

Using Popular Media to Teach Leadership

Jennifer Williams, Lecturer
Texas A&M University
2116 TAMU
College Station, TX 77845
jwilliams@aged.tamu.edu
phone: (979) 845-2997
fax: (979) 845-6296

Dr. Barry Boyd, Assistant Professor
Department of Agricultural Education
Texas A&M University
2116 TAMU
College Station, TX 77845
b-boyd@tamu.edu
phone: (979) 862-3693
fax: (979) 845-6296

Abstract

In studying leadership theory, one must realize that there is a difference between socialization of a leader and leadership theory education. Many successful leaders obtain their leadership skills from practice; in other words, they are socialized into leadership as they have learned from their experiences. One way to aid in the discussion of students' experiences is the use of multimedia. Songs, movies, and television shows are useful tools in leadership lectures.

The easiest way to begin to incorporate popular multimedia into your presentations/lectures is to first look at the leadership competencies that you are teaching. There are websites available that you can search by topic or start looking through your CD collection, as you watch televisions, or your movie collection to find media that would correspond to the competency you are looking for. Once you start looking for leadership in popular media, it is hard to stop. You start to notice that leadership is everywhere.

Introduction

In studying leadership theory, one must realize that there is a difference between socialization of a leader and leadership theory education. Many successful leaders obtain their leadership skills from practice; in other words, they are socialized into leadership as they have learned from their experiences. One way to aid in the discussion of students' experiences is the use of multimedia. Songs, movies, and television shows are useful tools in leadership lectures.

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants will be able to analyze leadership competencies in popular multimedia, learn how to incorporate popular multimedia into their presentations/lectures, and take away some examples of popular multimedia used for different leadership competencies.

Background/How it works

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The scariest part of incorporating multimedia into a leadership course is the fear of blank stares. Using popular multimedia is a gamble. Using the country song "You've Got to Stand for Something or You'll Fall for Anything" to hammer home the point of setting and knowing your values or, using the teen comedy

"Bring It On" in your class to show an ethical dilemma usually receives some raised eyebrows from your students. On the surface, they just hear a country song or see a cheerleading movie but upon closer examination, they find that the song has a message and the movie is a good example of an ethical predicament.

Results to date

Students love the classroom dynamics that multimedia allows. It breaks up lecture and allows students to "see or hear" leadership in a different way. Multimedia "enables lessons to be learned in a way that encourages free-flowing discussion" (Higgins, 2003). These hypothetical situations found in songs, television or movies lead to students bridging the gap from hypothetical stories to real life experiences.

The high response rate to the use of multimedia used in a leadership survey course has spawned numerous leadership activities that use songs, new assignments that let students analyze television and movies for their leadership content, and a course that focuses on the leadership concepts that can be found in movies. Table 1 shows some examples of popular media used in leadership courses.

Table 1.
Examples of Popular Media in Leadership Courses

Leadership Competency	Media Type	Example
Team Development	Song	"Lean on Me"
	Television Clip	"Survivor"
	Movie	"Miracle"
Vision	Song	"If I Had a Million Dollars"
	Television Clip	"Trading Spaces"
	Movie	"Drumline"
Ethics	Song	"Does He Love You"
	Television Clip	"The Apprentice"
	Movie	"The Skulls"

Conclusions and Future Implications

Songs, television shows, and movies "are a catalyst". They present dramatic problems, crises, and turnarounds that beg to be interpreted and discussed" (Clemens & Wolff, 1999). This generation of students likes to be entertained as they learn while at the same time being taught according to the principles of androgogy. Using popular multimedia is a teaching strategy that will accomplish both.

References

Clemens, J. & Wolff, M. (1999). *Movies to manage by*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.

Higgins, S. (2003). *Management goes to the movies*. Retrieved January 25, 2004 from <http://www.moviesforbusiness.com>.