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My Leadership Philosophy Through the Lens of Oskar Shindler

Throughout history, there have been an abundance of leaders who can be classified as extremely effective. However, there should be a clear distinction between an effective leader and a good one. An effective leader is able to get things done; A good leader, on the other hand, does the right thing regardless of whether it brings them closer to their end goal. It is interesting to note that finding an individual who exemplifies both good and effective leadership is difficult.. For example, Hitler and Stalin were both extremely effective leaders; yet the outcome of their reigns resulted in the death, destruction, and suffering of millions. While they were effective, their leadership was far from good. In most cases, power that comes with leadership tends to corrupt a leader. This phenomenon is referred to as the paradox of power - “the very traits that helped leaders accumulate control in the first place all but disappear once they rise to power” (Lehler). A good leader is an individual who can defy the “paradox of power” and resist the corrupt nature of power. A perfect example of this type of leader would be Oskar Shindler.

Oskar Shindler was a formal member of the Nazi party and an entreapenur who intially wished to capitalize off the misfortune of war. Shindler took over a previously Jewish-run enamelware factory and began making kitchenware and ammunition for the german army (Leadership). As a war profiteer, Shindler made a fortune through his factory and gained high levels of respect from chief members of the nazi regime. However, one thing that distinguished him from all other german war profiteers is that he completely disagreed with the Nazi war effort

(Leadership). Although Shindler was a nazi himself, he could not stand the senseless brutalities of war, especially the ones aimed directly at exterminating Jews. A shrewd individual, Shindler understood that he could use his fortune and power within the nazi party to save as many jews as possible. To do so, he employed over 1,200 jews from the ghetto nearby his factory

(Leadership). Oskar Shindler was courageous, treated his workers with high levels of respect, and was extraordinarily selfless. The culmination of these traits made him an exceptionally good leader.

Aristotle stated that “courage was the first virtue, because it makes all other virtues possible” (Treasurer). Without courage, a leader could never achieve anything because any decision big or small takes some level of courage. Most would agree that Schindler had a higher level of courage than most could aspire to; this was demonstrated through his undermining of one of the world’s most powerful and deadly regimes. Courage allows a good leader to go against the norm regardless of the consequences (Treasurer). While courage can be used for both good and bad, it was clear that Shindler used it for a positive outcome. Life is a gamble and a leader who lacks courage would never achieve anything.

In addition to being courageous, Shindler was also extremely compassionate with his workers. At a time when Germany saw the Jewish people as subhuman, Shindler treated them not only as equals but also as friends and family (Bulow). I believe a good leader must demonstrate compassion and respect towards their subordinates as this enables a deeper relationship between both parties. Subordinates who have a respectful and compassionate leader will be more motivated to work hard because they are not blindly following a leader. Shindlers jews worked extremely hard to produce goods in the factory, not because they were forced to but because they wanted too (Burlow). As an exceptionally good leader, Shindler gave the jews a

sense of value through compassion and respect at a time when no one else did. According to one of his survivors, “it was the personally more than anything else that saved us” (Leadership). In my opinion, a good leader must exhibit traits of compassion and respect to build a trustworthy and loving relationship between leaders and followers.

Finally, one of Shindler’s greatest characteristics was his immense level of selflessness. A truly selfless leader facilitates success and value in others without expecting or wanting any recognition in return. Schindler owed nothing to the Jewish people, yet his sheer humanity drove him to risk his life to save them. Schindler sacrificed everything he had for a people he was raised and taught to hate (Burlow). By the end of the war, Shindler was essentially broke; when interviewed and asked why he chose to act as he did, he stated, “I had to help them, there was no choice” (Burlow). In my opinion, a leader cannot be good without being selfless. Leadership is defined as “the action of leading a group, people, or an organization”, not oneself (Treasurer). Unfortunately, too many leaders act with the mentality of increasing personal worth. Schindler's Jews never once heard him say that he should be recognized for all the good he had done. Rather, they only heard, “I did what I could, what I had to do, what my conscience told me I must do. That's all there is to it” (Bulow). Selflessness and good leadership go hand in hand, without selflessness a leader could only ever aspire to be good.

In my opinion, a crucial aspect of Shindler’s exceptional leadership was that he never pretended to be something he was not. Schindler was not a perfect human and never attempted to hide his flaws as a gambler, an alcoholic, and an adulterer. Everyone has flaws and it is unrealistic to strive for perfection in a world where there will always be an opposing viewpoint. A good leader should aim for authenticity and honesty over perfection; only then will they be truly successful in the eyes of the masses. Schindler was an authentically good leader who

through courage, compassion, and extraordinary selflessness saved over a thousand innocent Jewish lives. I aspire to emulate Schindler's courage, respect, and selflessness because these characteristics enable an individual to be their best selves, as well as uplift others.

Works Cited

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