

# An exercise in looking for leadership development everywhere...

Read [this](#) recent very short story (4 min.) by Kara Ireland, called "Subliminal."

The work ends with one of the characters, Mrs. Sanderson, deciding not to speak up about the boys' game of "cops":

"She wanted to scold them, tell them to stop being so ugly to each other. That police altercations should not end in death. Being shot by the cops was not the expectation. That it was nothing to make a game out of. She wanted to tell them about the friends she'd lost, the sons of her friends who were taken. The scathing reminders of the terrorized nights she stayed up when her own boy stayed out too late.

"Instead, she just let them flock to her and take their treats, grateful they could still reach for them."

1. Why do you believe Mrs. Sanderson does not speak up? Try to come up with more than one reason and make an argument for the reason that makes the most sense to you.
2. Do you believe that a different kind of person than Mrs. Sanderson would have been more likely to speak up, e.g., someone of a different age, race, gender, background, education, parental/marital status, or psychological disposition? Explain your answer.
3. What do you think Mrs. Sanderson could have said to help the boys? What do you believe the outcome would have been?
4. Do you believe that you yourself would have spoken up in a similar situation? Why or why not?
5. *Should* Mrs. Sanderson have spoken up? Why or why not?

6. Why do you believe the author chose to end the story by having a character *want* to speak up but decide *not to*?
7. What opportunities do you expect to have to speak up about a problem--any problem facing any of your communities--in the next two to four weeks? Will you seize these opportunities?

Scroll down for some examples of ways you might monitor your leadership development based on your study of this story...

## Some ways you might monitor your leadership development based on this exercise

knowledge, or appreciation, of leadership

- You may notice from this passage that leadership often involves complex moral decisions, in this case a decision between preserving the innocence of two young children and preparing them for the adult world at the risk of traumatizing them.
- Similarly, you may notice that leadership is often about addressing conflicting needs, e.g., to play with one's friends, enjoy desserts, and live relatively carefree vs. being mindful of a dangerous threat.
- You may notice that certain leadership behaviors may be more easy or more difficult to perform based on how one identifies or how one believes others see them. In this case, the witness to the boys' game of "cops" may have been more or less likely to speak up based on their identity (or how they were identified).
- Similarly, you may notice how leadership is tied to reputation. Did Mrs. Sanderson's decision to speak up depend on how the boys saw her? If she had already established a reputation with them as a good counselor, would she have felt more comfortable talking to them about difficult subjects?

behaviors

- You may use this opportunity to practice the leadership behavior of perspective-taking by thinking carefully about why Mrs. Sanderson may not have spoken up. By taking the perspective of others often and well you become better at understanding their needs and helping them realize their full potential.
- You may use this opportunity to practice the leadership behavior of introspection by reflecting on whether you yourself would have spoken up and, if so, why are *you* the kind of person to speak up.

- You may plan to speak up in the future based on your reflection on the impact that speaking up can have (and what can be lost if one fails to speak up). A lot of leadership development through this kind of study depends on our ability to identify future opportunities to apply what we have learned.
- If you did this exercise in conversation with others, you have the opportunity to measure your proficiency in any of these behaviors by comparison to them. How well did you theorize about Mrs. Sanderson's mental states compared to others? How well did you understand your own predicted reaction compared to them? How creatively did you discover future ways of speaking up?

## decisions

- After reading this story you may have felt very strongly that Mrs. Sanderson should have spoken up. Or you may have felt that there should have been someone there to speak up, even if she could not. You may have felt a strong sense of compassion for the two boys (and for Mrs. Sanderson) and wanted to address the psychological impact of police brutality. You may then decide that you would like to understand better what are the helpful things that a person could say in this situation. You may then decide to read up on the subject of how to talk to young kids about the traumatic aspects of adulthood. You might want to take a course on counseling or even become certified in it. You might reflect more deeply on your own talents and experiences and think about whether you would be good at this and could even make it a career. You might compare how you would feel about trying to solve this problem as opposed to any other problems you currently care about. Even if reading this passage does not cause you to make any new decisions, it might make you feel more confident in the ones you've already made.