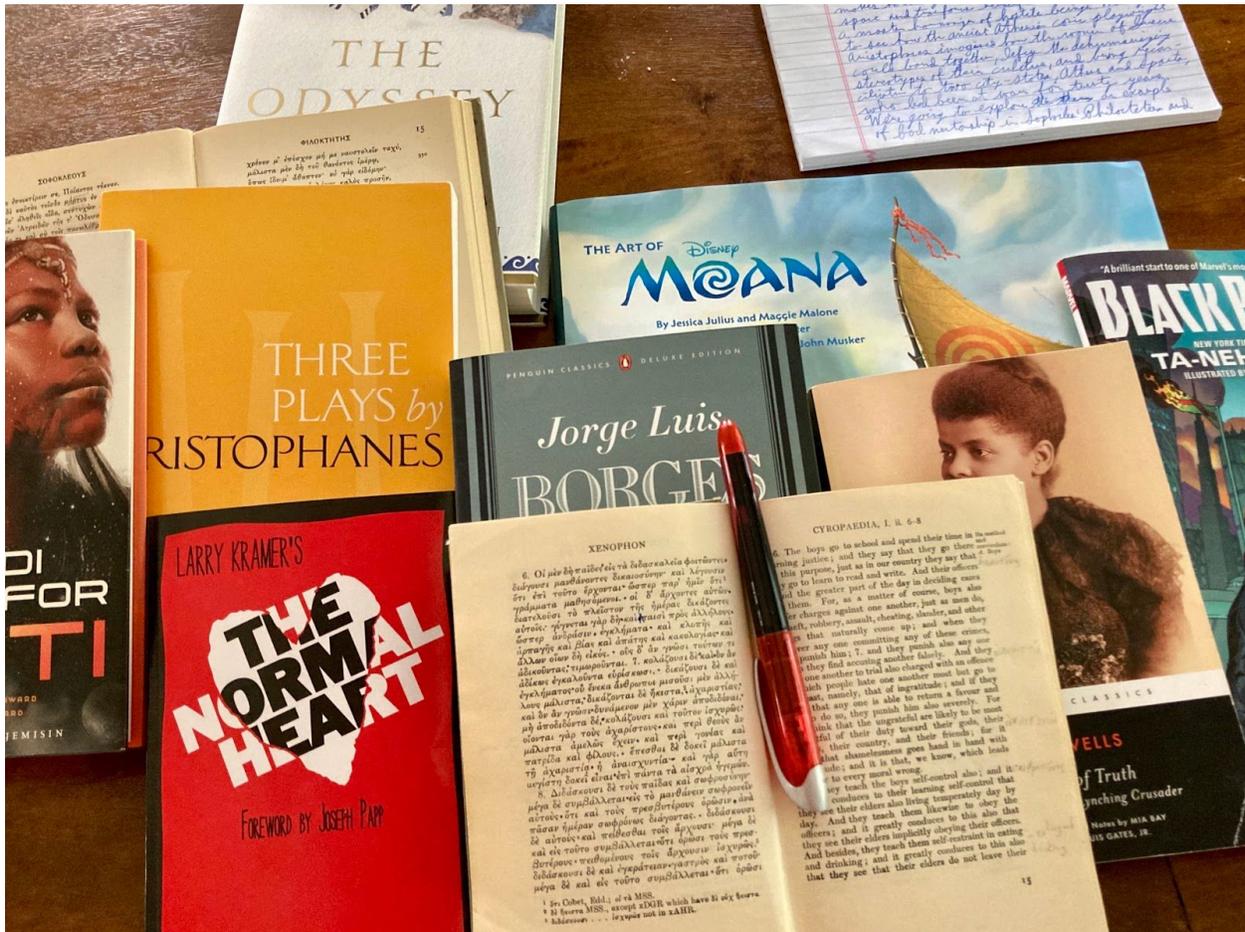


An introduction to leadership development through the study of the ancient and modern world



Hello and welcome to our course on leadership development through the study of the ancient and modern world. My name is Norman Sandridge and I'm an associate professor of classics at Howard University and I'm the co-executive director of Kallion Leadership, a nonprofit organization dedicated to understanding and promoting the process of translating the study of the humanities into better leadership. In this course we are going to travel across time and space in search of stories of leadership to inform our own development. We are going to look at how the ancient Greek goddess Athena mentors the son of Odysseus, named Telemachus, to become the king of Ithaca in the epic poem

the *Odyssey*. Then we are going to travel with the sixteen-year-old girl, Binti, in the novella by Nnedi Okorafor, as she makes her way to a university far into outer space and transforms herself into someone called a “master harmonizer” of hostile beings. We’re going to see how the ancient Athenian comic playwright, Aristophanes, imagined the women of Greece could band together, defy dehumanizing stereotypes, and bring reconciliation to two city-states, Athens and Sparta, who had been at war for twenty years. Then, we’re going to explore an example of bad mentorship in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* and see that close, physical contact can foster human connections that transcend ambition and greed. We will look at an example of how the mentee may also be bad in a short story from the Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, called “El Muerto” or “The Dead Man.” From there we will experience leadership through the eyes of Ned Weeks in Larry Kramer’s play, *The Normal Heart*, as Ned tries to lead an organization to fight the AIDS epidemic in the gay community in New York City in the early 1980s. We will then travel back to the fourth-century BCE, to read a Greek work about the education of the first king of the Persian Empire, Cyrus the Second, also known as “the Great.” We will follow this story with a speech by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Ida B. Wells, on the requisites of true leadership. We will conclude our journey by taking a look at two films that might be said to represent the future of leadership, at least from the perspective of popular culture. These films are Disney’s *Moana* and Ryan Coogler’s *The Black Panther*.

These works will be our reference points on this journey, and along the way we will be training ourselves to develop our leadership in five different ways. The first way we will develop is by increasing our knowledge, or appreciation, of what leadership is. And it’s here that I want to ask you to concentrate a bit more and focus on the definition of leadership that we will be using in this course. It comes from one of the works we will read from called Xenophon’s *Education of Cyrus*, or *Kuroupaideia* in ancient Greek. In this work Cyrus’ father Cambyses defines leadership ship and contextualizes it this way:

[I]t [is] adequate and respectable for someone if they [are] able to see to it that they become both certifiably respectable and good and that

*they and their household be self-sufficient. But, though this is a great deed, **to know how to take thought for other humans in such a way that they have all that they need in abundance and that they will all be the kind of people they need to be**, this of course appear[s] to be most admirable. [Xenophon Cyropaedia 1.6.7, modified to be in the present tense].*

So for Xenophon here leadership is something that happens in addition to personal development. You become a good person and then you worry about others outside your immediate family. So, for our purposes leadership is going to be about addressing the needs of others, whether it's assuring that they have what they need or become what they need to be. We're going to be asking ourselves how it is that we can meet some of those needs. This definition can be applied to familiar leadership roles, like a coach, or a boss, or a teacher. Or it could apply to anyone. You might have a dozen opportunities to address the needs of others in large or small ways in the course of any given day. So, it's worthy emphasizing that leadership may easily be performed by someone who does not hold a familiar leadership role. It may even be the case that those in leadership roles do not do very much leading.

Gaining knowledge, then, is one of the main ways we can track our leadership development. The second way we may develop is by changing our behavior such that we are performing acts of leadership better and more often. For example, one of the most common leadership behaviors we will encounter is speaking out about a problem facing the community. This is something we have the opportunity to do practically all the time, whether in person or over social media. But it can be challenging to do this because we have to work up the courage to put ourselves out there and risk criticism. And it's really hard to know how to speak out effectively even when we do find the courage. We can all think of people we know who do speak out but they speak out about irrelevant issues; or they do it at the wrong time in a meeting; or they are just trying to call attention to themselves and maybe trying to take credit for someone else's idea; or sometimes they just can't speak clearly or coherently. So, it turns out that

speaking up is a leadership behavior that requires our whole selves to be effective. I've made a list of other leadership behaviors in the lesson below with some guidance on how to begin assessing your own leadership.

As your knowledge of leadership increases and you reflect more on your behavior, you may make some large or small decisions about how to develop your leadership. You might decide that there is a human need you want to devote several years of your life to. This devotion might entail new courses of study, new degrees, new apprenticeships, new organizations to join, and even new organizations to found.

And as you are making these new decisions, you can also think of your leadership development in terms of the people you are partnering and networking with in your endeavors. One of the things I invest a lot of my own time in is figuring out precisely who would be good to work with on a particular project. Are they competent? Are they trustworthy and reliable? Do our energies and talents complement each other? Do we share the same values and sense of mission? I find that it is much better to put a lot of thought into picking the right partners, and waiting patiently for them to come along, than it is to try very hard to convince a random person to work with you.

Finally, as you develop your knowledge of leadership and improve your behavior, make better decisions and build better partnerships, you may also want to improve how others see your leadership, that is, you may want to care about your reputation. For example, you may see yourself as someone who will speak up well when there's a problem facing the community, but do others see you that way? Why or why not? What could you do to improve your reputation if you wanted to? Maybe you need some kind of certificate or maybe it's enough to announce to your community members that you intend to improve a certain form of leadership. You could even invite them to monitor your progress and give you feedback.

These, then, are the five ways we will be thinking about our leadership development in our journey through this course: knowledge, behavior, decisions, relationships, and reputation. There are probably additional ways we could think about leadership development. I owe it to my students for coming up with the mnemonic “Doctor Burger King,” or DRBRK as a way to remember these five.

In terms of our techniques for developing our leadership through the humanities, we’re going to do a lot of thinking, talking, reading, and writing, and we’re going to do them all *very slowly*, which is important for me because I tend to talk very fast. In particular, we’re going to engage in a very ancient practice of what we call “sketching leadership.” This is a practice where we try to capture certain expressions of leadership by describing them in words and then challenging ourselves to improve based on these sketches (for reference, here’s a [brief guide](#) on sketching leadership). We may do sketches of leadership based on our own observations and experiences, from examples in history, or from figures in film and literature. I’m going to read here a quote from an ancient Greek biographer from the city of Chaeronea, named Plutarch, where he explains how he understands the importance of sketching for his own development:

*I happened to undertake the sketching of the lives on account of others, but I am continuing and enjoying it now for my own sake too, attempting to use historical inquiry like a mirror in some way or another to arrange my life and make it resemble the virtues of those people...By spending my time in historical inquiry and by my habit of sketching, since I welcome the memory of the best and most worthy characters in my soul always, I have prepared myself, if ever my associations by necessity toss something foul or wrong or disgraceful at me, to drive it away and reject it, and instead gently and calmly to turn my attention away towards the most beautiful of examples. [Plutarch of Chaeronea (46-120CE), *Life of Timoleon* 1.1, 5; translation by Mallory Monaco Caterine]*

So, a sketch is both something we do to clarify our understanding of leadership on our own terms--and something we can use to think about new opportunities to lead.

And speaking of "lead", you may have noticed that so far I have not said anything about "leaders," even though this is a course about leadership. And this is because I don't think there is such a thing as a "leader", at least not in the way that people often mean. This is to say that I don't believe some people just are leaders by their nature or training or that some people just are followers. Even though we might say you need certain competency to show certain kinds of leadership, any of use might lose this competency through inactivity or we might not have the judgement to know when to act when the time calls for it. And, as I said before, you don't need to hold a leadership role to show leadership. So, I'm going to give you my own mantra about leadership and it's a paraphrase of Polonius from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "Neither a follower nor a leader be; but show leadership as often and as well as you can."

And with that we are now ready to begin the first chapter in our journey through ancient and modern leadership...