

Leadership, Ignatian Way

The Ignatian style of leadership and ministry essentially consists not of a set of doctrines or rules, but rather involves principles that foster an integrated way of living.

I. A HISTORICAL EXPRESSION

A succinct expression of the Ignatian vision of leadership uses historical language from the early history of the Jesuits. Jeronimo Nada, a member of the nascent Society of Jesus in the 16th Century, was entrusted by Saint Ignatius of Loyola with the task of communicating and engendering Ignatian ideals to Jesuits throughout the world. Everywhere Nadal went, he used consistently employed the catch phrase *nuestro modo de proceder* or **“our way of proceeding”** in referring to the Ignatian style of leadership and ministry. Moreover, he used the following triad to capture three fundamental principles of the Ignatian charism: *spiritu, corde, practice* or **“in the Spirit, from the heart, practically.”**

“In the Spirit” – that which brings about consolation. Acting out of God’s presence, goodness, justice, unity, reconciliation, joy, or similar movements toward God.

“From the heart” – “Heart speaks to heart.” A way of speaking, acting and relating to others from the bottom of one’s heart. Engaging people at “the heart” does not mean solely touching their feelings and emotions but attracting people at the deeper level of motivations, values, and desires. It involves getting to the “heart of the matter,” relating to people at levels that give deeper meaning and purpose.

“Practically” – synonymous with “pastoral.” It entails what is more helpful in caring for and guiding people spiritually, toward holistic growth. The classic Jesuit expression inquires: “What is better for the ‘help of souls’?”

II. A CONTEMPORARY ARTICULATION

In his book, *Heroic Leadership*, Chris Lowney articulates the Jesuit model of leadership by delineating its distinctive qualities and guiding principles in the context and language of business:

A. Four Distinctive Characteristics¹

1. “We’re all leaders, and we’re leading all the time, well or poorly.”
2. “Leadership springs from within. It’s about who I am as much as what I do.”
3. “Leadership is not an act. It is my life, a way of living.”
4. “I never complete the task of becoming a leader. It’s an ongoing process.”

1. **Everyone is a leader**, and everyone is leading all the time – sometimes in immediate, dramatic, and obvious ways, more often in subtle, hard-to-measure ways, but leading nonetheless.

¹ Key language and quotes are taken from Chris Lowney’s *Heroic Leadership*, Loyola Press, 2003.

It is in the everyday, ordinary activities and choices that I am becoming a leader. It is the way I smile, dress, am spontaneous, self-revealing, kind, affectionate, and supportive that I influence others, for better or for worse. Leadership is primarily an inside job because it is about self-leadership. However, it affects people exteriorly. My inner choices influence others at an external level. As I grow and improve, so does my group, company, family.

2. A leader's greatest power is his or her **personal vision**, communicated by the example of his or her daily life. Vision springs from within, from hard self-reflection that yields deep-rooted personal beliefs and attitudes: What do I care about? What do I want? How do I fit into the world?

3. **Leadership is not a job** to be left at work when one comes home to relax and enjoy life. It does not consist of putting on a set of values or conduct when one is "on duty" and putting on a different set when one is "off duty" – like a lab coat or construction hat. Because, it is a way of valuing and thinking that springs from deep within, there is no sure checklist of things to do; rather, it is an inner compass from which to discern one's action. Heroic leadership is a daily personal pursuit. Do I wake up in the morning with this attitude?

4. Becoming a leader is an **on-going process** of self-development. Leadership is a never-ending work in progress that draws on continually maturing self-understanding. Environment change, people change, priorities shift. These changes call for continual adjustment and recommitment. No one becomes a leader by accident. Strong leaders welcome the opportunity to learn about oneself and the world and look forward to new discoveries and interests. A leader is essentially a pilgrim, not one who has "arrived" at some idealized state of perfection.

"The Jesuit team doesn't tell us much we don't already know about **what leaders do**. Nor do they teach us anything about **what leaders achieve**. But they have a lot to say about **who leaders are**, and **how leaders live**, and **how they become leaders** in the first place."²

B. Four Guiding Principles Forming an Integrated Way of Living, a "Way of Proceeding":

1. **Self-awareness**: understanding their strengths, weaknesses, values, and worldviews
2. **Ingenuity**: confidently innovating and adapting to embrace a changing world
3. **Love**: engaging others with a positive, loving attitude
4. **Heroism**: energizing ourselves and others through heroic ambitions.

1. Self-awareness: "To overcome oneself and to order one's life"³

Leaders thrive by understanding who they are and what they value, by becoming aware of unhealthy blind spots or weaknesses that can derail them, and by cultivating the habit of continuous self-reflection and learning.

When Nelson Mandela was liberated after 25 years of imprisonment by apartheid regimes, he made this confession: "My greatest enemy was not those who put or kept me in prison. It was myself. I was afraid to be who I am." "Overcoming oneself," "self-acceptance," and "being at home with

² Lowney, p. 15. The bolded phrases betray my emphases.

³ The phrases quoted in the subheadings are taken from Saint Ignatius' *Constitutions*.

oneself” are expressions referring to a journey within that seeks a healthy command of self. Only the person who knows what she wants can pursue it energetically and inspire others to do so. A good leader knows what she wants in life, how to get it, and what weaknesses or paralyzing mindsets can trip her up. Leadership begins with *self*-leadership.

Key virtue: humility (accepting the truth about oneself through regular practice of self-reflection like the daily awareness examen)

2. Ingenuity: “The whole world will become our house”

Leaders make themselves and others comfortable in a changing world. They eagerly explore new ideas, approaches, and cultures rather than shrink defensively from what lurks around life’s next corner. Anchored by nonnegotiable principles and values, they cultivate the “indifference” that allows them to adapt confidently.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola described the ideal Jesuit as “living with one foot raised” – always ready to respond to emerging opportunities. A leader must be vigilant about and set aside ingrained habits, prejudices, cultural biases and the “we’ve always done it this way” attitude – baggage that blocks effective, adaptive responses. He or she stands by core beliefs and values that are nonnegotiable. Knowing what’s negotiable and what isn’t, the leader can adapt or accommodate confidently. In short, he or she becomes “indifferent” – free from attachments to places, possessions, ways of doing things in order to move, change, or adapt to engage opportunities.

Key virtue: indifference or interior freedom

3. Love: “With greater love than fear”

Leaders face the world with a confident, healthy sense of themselves as endowed with talent, dignity, and the potential to lead. They find these attributes in others and passionately commit to honoring and unlocking the potential they find in themselves and in others. They create environments bound and energized by loyalty, affection, and mutual support – places marked by “greater love than fear.”

Research has shown that individuals perform best when they are respected, valued, trusted by someone who genuinely cares for their well-being. Ignatius used to say “Refuse no talent, nor any man of quality.” Do we treat people well because we need them to do things for us, or do we empower them to develop their gifts, regardless? Do we strive to make people *want* to work and make a difference rather than just making them work? This love-driven leadership involves:

- the vision to see each person’s talents, potentials, and dignity
- the creativity, passion, and commitment to unlock those potentials
- the resulting loyalty and mutual support that energize and unite teams

In short, love-driven leadership involves a way of seeing potentials and the commitment to empower others toward realization of that vision.

Key virtue: love (that empowers, unifies, edifies)

4. Heroism: “Eliciting great desires”

Leaders imagine an inspiring future and strive to shape it rather than passively watching the future happen around them. They extract gold from opportunities at hand rather than waiting for golden opportunity to be handed to them.

Eleanor Roosevelt said: “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” One will not achieve the dream one cannot imagine. This involves the Ignatian ideal of the “magis” (A.M.D.G. – “for the greater glory of God” lies in a total surrender to God). At times this means envisioning and imagining heroic objectives. At other times, it entails the Theresian ideal of “doing an ordinary act with great love.” It may involve doing more; or it may mean doing less. This always involves compassion toward others in understanding of weaknesses, but aiming high nevertheless.

Key virtue: cultivate imagination (wonder like a child; dream like a visionary; think outside the box)