The Leadership Course

Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model.

EXT ED  The Leadership Course
Spring 2019  4.5 CEU's

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Course Overview

This course is based on a transformative leadership course developed over the past thirteen years by a team of academics and organizational change consultants. It has been taught in various forms at the University of Rochester, United States Air Force Academy, the Erasmus Academie (Netherlands), Texas A&M University, Dartmouth School of Medicine, UCLA, Rutgers University, the University of Colorado, and for credit in the curriculum of two other CSU campuses: Fresno State and CSU Bakersfield.

The title of the original course is: Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership: An Ontological/Phenomenological Model. It is offered annually to the public by its author-instructors - Werner Erhard (Independent), Michael C. Jensen (Jesse Isidor Strauss Professor Emeritus, Harvard), Steve Zaffron (CEO, Vanto Group), and Jeri Echeverria (Professor and Provost Emerita, CSU Fresno and retired Executive Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs of the CSU system).

“Traditional” Approaches to Studying Leadership

To date, the majority of academic research into leadership has focused on the personality or intelligence of individual leaders and/or leadership behaviors (e.g., directive actions, inspirational motivation) that separate effective and ineffective leaders. Studies have explored how these variables interact with different situational variables (such as employee experience or task structure) to produce leadership outcomes. While this
research stream has produced valuable knowledge, there are limitations when it comes to applying it to the development of leaders.

Instead of learning behaviors, and trying to emulate what other leaders do, we need access to the being of a leader, and the effective exercise of leadership. Rather than being better able to explain and understand what happens, we want access to making it happen. We will approach this by exploring the importance of context – the way in which people and events occur or seem to us. For example, a suitcase left unattended in an airport terminal creates a different reaction in us today than it would have 15 years ago. The physical reality is unchanged, but the context is different.

In leadership situations, we have considerable choice over the contexts we invoke. Altering the context alters how people and events occur or seem to us, and that alters the way we act. Contexts can be constraining and distorting, or freeing, enabling, and empowering. During the course, we will develop a context for leadership with the power to give you the being and actions of a leader, and the effective exercise of leadership as your natural self-expression. We will also provide you the opportunity to become aware of and deal with personal obstacles to the exercise of leadership, allowing you to remove, or at least relax those obstacles, so as to access your natural capacity for leadership.

A Note on ‘Ontological’ versus ‘Epistemological’

Ontology is “the science or study of being; that part of metaphysics which relates to the nature or essence of being or existence” (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary or SOED) – in this course, our focus is on what it means to be a leader. If you have ever wondered what it is like to be a bird, or to be a person of the opposite gender, you were engaged in an ontological enquiry. If we can identify the ‘nature or essence’ of being a leader, we are likely to act as a leader and exercise leadership effectively.

In contrast, epistemology is “the branch of philosophy that deals with the varieties, grounds, and validity of knowledge” (SOED). An epistemological mastery of a subject leaves you knowing, while an ontological mastery leaves you being. When you have mastered the being of being a leader, any knowledge you have about leadership will still be available to you. As an analogy, knowledge of brush strokes, lighting, and hue will not make one into an artist, but an artist who has this knowledge will have an enhanced ability to produce art.

The word “model” is used in the sub-title of this course, “ontological / phenomenological model”. A model is a depiction of something. And in this course the model employed is a depiction of the nature and function of life (what we live in), and of living (our engagement with life), and of self (the one who does the living in life). This model is derived from an unfiltered awareness of the nature and function of life, living, and self, with no distortion of this direct perception by any concepts, theories, or beliefs about life, living, and self. Deriving a model in this way is formally referred to as “bracketing”. To bracket is to set aside all concepts, theories, beliefs, and the like, that could distort one’s direct, real-time experience of what one is attempting to model.
We found that the use of an ontological / phenomenological model of human nature and human function was required for us to deliver on the bold promise of this course. As we said above, ontology is the study or science of the nature and function of being (as in “being a leader”), and phenomenology is the method of direct access used in ontology to study and research the nature and function of being (as in being’s impact on “exercising leadership effectively”).

Note the sharp difference between phenomenon (from which “phenomenology” is derived) and concept. Phenomenon is defined in Webster’s New World Dictionary & Thesaurus (1998) as “any event, circumstance, or experience that is apparent to the senses”. Concept is defined in Webster’s as “an idea or thought, esp. a generalized idea of a thing or class of things; abstract notion”.

**Mindset for Approaching Participation in this Course**

The focus of this program is on developing an expanded opportunity set of ways of being, thinking, planning, and action that give you access to being a leader and the effective exercise of leadership. It is not about being given answers; throughout the course, you should constantly be asking yourself: “What does this insight open up or make available to me in regard to my being a leader and the effective exercise of leadership?”

It is important that you adopt a ‘discovery mindset’ in approaching the course, and your participation in it. To quote G. Spencer Brown: “Unfortunately we find systems of education today that … teach us to be proud of what we know and ashamed of ignorance. … [T]o teach pride in knowledge is to put an effective barrier against any advance upon what is already known, since it makes one ashamed to look beyond the bounds imposed by one’s ignorance.” Brown, G.S. (*Laws of Form*, New York: Julian Press, 1972).

If the above is true, many of us will be tempted to limit our course participation to knowing the right answer, or contribute in ways that avoid us looking bad. As this course develops, you will find that being a leader and exercising leadership requires that you are committed to something that is bigger than yourself. Additionally, you will find that it is not a leader’s job to ‘know everything’, but rather to gain access to the wisdom of the people you are leading. As such, this is an opportunity to practice going beyond the in-authenticity of “looking good” and participate fully and authentically.

**Course Objectives**

If you complete all requirements of this course, you will leave this course with your own personal access to being a leader and the effective exercise of leadership as your natural self-expression. (While you will not necessarily have all of the experience and specific knowledge you think you need to be a truly extraordinary leader, you will have experienced whatever personal transformation is required for you to be a leader).
Assignments

There will be a few reading assignments as the Course progresses (total number of pages is about 140 pages), as well as regular break assignments throughout the Course. In addition, you will be asked to share brief Reflections via email twice per month and work on a Course Leadership Project during the term.

There is no grading in this Course. You will receive responses in exchange for your work but your work will not be given a letter grade. You will not be booted out of the Course if you miss a Reflection or refuse to engage in a Leadership Project. However, please be aware that failing to complete the assignments will result in a less effective course for you – that is, not doing the assignments will result in your loss. You will gain a great deal from the course if you participate fully – engage in the reading and break assignments, participate in course discussion, working on your Course Leadership Project, submitting reflections, and asking questions even when it seems awkward.

Reflections

Submit your Reflections every two weeks during the Course. In each Reflection, include one or more of the following:

- comments about what is going on with you regarding this course,
- any challenges you are having with course materials or class discussion,
- what you “don’t get” or “do get” about the Course,
- realizations or developments regarding your course project, and/or
- any other topic you want to share.

Write authentically and substantively enough to develop your message – say 2 to 4 paragraphs. On or before the following dates, please send your Reflections to me at jeronima@comcast.net:

- Wednesday, February 27th
- Wednesday, March 6th
- Wednesday, March 20th
- Wednesday, March 27th
- Wednesday, April 3rd
- Wednesday, May 1st

You may submit additional Reflections during the course if you wish. I will do my best to respond to your comments within a few days of receiving them.

Leadership Project

At the beginning of the course, you will be asked to take on an area of your life as a course leadership project. Your project should be concern that you have about which you may have said to yourself, “this will never change” or that it “will always be this way.” It can be something from your workplace, your home life, or community life. Any leadership project exists as a leadership project because there is a concern to be fulfilled.
As we use the term concern, we mean “a matter of fundamental interest or importance.”¹ We do not mean something worried about. Note that, when there is (or could be if looked for) a clear-cut pathway to fulfilling a concern, while it may require competent management to fulfill, it does not require leadership.

In short, the genesis of any true leadership project is a concern to be fulfilled. Or saying the same thing in another way, leadership projects are born out of some matter of fundamental interest or importance, the fulfillment of which, you take on.

Your Course Leadership Project will come from a concern you have (or that another or others may have), the fulfillment of which you will take on.

For the purpose of this assignment, please use the following definition for leadership: the realization of a future that wasn’t going to happen anyhow, which future fulfills or contributes to fulfilling the concerns of the relevant parties. Your Course Leadership Project must be a future to be fulfilled that you have some sense is fulfillable, but that you haven’t already figured out how to fulfill. (If you already know how to fulfill it, it would only require competent management.)

We will discuss the guidelines for Creating Your Course Leadership Project on the first day of class. On March 2nd, you will be invited to share what your project will deal with.

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3rd Day of Class  Saturday, March 9th  9am to 4pm
Be ready to share what you discovered (break assignment or other)
Read pages 11 - 37 in Pre-Classroom Assignment #6
Read Pre-Classroom assignment #7 and assess how your Project is going

Reflections #3  Wednesday, March 20th

4th Day of Class  Saturday, March 23rd  9am to 4pm
Be ready to share what you discovered (break assignment or other)
Read pages 63 – 81 in Pre-Classroom Assignment #6

Reflections #4  Wednesday, March 27th

5th Day of Class  Saturday, March 30th  9am to 4pm
Be ready to share what you discovered (break assignment or other)
Read the rest of Pre-Classroom Assignment #6 (pages 1 – 10, 41 – 62)

Reflections #5  Wednesday, April 3rd
Be ready to share what you discovered (break assignment or other)

6th Day of Class  Saturday, April 6th  9am to 4pm
Be ready to share what you discovered (break assignment or other)
Review any parts of Pre-Classroom Assignment #6 that you “don’t get”

Reflections #6  Wednesday, May 1st

Final Class  Meeting  Saturday, May 4th  9am to noon

Other Activities Important to Your Success in this Course

1. On the Monday following class, the slides we have just viewed and discussed in class will be posted on Moodle for your review. Especially when more challenging material was presented, students have reported that reviewing these slides between class sessions has been helpful.

2. There will be Break Assignments at every break during and between classes. Reviewing and considering the Break Assignments between class meetings is also a very helpful tool to support you in mastering this course material.

3. Please check Moodle occasionally to see if there are new postings or announcements.

4. If you need clarification or support, please call or email your professor.
Our Text Book

Our text book is in two parts:
1. the Presentation Slide Deck, which you will have access to within two days after each class session has been completed. *Being A Leader And The Effective Exercise Of Leadership: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model (Presentation Slide Deck)* and
2. Pre-Classroom Readings #1 through 7. These readings will be posted on Moodle.

“Rules of the Game”

In order for you to realize the promise of this Course, and for the Course to work effectively, you will need to make the following promises:

1. I will keep and/or honor my word at all times. (more on this as the day progresses)

2. Be in my seat, ready to go at the end of each break, having completed my break assignment.

3. If I need to leave the room during class, I will leave and return as quickly as possible.

4. I will state my first name each time I comment, share or question. We will do this until everyone in the room can identify everyone else by first name.

5. Each morning and after each break, when I come into the room, I will take the front-most and the center-most seat available, even if I prefer not to sit close to the front.

6. Each morning and after each break, I will sit next to someone I have not sat next to before. I will do this after each break throughout the course.

7. If I need to stand during the course, I will go to the back of the room and then return to my chair as soon as possible.

8. I will not eat during course sessions, and I can eat during breaks and at lunch. [Water and drinks are ok, and I will remove any trash.]

9. I will not use my PDA, laptop, camera, e-device, etc., during course sessions.

10. I will text Jeri at any time when if/when I discover that I will not be keeping my word related to the course. This includes being late or missing a part of class. (more on this as the day progresses)
11. If I have not keep my word, or have broken my word, and I am about to enter the class without having informed Jeri beforehand, I will acknowledge it as soon as I return to class. If, for example, I walk into class late, I will acknowledge that I have broken my word by saying something like:

“I acknowledge that I did not honor my word to _____. You can count on me to honor my word going forward.”

12. I will respect the dignity, thoughts, and confidentiality of my classmates. I will honor confidentiality regarding what other participants share during the course.

a. With people who are not in the course I may share what has been shared by participants in the class, but I will not ever mention the name of the person who shared it, or any company or other institution name, or the names of anyone else who was involved in that sharing.

b. I am responsible for managing this request. [Obviously Jeri is not able to guarantee it. You should know that in our years of doing this work, we have not heard of people violating this request.]

13. Regarding speaking up during class; others want to hear from me. I will use one of two approaches when I have something to say:

a. Speak up without raising my hand if no one else is speaking

b. Raise my hand to be called on if someone else is speaking