Are leaders born or made? It is not quite the "chicken and egg" question, but the debate it spurs can last longer than a string of 90 degree summer days in Indiana. Of course, if one answers "born and only born", then the implication would be that leadership can't be taught. That would greatly reduce the value of many programs, from Harvard School of Business to Duke Divinity School's Faith and Leadership Center, and even the leadership emphasis at ESR. One day as I asked myself that "born or made question," the immediate response from the peanut gallery of my own mind was, "Neither. Among Friends they're adopted."

I think the question can quickly reach the point of diminishing returns, but it does lay before us the issue of whether leadership is primarily a result of charisma and personality or a product created by the acquisition and utilization of certain skill sets. In the former case, it is easy to name individuals whose innate abilities were instrumental in convincing others to follow, only to discover that their objectives were malicious and self-serving. In a sense they qualify as strong leaders but hardly as good ones. In truth, we'd rather take our chances with anarchy than experience their influence again. While many of these compelling leaders seem to rise from the ashes, extremely successful from day one, I'd wager that is seldom, if ever, the case. Were we to study their lives with some scrutiny we would discern the evolution and formation of their character and their practice. In the latter case, leadership as a collection of skills, we can probably name some very capable people in terms of learned skill sets associated with successful leadership, but also know they would have difficulty getting three magnets to line up together. However skilled they may be, people are not inclined to view them as leadership material. Why is that?

Are leaders born or made? Adopted or imported? I believe some may be more naturally gifted, but leaders themselves are not born; and one can study long and hard, but the digestion of theories and collection of workshop certificates alone will not produce competent leaders. It is probably a both/and scenario rather than either/or as it is often presented. As I sat with the question in recent months, the response arose within me, "What if that is the wrong question?" From the perspective where I stand, in the 21st century western culture, an academic in a

religious context, a Quaker and a southern, left-handed one at that, I think the more accurate observation is that leaders are called. Even for the non-religious, in order to lead, a situation is needed in which one's abilities are well suited. As I think about that shift in the midst of the broader discussion of leadership, the idea of "called" stands in contrast to "ambition." To be clear, I don't oppose ambition or even aspiration in general. It is good to have goals toward which one strives; but I believe there is a substantial difference between an ambition to lead due to a personal goal or motivation and agreeing to lead as a result of a calling or invitation.

There are multiple levels or types of calling. In the broader discussion that calling may be from the community or group which, itself, seeks to be led. I clerked the search committee for an executive director of a Friends organization this past winter. Whatever ambitions or aspirations the applicants may have had, it took a decision of the committee and ultimately the board to call or invite this person into leadership. We can easily name a handful of other organizations in our orbit of travel and volunteering in which new leadership has been chosen. In nearly every case, an overly ambitious, nearly messianic, position description was used to articulate and define the qualities of leadership desired and the conditions under which it may occur, and the group called the person who most closely matched what they had convinced themselves they wanted.

One of the common themes now seen in leadership materials, that was absent in earlier generations, is the role of the group in creating conditions in which one may lead and in assenting to be led. While I think these writings sometimes overstate the group's role, moments like the so-called Arab Spring remind me that there is substantial truth to that insight.

Calling assumes a different dimension when we wander into the territory of spirituality, where we dare to imagine that the Divine offers an ongoing dialogue within the depths of our being. There, in the Sanctuary of the Soul, that wonderful phrase Thomas Kelly used in *Testament of Devotion*, we often find a nearly pulsating summons or nudge that so resonates within us it can seem to be naming that for which we were created. (As an aside, I wondered if the term Sanctuary of the Soul was original to Kelly. When I Googled the term, the first link read "Low Prices on Sanctuary of the Soul at Amazon.com." I was all set to buy a couple of spares. As it turns out, Richard Foster is releasing a devotional with that title. I imagine it will be a fine book, but I was a little disappointed nonetheless.)

Over the past several months I have had the wonderful opportunity to hear various Quakers talk about their own understandings and practice of leadership. In many cases, they spoke of the

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centrality of being called to the work. Called leadership is a response to higher power. It remembers why it attempts to lead in the first place. It continues to look within to the source of the calling for guidance and direction on how to exercise leadership. One immediate change that calling introduces into the leadership equation is that those who are called do not step into leadership roles with the intention of imposing their own vision or will on the group; they have come as an act of faithfulness, indeed some would say holy obedience.

Even if the idea of God or a calling from God doesn't fit well with a particular individual, it seems to me that those leaders who are prone to reflection and introspection will point to some internal knowing that contributes to their willingness to say "yes" to the opportunity to lead. Without call or invitation, whether born or made, leaders are like a horse with no race to run, a parade marshal without a single float or marching band or even a clown to follow. Short of invading and coercing, they have no one to lead, leaving us with the leadership version of the "if a tree falls in the woods . . ." question—"If a leader has no one to lead, is he or she still a leader?"

At ESR, we support the idea that God calls individuals to ministry, and that even so, some development and nurturing of gifts is usually beneficial. In a similar way, even as leaders are called, there is much to be learned. However, I'd suggest there are more profitable lines of inquiry than merely thinking about strategic planning and personnel management.

A second conclusion I've reached in thinking about whether or not leadership can be taught is that the discussion on innate ability versus skill sets overlooks the matter of leadership framing or foundation. How does one view the organization one leads? How does one analyze the context? Frame the issues? Interpret the fears and the desires of the group? How does one formulate a point of view and propose a course of action? What guides a leader's decision-making process? As I was about to graduate from seminary, I remember a classmate asking if I thought I'd really learned anything in seminary. The insinuation was that he thought he was leaving pretty much the same as he had arrived. My answer was, "Oh heavens, yes." Not so much in a tidy toolbox of skills and answers to fix every situation, but I could see a tremendous effect on how I viewed the world, on my self-understanding, and on how I processed information and made decisions. An ESR alumna, who holds several degrees including one in the field of law, has shared with me more than once the impact of a theological education for her was that it provided an ethical grounding and framework from which to make decisions that was lacking in

her study of law. She laments the fact that such an important educational and formational component is lacking in a field so dependent upon ethical judgment. It is my own experience, and conversations like that one, that persuade me that teaching about leadership begins with questions of formation and values, not organizational flow charts and spreadsheets.

Once a leader is in place to lead, he or she has some degree of power and authority with which to do good or other than good. Hopefully little illustration or persuasion is needed to understand that the decisions a leader makes and the actions a leader takes have significant impact on those being led.

I recently read an account of a large agricultural company that had a sludge by-product that was disposed of as waste until someone discovered that vitamin E could be extracted from it. The process for extracting vitamin E required that the by-product be transported to the company's soybean operation and mixed with these beans. At the end of the process, vitamin E was extracted, but it also now contained certain pesticides and chemicals absorbed from the beans. The vitamin industry is under-regulated, so the product is sold in that condition to the public. The employee telling the story said, "You have to understand, our company's only motive is to make a profit. We are breaking no laws, so we continue to sell the product even though we know it contains contamination." As I read that story, I thought, "Here is an example." In this case, those in leadership with the power to decide what a company produces and sells are driven by economic rather than either ethical or humanitarian concerns. Why is that? Profit is certainly not a bad motivation for a business, but it can't be the only motive. At some level, decisions like that connect with the values that have been adopted and internalized by the decision makers.

We all have a set of values. Mine may not match yours exactly. Whatever they are, values affect leaders' perceptions of situations. That includes the manner in which we interpret that perception, as well as limitations or blind spots of what others may see that we will miss. They help define what we consider as an ethical or unethical response. The solutions we devise to address our understanding of the issues we perceive are rooted in those values.

If decisions we make are driven by the values we hold as applied to the circumstances we face, then the quality and content of leadership depend as much if not more on the values we hold than on the characteristics we possess or the skills we acquire. The thing is, we acquire so many of those values before we are old enough to know that it is happening and certainly before

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we being to think deliberately about leadership. We acquire them from multiple sources. They come from our families. For instance, my family—paternal grandparents, father and siblings—operated with that old "your word is your bond" axiom. Religiously, I relate that to Friends' testimony of integrity. Watching them operate with that axiom influenced me greatly. I expect people to do what they tell me they will do, and to do it with my prodding them. I have learned that it is terribly disappointing to me when people do not follow through. That creates a leadership quandary for me. Do I try to discard the value that offers integrity to others as my contribution to the relationship and expect it return? Do I become an overly suspicious person, rarely trusting and always monitoring others? I think I have adopted and adapted a couple of teachings of Jesus. I've joined his "let your yes be yes and your no be no" to the exhortation to be "as cunning as a serpents, as gentle a doves." And, I have had to become patient with the excessive rigors of documentation in some situations where a handshake simply will not suffice.

Values are also implanted by our regional culture. As an example, I realize that I am prone to give narrative answers. If you ask me a question, the answer you seek is likely surrounded by a story. If nothing else, it is the story of how I think about the issue contained in the question you ask. As I have become aware of that, at times I have tried to spare people the story and give a concise one word or one sentence answer. Some have no doubt appreciated my effort at brevity, but on occasions I have later learned the person assumed I must have been angry with them because I was "short." I view that tendency toward narrative very much as a characteristic of the region where I was born. We can transact business and an outsider will never see it happen because it occurs in disconnected bits and pieces within the narrative exchange. I value that exchange because it can deepen the relational dynamic between the parties involved and/or give insight into the thinking process of the person answering the question. As I have watched that style alongside other more curt and direct styles, I realized I would probably have a difficult time leading in some regions of this country because there simply is no space for or understanding of that style.

Faith traditions influence our values. Any allegiance I have to peace and justice grows from a spiritual transformation that holds anger, fear, and greed at bay. I remember a presentation on interfaith dialogue in which the speaker suggested Christians should lay aside their convictions about Jesus and simply engage in peace work. I recognize he was trying to move beyond a point of theological contention that can divide religious groups. Immediately, I knew within myself

that without Jesus I had insufficient motivation toward and hope for peace. My collection of values would shift like a pile of stones after a foundational piece at the bottom of the heap had been removed. Even deeper than particular values such as peace or integrity, at least for leaders who themselves have deep religious convictions, I believe introspection will reveal a connection between a faith tradition's views on authority and communication and our own efforts to use authority within leadership contexts.

That begins to sketch out the origins of many of our values. I would add to that sketch things moments of conflict as occasions where, if we come to knowledge about ourselves or change our point of view, conflict contributes to our set of values. And media. I shudder to think how many ways the media influences us. Since 9/11 I have been more attentive to how it has been used to inflame fear, which affects interactions with persons who are different, spending habits, and more.

So if leadership can be taught, what do we teach? If we accept the premise that one's values are a cornerstone for how one leads, then I would suggest that teaching leadership necessarily includes attention to personal formation in which we identify those values, and points of view that shape our own moral compass. We all have them. The question is, "Can we name them?" If we can, are they ones we choose to have, or have we simply never confronted some our rough edges? Here is my short list of items to include when teaching about leadership:

1. The importance of formation. At the very least, attention to formation in leadership development would include attention to the centrality of listening for a calling to leadership rather than rushing forward in every situation where it is needed. Formation includes an introspective examination of the impact of one's own family, region, etc., in shaping one's values and motivations, and one's patterns for acting and interacting. In should lead us to a point where we can name the values we claim to hold as well as the ones we actually demonstrate. To get to the truth quickly, pay attention to the correspondence between espoused values and enacted values under moments of stress.

Leadership is improved when the leader knows him- or herself. We cannot completely escape the formation of our past, but neither do we have to be completely determined by it. Once we enter the land of critical analysis and reflection, we have some choice in the values we will embrace and those we will reject. That is one of the reasons I appreciate Peter Rea and Alan Kolp's book *Integrity is a Growth Market*. It casually and clearly names seven values that anchor

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virtuous leadership. When we wander into that territory, today's world is quick and right to say, whose values? Whose virtues? Why do you choose these? What if they are not the ones I would choose? My point is not to say "these are the ones you must choose; rather your must choose the ones you will use. The failure to choose is a default choice to continue operating with those you acquired along the way."

Imagine the different decisions that might be reached in an economic downturn if values that promote profit and accumulation govern a decision rather than ones that promote the good of the whole or simplicity. What would the United States be like if, somewhere along the way, our culture had decided to value generosity more than accumulation, and granted power/influence to those who gave more away without strings attached rather than those who showered themselves in luxury?

Among those Friend leaders we interviewed, there were differences of personality and perspective on several things, but there were at least four values that seemed to surface frequently. As mentioned earlier, they frequently referenced a sense of being called in a religious sense. Two, they shared a conviction that there is that of God in others. Repeatedly, that belief created value in the other persons in the group. It influenced how the leaders chose to consult with them, or included them in decision-making. It affected how leaders proceeded with the difficult task of termination when necessary, which in turn affected things such as the ethos of the group. Finally, they named personal integrity as a chief, guiding value that framed their leadership. The seeds of those values may have been planted earlier, but they were reinforced and honed by their religious tradition and practice.

I believe that teaching leadership is more effective when it includes identification of the values and beliefs that will shape a leader's presence, influence the leader's relations with others in the group, and frame their decision-making.

2. Teaching leadership should give some attention to the power of metaphor and myth, and the expectations they enflame. Whatever we think about ourselves as leaders, we act out our leadership on a stage designed by the expectations of others. Despite the growing call for a kinder, gentler, more inclusive kind of leader, culturally there is still a deep resonance with the heroic leader. He or she is a deliverer, a conqueror, one who can right the wrongs that threaten the organization and restore us to a place of peace and prosperity. It rallies behind the words of a defiant president telling the terrorists to "Bring it on." It lives in the apocalyptic hopes of

religious traditions that long for the vanishing of their oppressors. It cheers when the star athlete promises championships and the defeat of all pretenders. For some, that is the only known model of leadership; for others, though most days they want a different model, it is still the place they will run when chaos overwhelms, or when the buck really must find a place to stop. Leaders need to understand the persistence of that metaphor, when to step into it, but also when to resist and work to create other ways of thinking about leadership. At times that may be as simple as giving the issue back to the group to resolve rather than fixing the problem when it is laid on your doorstep.

3. Leaders need to be taught about the importance and power of Presence – in this case, their own. As a leader becomes aware of the expectations of others, it will be beneficial if he or she has a well-formed idea of how they will be present to the group. One of the most important things leaders do within a group is contribute to the ethos of the organization. In addition to the official communications that one may "say" to a group, how one "is" with the group is equally important. It is, simply put, a matter of presence: formal or casual, rigid or relaxed, stern or welcoming, calm or anxious, and so forth. Does one's presence contribute to an atmosphere of trust or suspicion, joy or fear?

This is one place where I see a busy intersection between formation, personality, and skills. In a word, I would say the type of presence a leader wants is centeredness. My Quaker religious tradition has rooted the idea of centeredness into my thinking. Others might prefer terms such as balanced or focused, and those would suffice and but also likely give different nuances. When I speak of teaching the place of centeredness in leadership, I have in mind calmness, which internally is deeply rooted in one's living connection with God; externally it manifests as kind, attentive, yet firm. Seeing it as a product of inner stillness that can endure even after the practice of waiting silently in worship makes it a product of formation. One's personality contributes to the ease of reaching and maintaining that point, and also how it is projected. Those who are naturally confident might find it easier to remain centered under stress whereas those who are naturally anxious or easily distracted or lacking in confidence might find it more difficult, particularly if the demands of leadership reach an overwhelming point. Learning to maintain such centeredness in a daily schedule in which contexts, topics, and group dynamics can change quickly and vary drastically draws on learned skills.

4. Leadership studies must teach about context. The expectations of others, woven together, move beyond metaphors and establish the context in which one leads. If we are going to teach leadership, we must teach that leadership occurs in a system, not a vacuum. The system is active and powerful, not passive. A few years back when Lilly Endowment issued a call for proposals on excellence in ministry, their chief interest was how to renew and inspire ministers so that they were capable of excellent ministry. In a proposal that had buy-in from Indiana and Western Yearly Meetings, I helped develop a proposal that basically said it will have minimal effect to pull pastors out of their system in order to renew them if the system in which they serve is unhealthy. More times than not, the system is more powerful than is the minister. Returning the minister to the same unhealthy system will simply deplete him or her again. A better strategy, we proposed, would be to address the renewal of ministers but also work at creating healthy congregational systems. Why? Because a leader doesn't operate in a vacuum. The power of environment and context, or culture is too large to ignore. Whatever <u>Faith and Practice</u> or the <u>United Methodist Book of Discipline</u> says about the role and authority of the pastor, the dynamics of the local system have their symbols, rituals, and informal authority patterns. Lilly did not fund the proposal, but I have not changed my thinking on the matter.

That means that teaching leadership involves teaching about understanding organizational and cultural dynamics, analyzing the system, and thinking with the whole in mind. Leaders must take time to learn the story, the history both told and untold (as it can be known) of the group. Some people are prone to see the big picture. They have the gift of seeing two and three steps out what needs to happen, and what is likely to occur under certain scenarios. I do not know if that can be taught. If a leader has that ability, she or he is ahead of the game. Even if one does not have it, one can learn to think from a systems point of view.

5. Dealing with Conflict. I have known a few people who enjoy and thrive in conflict. Most of us prefer a peaceful state. However much one may know and understand about the system in which one resides, that knowledge will be insufficient to eliminate conflict from within the system, nor should we really want it to (though not all types of conflict is healthy).

It seems to me that conflict is largely driven by two things: differing expectations of the parties involved, and communication patterns. With regard to expectations, consider the reality of organizations. When we pause to consider the numerous levels of needs and desires in an organization, the complexity is astounding. There is the organizational mission, which

supposedly an employee embraces when he or she accepts employment. (Yet, if there were an organizational version of Maslow's hierarchy of need, paycheck would be at the bottom. Until that is satisfied, the rest is much less important). There is the style of leading by the CEO and others in the org chart. There will likely be variation between them, potentially setting up conflicts. Each of those persons will have professional objectives of their own, and expectations of others who work with them or for them. In addition each person there, from the President to the person who empties the trash at night, has his or her own personal agenda. Those can't all be in perfect harmony.

Some conflicts will emerge over the direction of the organization, or personnel decisions, or new research and development. Others will be rooted primarily in the relational dynamics, where styles and personalities don't fit well together. And, when one is the designated leader, it is a given that others will second-guess the decisions that are made. A leader cannot lead—should not answer the phone when the call to lead comes—if he or she does not have some skill in managing conflicts.

I named communication patterns as another cause of conflicts. There are the formal communications through which leaders believe they have said what needs to be said, and have led in ways they should lead. And there are informal communication patterns—the means of social interaction between members of the organization. Colleagues take cues from one another about how to interpret what has been said, and what importance to assign to it. I do not think leaders can manage or control the informal process. The most one can do is try to participate within them, to the degree entrance is possible, in order to shape what is received and how it is interpreted.

6. We need to teach the art of imagination and improvisation. Both involve creative thought. The former will enrich the quality of vision; the latter will improve its implementation. Together, they cultivate a climate of innovation. Questions like "What if . . .?" or "Could it be . . ." should be asked early and often. Whether the organization expects vision to come from the leader or from a more collaborative process, those in leadership help tend the process. Part of that tending is the facilitation of a process that encourages placing mission beside identified objectives, and thinking about how to move the group in that direction. To create something that is not yet requires a) intentional thought, and b) the ability to imagine what and how the preferred future should. That process that gives birth to vision. Vision is, by necessity, general in nature. One

cannot imagine every possible scenario that might occur or every conflict that will arise. Those in leadership will have opportunity upon opportunity to size up the moment, interpret the data, and . . .improvise.

7.   Finally, in teaching leadership I would include the word "adaptability." One of the strong currents in leadership now is the work of Ronald Heifetz who speaks of adaptive leadership. It requires learning to distinguish between technical matters and "swamp issues"; and for the latter, it demands that leaders remain flexible to change as context changes, as new information emerges, and others in the group introduce ideas and concepts that could be beneficial.

I remember signs I have seen in some businesses as well as novelty stores. It contains some variation of Rule# 1 – The Boss is Always Right. Rule #2 For all other matters, see Rule #1. That is not adaptive leadership. If leaders truly want to concentrate on engaging the group to move the organization forward, a bit of flexibility and adaptability is required.

In closing, there are two things I'd leave with you:

As I look at the list that has emerged in thinking about teaching leadership, it seems clear to me that these are topics that are only learned when there is an experiential dynamic to the learning. Whether that is role-play in class, or case studies brought by the leaders themselves, it is insufficient to learn some of this merely in theoretical form.

Second, as I think about Friends, two key challenges to us are these: If you accept the premise that values are key to leadership, and values are learned, it would seem to me that our first challenge is that Friends can struggle with definitive statements about beliefs, which can limit clarity about values. And, adaptability and flexibility seem compatible with Friends views of following the leading of the Sprit and continuing revelation; still, Friends are as entrenched in their own tradition as anyone else.

Much of what I've read in recent months touts transformative leadership as the preferred model. That resonates with me; however, its advocates often only propose visionary rhetoric as the tool for achieving such transformation. While important, that seems insufficient to me. I'm proposing a formation that clarifies and even reshapes character, and a set of deeper skills that work on presence and engaging the personalities in a group, with a goal of improving the content leaders offer in the midst of their challenge. This is not at the expense of traditional tools, but merely a suggestion that there are more pressing matters in teaching and developing good leaders.