



**Lessons on Leadership:
What the Legal Profession Can Learn From Martin Luther King, Jr
Friday, April 28th, 2022, 10:30 AM-11:45 A.M.**

Description

This is a seventy-five minute presentation that discusses Donald T. Phillips' Martin Luther King, Jr. on Leadership: Inspiration & Wisdom for Challenging Times, a work that analyzes the leadership traits of Martin Luther King, Jr. This presentation will discuss Dr. King's leadership style, and how talent development professionals can incorporate these leadership lessons in their own practices.

Key Topics and Reading References

- 1. Good leaders do not dictate. They listen to others, generate buy in from them, and otherwise make them feel included in the decision-making process.**
 - a. The best leaders realize that people want to know that their ideas are being, the very least heard (42)
 - b. When leaders listen first, then speak, they are engendering trust in those who would follow (43)
 - c. The desire for lifelong learning fosters a strong tendency to listen. (43)
 - d. Listening has four major benefits – builds trust, facilitates understanding of the people's aspirations and expectations, enables learning, and fosters connection and rapport with others. (43)
 - e. Listen and follow the lead of the people. Work in groups and make no major policy decision without the input of other leaders in the organization. (51)
 - f. In the end, the only real power a leader has is to persuade. People will not support a dictator. (610) When leaders begin to coerce or tell people what to do, they are essentially abandoning true leadership and embracing dictatorship. (61)
 - g. People will not follow a leader unless they trust that individual and are persuaded that the course advocated is the right one to take. (61)
 - h. It often takes more courage and self-confidence to work with people – to convince and persuade them – than it does to dictate or simply issue orders. (188)
 - i. Practitioner discussion re how to generate buy in and make others feel included in the decision-making process.
- 2. Good leaders inspire people with a dream or a plan.**
 - a. Most of the world's great leaders provided an inspiring vision. You can't get people to respond to anything if they are not stimulated. (317)



- b. Focus on the human desire for a better tomorrow. (317)
- c. The real genius of the “I Have a Dream” speech was not the oratory, but the substance of what MLK outlined as his vision. He was tapping into the values, the wants, the need, and expectations of the people he represented. (321)
- d. People do not follow leaders who do not care about the values, the wants and needs, the hopes and aspirations of those in the organization. People do not follow leaders who don’t care, period.” (286)
- e. Practitioner discussion re how to generate an inspiring vision.

3. Good leaders are lifelong learners.

- a. After his defeat in Albany, everyone wondered why he could be so upbeat. MLK constantly learned from experience and subjected himself to endless self-analysis. (77)
- b. Learning and leadership go hand in hand. Not all readers can be leaders, but all leaders must be readers. Harry Truman. (79)
- c. Leaders anticipate setbacks. They expect to make mistakes because they understand that when an individual is out front making things happen, events will not always turn out perfectly. (82). To that end, the SCLC always conducted a postmortem of every campaign in which it was involved. (82) MLK and his team did such a post-mortem after the unsuccessful Albany campaign.
- d. Good leaders willingly accept criticism. (297-304). In general, there are only two things for which leaders can legitimately be criticized – for not doing their jobs properly and for not accepting the fact that they are going to be criticized. (304)
- e. SCLC set up a formal leadership training program. (205) Part of the reason for such intensive training was to develop new leaders from the organization’s existing ranks – those who could take over when the current leaders were long gone. (205-206)
- f. Practitioner discussion re how to incorporate focus on lifelong learning as a leadership skill in your practice.

4. Good leaders involve everyone through alliances, teamwork, and diversity.

- a. MLK worked to build alliances with other national civil rights groups. (138-139)
- b. Advantages of alliance building (139-140)
 - i. Banding together creates energy, enthusiasm, and courage
 - ii. People gain more power and strength in formal organizations
 - iii. Major social change is best achieved in groups
 - iv. Alliances effectively expand contacts and networks of communication
 - v. Alliance allow more results to be achieved
- c. MLK built alliances with white Georgians and labor unions (141). Note that he often gave credit to Hoffa and Reuther (142)



- d. MLK built relationships with a number of northern philanthropic organizations. (142)
- e. MLK made a point to build an alliance with JFK. MLK also built an alliance with LBJ and supported his new War on Poverty initiative (144)
- f. MLK had the self-confidence to surround himself with the best people he could find. He was humble enough to listen to them, and talented enough to keep them all together. (144-145)
- g. MLK generated teamwork – he would hold regular retreats – try not to take sides, let everyone debate and discussion, and then attempt to arrive at a consensus. (145)
- h. Teams are better than individual work for four reasons: (147)
 - i. Teams bring together a broader mix of skills that exceed those of any single individual.
 - ii. Teams jointly develop and strive toward clear goals.
 - iii. Teams can adjust with greater speed and effectiveness.
 - iv. Trust and confidence are more easily built in teams.
- i. Diversity is an important part of teamwork – it doesn't do any good to have a team where all members look, think, and act exactly the same. MLK stressed diversity. He included taxi drivers, maids, and construction workers in his efforts (148-149).
 - i. Remember that the wider range of opinions you hear, the better chance you have of extracting the truth. (193)

5. Good leaders “march with the people.”

- a. Circulating with the people was an integral part of MLK's leadership style. (219)
- b. MLK was not actually there for Selma's Bloody Sunday – he would never forgive himself for not being there. (220).
- c. MLK “would not simply come into a city, talk the high talk, and then leave town. He would usually make a concerted effort to get out and speak with those everyday people who were most affected by whatever was taking place at the moment.” (220)
- d. The idea of a mass march was based on the principle in leadership that leaders must maintain a high degree of contact with the people they represent.” (226)
- e. During the Revolution, Washington spent time in the field with his troops. Lincoln did the same thing in the Civil War. Grant refused to run the Civil War battles from D.C. Truman engineered a “whistle stop” campaign. (226)
- f. In corporate America, this is known as MBWA – Managing by Wandering Around. (226)
- g. When MLK marched with the masses, his followers perceived that he was part of the crowd. (227) Why does this work? (228-229)
 - i. Obtain key information
 - ii. Keep people informed
 - iii. Obtain feedback



- iv. Facilitate learning
- v. Understand what people think and feel
- h. MLK walked among the people – rented an apartment in the west side of Chicago. Invited members of local gangs to visit MLK in his apartment. (232-233).

6. Good leaders negotiate and compromise.

- a. MLK showed this in his dealings with Mayor Daley when he was living in Chicago. (243)
- b. MLK “realized that a compromise is always less than people want or seek – sometimes less than they deserve.” But compromise can “allow for the realization of substantial achievement.” Similarly, Kennedy used compromise to end the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. (246-247)
- c. Compromise is often the only “practical tool” available for a leader, because leaders can’t generally use coercive power without slipping into the role of a dictator. (249)
- d. Negotiation and compromise steps (250-257)
 - i. Seek dialogue to discuss concerns
 - ii. Create a crisis
 - iii. Set our demands and conditions
 - iv. Stay firm and keep up the pressure
 - v. Meet and regroup with your team
 - vi. Be prepared to intensify pressure if demands are not met
 - vii. Insist on a plan of action
 - viii. Show good faith, use discretion, and allow the opposition to save face
 - ix. Praise the other side
 - x. Stick to the agreement