagues continued to learn how to analyze and act on the problems facing them. These leaders, without exception, also maintained a broad outlook on their work, seeing it always as a struggle for their comrades' shared humanity and creating the political conditions most likely to bring about each person's flourishing. Even if they did not say so explicitly, they agreed with Myles Horton that anything they wanted for themselves, anything that might help them grow and thrive, they must also want for everyone else without exception. That is the kind of community they all believed in. That is the kind of society they all attempted to build. The learning tasks these remarkable leaders executed as they pursued this goal are the focus of this book.