



REFLECTIONS

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT 40 YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE I JOINED THE FACULTY AT BAYLOR. MY CAREER, LIKE MOST, HAS HAD ITS UPS AND DOWNS, BUT I FEEL IT'S BEEN MOSTLY "UPS" SINCE THAT DAY IN THE FALL OF 1971 THAT I FIRST WALKED INTO A HANKAMER CLASSROOM. I THANK GOD THAT HE HAS ALLOWED ME, IN SOME SMALL WAYS, TO HELP LEAD THIS INSTITUTION THAT I LOVE SO MUCH.

LEADERSHIP



PERSPECTIVE



LEADERSHIP

BY BILL THOMAS



I've seen many leaders (both formal and informal) come and go at Baylor and other academic institutions during the last 40 years. Although I've held positions of formal leadership at various times, I prefer to be regarded as an "informal" leader, because it is earned through the respect of one's colleagues and tends to endure longer than leadership by title alone.

As important as leadership is, very few people actually have formal leadership training. Most of us have learned it in the school of hard knocks. In my opinion, the attributes of good leadership in academia are really common to those of other organizations: values, vision, engagement, communication, caring and stewardship. Although there are other leadership attributes, these are the ones that stand out most in my mind, because they have been demonstrated so prominently in the lives of the most effective leaders that I have observed. Conversely, one or more of these attributes have been lacking in formal leaders that I have regarded as less effective.



VALUES

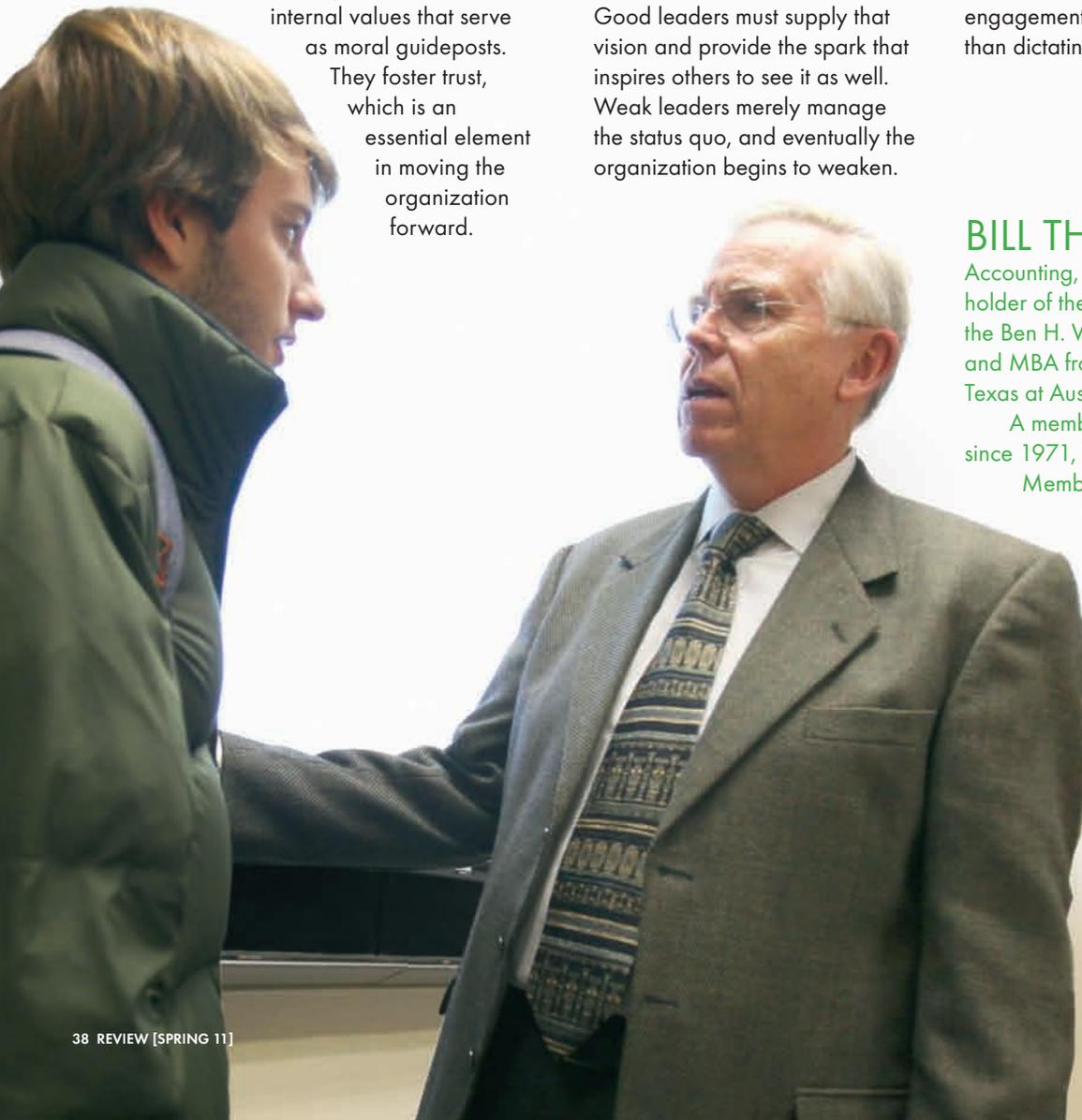
Integrity, honesty and humility are life-defining values of every effective leader I have known at Baylor or elsewhere. There are no substitutes for these core values. Without them, persons placed in positions of leadership eventually fail, and in extreme cases have caused their organizations to fail. The other aspects of leadership flow from these internal values that serve as moral guideposts. They foster trust, which is an essential element in moving the organization forward.

VISION

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Without a vision, the people perish." No institution, public or private, religious or secular, gets better by remaining the same. Vision requires members of an organization to see beyond the here and now and to envision how things can and should be. Good leaders must supply that vision and provide the spark that inspires others to see it as well. Weak leaders merely manage the status quo, and eventually the organization begins to weaken.

ENGAGEMENT

Vision is not of much use unless the leader can inspire others to see it and to engage in fleshing it out. Nowhere is this more evident than in academia. I have often likened colleague engagement in academia to "herding cats," because with the freedoms we enjoy, we academics often come to view ourselves as self-employed, as erroneous as that impression might be. So, whenever changes must be made, leaders must first demonstrate the capacity and willingness to engage in change themselves. Additionally, they must be role models, not only by showing others by example how engagement in the process can work, but by persuading, rather than dictating, others to engage.



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A member of the Hankamer School of Business faculty since 1971, Thomas was recognized as an Outstanding Faculty Member at Baylor in 1984 and presented with the Outstanding Faculty Award for the Executive MBA Program in Dallas for both 2000 and 2001. He was named a Master Teacher in 2004.

Thomas' scholarly work focuses on fraud prevention and detection, as well as ethical issues among accountants in public practice. He serves as the accounting and auditing editor of *Today's CPA*, the journal of the Texas Society of Certified Public Accountants. He is the author of a textbook in auditing, as well as many articles in auditing, financial accounting and reporting, taxation and accounting education.

Prior to becoming a professor, Thomas was an accountant with the firms of KPMG LLP, and BDO Seidman LLP. He is a member of the American Accounting Association, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Texas Society of Certified Public Accountants.



CARING

As the old saying goes, “I don’t care how much you know until I know how much you care.” Effective leaders must show, rather than tell, others how much they care. At least two facets of demonstrating a caring attitude include listening to and serving others.

I have found that students and faculty colleagues alike are far more likely to listen to my ideas when they know that I am reciprocating. Effective listening is a key toward demonstrating a caring attitude. There is always a temptation to set others straight by telling them how their thinking is wrong. No matter how wise and appropriate my advice is, I have found that sometimes people just want me to listen, not talk. This takes time, willingness to postpone expressing my own ideas in deference to listening to the ideas of others, no matter how off base I might initially think those ideas are. In fact, I have often been astounded to discover that, when I take the time to listen, those wacky ideas have often proved better than mine! Waiting until others ask, “What do you think?” is often hard, but it pays off because it demonstrates respect and tolerance for the views of others.

Service to others involves both words and actions: speaking words of encouragement, comfort and apology; and giving both of money and time to help students, faculty and the institution achieve their goals. These attributes demonstrate a servant’s heart, a willingness to follow our words with our actions, which is an essential element of leadership.

COMMUNICATION

Good leaders must be effective interpersonal communicators. Many, if not most, of the problems that occur in organizations are the result of poor communication on the part of the leader. The most common modern example of weak organizational communication I can think of is “management by e-mail.” I must confess, I abused e-mail terribly as department chair. It seemed so much more efficient to communicate by sending a multiple-recipient e-mail than to pop into people’s offices to chat. One click of the mouse and it was done (or so I thought). I slipped into the habit of communicating most of my thoughts and those of others (the “fwd” button), by e-mail. I soon found that, despite my misplaced feelings of accomplishment in passing so much wisdom along, faculty members began to alienate me from their conversations because they felt I had no time for them personally. It took me a few years to realize that, when there are important issues to address, sometimes e-mail (and its newer counterparts Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) are weak substitutes for face-to-face conversations. True leadership involves learning how to express vision and engage participation through regular, persistent, human communication.

STEWARDSHIP

The wisest leaders soon discover that they are mere stewards, rather than owners, of the academic institutions they serve. I feel that three of the most important aspects of stewardship are holding on with open hands, grooming successors, and knowing when to let go. One of my mentors, former Dean Richard Scott, told me, “If you want an illustration of how essential you are to an organization, fill a bucket with water, insert your finger and pull it out. You’ll find that there are ripples for a moment, and then they’re gone.” No matter how seemingly indispensable academic leaders are, there comes a time for them to step down. After they depart, it doesn’t take long for them to fade into obscurity, while the organization moves on. I believe that effective leaders don’t hold on to their positions too tightly, because when they do so, they may egocentrically confuse personal and organizational goals. Effective leaders should also take time to identify promising successors, and to groom those successors by encouraging them to develop leadership attributes. Finally, discerning leaders develop a sense of timing that helps them know when to step down and let others take the reins. While they eventually disappear from the landscape, their values, passion and ideas remain.

We are blessed at Baylor to have had visionary leaders in the past. Our current administration and faculty are role models of leadership. Because of that, Baylor University and the Hankamer School of Business will remain an institution that develops Christian leaders who are capable of “lighting the ways of time.”