

## **Navigating the Complexities of The Leader by Shreyas Sankaranarayanan**

Over time the role of being a leader has become a glorified and powerful role. However as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill put it, “the price of greatness is responsibility”. This could not be more accurately exemplified than in the expectations of a modern leader. We have come to expect near perfection from our leaders and sadly no leader could ever realistically uphold such a standard. This is clearly outlined in the Harvard Business Review article, “In Praise of an Incomplete Leader” which explains that the propagation of the myth of a perfect and “complete” leader should be ended. In fact, the article argues that only when leaders start to acknowledge themselves as “incomplete”/imperfect can they cultivate and coordinate with their subordinates and make up for their missing skills by relying on others.

Specifically, the article identifies 4 different skills a leader should cultivate to help complement their strengths and weaknesses to improve the effectiveness of their leadership over their subordinates. They are as follows: sensemaking, relating, visioning, and inventing. Sensemaking entails analyzing trends in the company ecosystem and assessing their implications. Relating involves establishing networks of trusted associates and combining support with questioning. Visioning involves constructing realistic and inspiring representations of a future state that all members of the company want to engage themselves in. Inventing involves developing innovative methods to surmount challenges and turn a future vision into a reality. We can even see these skills being employed by great leaders in the past. For example, Apple co-founder Steve Jobs in the early stages of his company realized the need for more effective marketing to push his products to the next level. (Sensemaking) Although he lacked the necessary skills to carry this out, he connected and persuaded marketing expert and PepsiCo president John Sculley to join Apple as CEO. (Relating) He did all this by involving and exposing Sculley, who was initially reluctant to join Apple, to the vision he had for the company. (Visioning) Steve Jobs through this invented new way to market his product and achieve his vision for Apple. (Inventing) This move was a huge success for Apple as during Sculley’s time as CEO company revenues increased from \$569 million to \$8.3 billion. We can see that through the usage of these 4 different skills Jobs became a better leader to Apple.

Recently, my team and I were given the opportunity through the Youth Leadership Development Program in Houston (YLDP Houston) to interact with Mr. Brian Greene (President and CEO of Houston Food Bank). In the conversation with Mr. Greene, I was able to ask a question that had long intrigued me: How does a leader of such a huge organization manage and appease the various intraorganizational interest groups to avoid potential conflicts? In response to my question, Mr. Greene discussed how with the recent pandemic he has had to carefully analyze and respond to the situation to ensure utmost safety but also ensuring access to about 159 million meals. (Sensemaking) He also talked about the various people (dietitians, CPAs, logisticians, supply managers, etc.) he works along with to carry out the organization’s mission. (Relating) He discussed how he tried to lead and navigate most intraorganizational challenges while ensuring such efficiency. He discussed how he established organization-wide goals and ensured dedication to these goals by explaining how these goals contributed to achieving the overall vision of a hunger-free Houston to his coworkers. (Visioning and Inventing) We can once again see the employment of the 4 skills to successfully navigate the complexities of being a leader.

Ultimately, a leader can overcome any variety of weaknesses and deal with adversity through certain skills. This might just even be the secret to navigating the complexities of the leader.