



The Socratic Leader Academy

Personalist Leadership

Personalist Leadership is the fruit of 20 years of leadership research by Dr. Anthony Howard. His coaching, consulting, and conversations with high level leaders around the world led to *Humanise. Why human-centred leadership is the key to the 21st century*—the first book to explore this modern phenomenon. His concern for people, and the way people are treated at work, ultimately was the genesis for doctoral research that examined the limitations of prevailing approaches to leadership and revealed the need for a new model of leadership, grounded in the human person, and their relationship with other persons in the leader's team and company.

Limitations of leadership theories

The single greatest deficiency of every theory of leadership is the failure to address the fact that leadership involves a person leading other persons. While the theories and models address what leaders do, or what attributes leaders have, they overlook the fact that it is a person who is leading another person.

This failure often results in people being treated as assets, or resources, or as a means to an end. This can be seen in statements such as '*people are our greatest asset*', or '*imagine our people are our customers*', or '*developing people is good for the organisation*'. While these are well meaning, they unintentionally reduce persons to an object or an asset. When persons are treated as a means to an end they do not bring their whole selves to work, establish proper relationships, take full responsibility, or find meaning and purpose in their work. This is ultimately detrimental to the organisation.

Leadership is *personal*

Leadership at its most basic involves a relationship between a leader and his or her colleagues. Therefore, true leadership starts with putting persons, who are worthy of dignity and respect, at the centre of every decision and action. This is the foundation of Personalist Leadership.

A person is more than a 'persona', and not simply a self-interested individual, driven by money, status, or power. A person is someone's wife, husband, son or daughter, brother or sister. They are a unique, self-determining, responsible, relational being, who wants to care and be cared for, who is an end in themselves, and so cannot be used as an end, or tool, by others. This means:

- As persons, we become who and what we are in *relationship* with others
- As persons, we are self-determining, and want to take *responsibility* for our lives
- As persons, we have particular gifts and talents and want to find a way to put those in *service* of some greater good
- As persons, we seek meaning and *purpose*

Mapping leadership against these dimensions reveals that leadership is *relational, responsible, serving* and *purposeful*. These are the elements of Personalist Leadership.



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A model of Personalist Leadership



Personalist Leadership includes two aspects: a person and their fulfilment, or flourishing, and the leader-follower dyad. It is this agreement of two or more people that creates leadership. This means that everyone in the organisation—from the front-line and the production-line through to the CEO and Board—constitutes the 'leadership' of the firm, since everyone is in a leader-follower relationship with their colleagues.

Leadership is not something leaders do, but a mutual relationship between leaders and followers; like marriage, it comes into existence when both say 'yes'. This means that leadership research, leadership development, leadership events, should *always* include leaders and followers, for in the absence of followers you do not have leadership.

The Personalist Leadership model reveals that the *first work of a leader* is to create an environment in which people can flourish, or be fulfilled. Such an environment enables people to find meaning and purpose in their work, use their gifts and talents in a generous and rewarding manner, take full responsibility for their themselves and their work, and enjoy safe and caring relationships with their colleagues.

The Personalist Leadership model also reveals that *the first work of leadership* is for the leader and follower to cultivate an effective relationship, agree together on the common good or purpose on which they are focused, understand how they will serve one another in order to achieve that good, and agree the specific responsibilities each has within their particular roles.



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The power of Personalist Leadership

While elements of this, such as purpose, may be found in other models, Personalist Leadership unites the fundamental dimensions of being a person, with the roles of leading and following, into an integrated model of leadership that is independent of context, while respecting the dignity of each person. In other words, while particular moments may call for (say) strategic leadership or agile leadership, or even command and control leadership, every moment requires Personalist Leadership, because every act of leading involves people.

This means the four dimensions of persons, noted above, play out as four fundamental questions that can be asked across one's day, one's projects, or the long term. The same questions can be asked of a team, or the whole organisation.

- Who are the people I am (we are) in relationship with, and how can I (we) enhance those relationships?
- What am I (are we) responsible for, and how will I (we) fulfill those responsibilities?
- How and where will I (we) contribute particular gifts and talents, and make an impact through my (our) service?
- Why am I (are we) doing this, and does doing so lead toward a meaningful purpose?

Likewise, the benefits of this approach can be found in each of the elements, that have been addressed in various ways in various organisations. For example, Unilever's focus on purpose drove engagement, impact and growth; Barry-Wehmler, a US\$3 billion industrial firm, has experienced 18% compound growth for over twenty years by focusing on caring relationships. The Mars Corporation focuses on purpose and unity before self-interest. In the early 2000's Jim Stengel analysed the 10 year performance of 50,000 brands, and found investing in the top 50 of those that focused on 'improving people's lives' delivered a 393% return, against an 8% loss in S&P for the same period. In other words, focusing on any aspect of personhood has been shown to deliver measurable positive impact on people, performance, and ultimately profit.

Imagine what can happen by focusing on all four dimensions in a consistent, cohesive, manner.

Personalist Leadership, implemented with the unwavering support of the board and CEO, overcomes the limitations of the prevailing theories, and has a multiplier impact on any one of these dimensions alone. It does not replace, but rather complements, your existing approach, providing the foundation for an effective and consistent approach to leadership, as a relationship between persons, in and through the firm.