

Leadership in Cinema



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

(Partnership with Drexel University's LeBow College of Business students

<http://www.lebow.drexel.edu/index.php>)

The King's Speech (Based on a true story)

Submitted by: Dana D'Angelo with Contributors **E-mail:** dangeldc@drexel.edu

Phone: 215-895-2954

Genre: Biography/ Drama/ History **Released:** 2010

Studio: The Weinstein Company **Audience Rating:** PG-13

Runtime: 118 minutes

Materials:

The King's Speech DVD or online movie access, appropriate projection system, participant note-taking tools, and access to the following readings on leadership theories and ideas:

1. Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership
<http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/About-section-Our-Approach.aspx>
2. Goleman's Leadership Styles
<https://hbr.org/2000/03/leadership-that-gets-results>
3. Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles
<https://www.fireleadership.gov>
4. Rowley's Educational Leadership – The Good Mentor
https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/docs/pdf/good_mentor.pdf

General Objective:

Students will learn the above theories on leadership techniques and will discuss them in the context of *The King's Speech*, thereby furthering their understanding of the leadership concepts.

Basic Plot:

After the death of his father King George V, and his brother Edward VIII's abdication of the throne due to his choice in wife, Bertie, the next in line for the throne who suffers from a debilitating speech impediment, is suddenly crowned the King of England. After countless visits to doctors and therapists, Bertie (King George VI) had given up hope on battling his stammer, until his wife Elizabeth, the future Queen Mother, arranges for her husband to see an unorthodox speech therapist, Lionel Logue. After a rough start, the King and Lionel delve into an unconventional course of treatment and through their time spent together and the King's

eventual success; the two form an unbreakable friendship and bond. With England on the brink of entering World War II his country is in desperate need of a leader, so with the support of Logue, his wife and daughters, his government and Winston Churchill, the King will prove his voice is meaningful when he overcomes his stutter and delivers a radio-address that inspires the people of England and unites them in the battle of World War II.

Cast of Important Characters:

Colin Firth Duke of York / “Bertie” / King George VI
Helena Bonham Carter Duchess of York / Queen Elizabeth
Geoffrey Rush Lionel Logue
Michael Gambon..... King George V
Guy Pearce..... King Edward VIII
Timothy Spall..... Winston Churchill

Facilitation Options:

This lesson plan has been written around full film facilitation – the setup of this plan anticipates that the students will watch the entire film. Due to possible time constraints, however, the students may not be able to watch the full film, so the instructor may choose to only show specific clips from the film that pertain to leadership. In such a case, since only a few clips can be found on YouTube due to copyright blocks, the instructor should watch the movie beforehand, and note certain scenes that he/she deems most valuable. He/she may opt to also use the scenes described in this lesson plan.

Full Film Facilitation Guidelines:

1. Assign the readings to the students before meeting to start the watching the movie.
2. Review the theories and concepts of the readings during class before watching the film to ensure that the students understand what they should be looking for.
3. Show the film, *The King’s Speech*, after having instructed the students to take notes on specific examples of leadership styles and techniques.
4. After the film, have students break up into small groups to discuss what examples of leadership they found that pertain to their readings.
5. Discuss as a class what each group found most exemplary of the readings on leadership in the film.
6. Ask the students to apply what they learned from the film and the readings on leadership to their own lives

Clip Facilitation Guidelines:

1. Assign the readings to the students before meeting to watch clips of the movie
2. Review the important parts of the readings before showing clips of the movie.

3. Show clips, specifically chosen by instructor.
4. Break students into groups to discuss the examples of each reading that they found in the film.
5. Request that the students think of examples in their own lives that relate to the movie and the readings on leadership.

Part 1: Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Behaviors in *The King's Speech*

Objective:

Students will learn how well Kouzes and Posner's leadership behaviors work in different situations by finding examples of the behaviors in the film.

Challenge the Process

- When Logue is walking in the park with King George VI and telling him that he could be king, a better king than his brother. (Scene Time: 1:02:50-1:04:27)

Enable Others to Act

- When Logue recorded King George VI reciting Shakespeare perfectly and gave him the record (Scene Time: 27:00-34:15)

Encourage the Heart

- When Logue consoles King George VI after his father dies and they talk about his past.
- Also all the times when Logue believes in King George VI even when he doesn't believe in himself (Scene Time: 47:37-56:00)

Discussion Questions:

1. Which characters challenged the process, as described by Kouzes and Posner, in *The King's Speech*?
2. Which actions, as described by Kouzes and Posner, does King George VI show? Lionel Logue?
3. Which characters enabled others to act throughout *The King's Speech*?

Part 2: Goleman's Leadership Styles in *The King's Speech*

Objective:

Students will find examples in the film of each style of leadership described by Goleman, which will further their understanding of the concepts of each style, how they can be used, and how well they work in different situations. They will also relate one of the examples of Goleman's Leadership Styles in the film to an experience in their lives.

The Coercive Style

- Lionel Logue insists that he and King George VI – then the Duke of York – address each other by their first names, Lionel and Bertie. However, as he is royalty, the king refuses and argues against such disrespectful informality. At one point, after having been very persistent about calling the king by his first name, Logue says, “I’m not going to call you anything else.” Considering the fact that the king probably believed it unthinkable for anyone outside of his family to call him “Bertie,” he responds, “Then we shan’t speak,” further straining the environment in which Logue was trying to work with him. (Scene Time: 21:47-24:10)

The Authoritative Style

- King George VI acts as an authoritative leader when he addresses all of the English people for the first time in the final speech shown in the film. In his radio-delivered speech, Bertie informs his people that “The task will be hard” and that “There may be dark days ahead.” A key part of authoritative leadership, transparency helps to motivate people, which is exactly what King George VI did with this speech. (Scene Time: 1:43:00-1:47:36)

The Affiliative Style

- King George VI’s wife, Elizabeth, played a major role in the affiliative leader position, always consoling her husband whenever he had doubts about himself as a king and leader. When King George VI was crying because of his feelings of inadequacy, Elizabeth attempted to cheer him up using humor, as affiliative leaders first concern themselves about the well-being of people so that they can perform their duties proficiently. (Scene Time: 1:14:33-1:16:35)
- Lionel Logue also utilizes the affiliative style when he attempts to – and eventually succeeds in – finding out about Bertie’s personal life, which he uses as the reason for King George VI’s stammer – his father.
- After King George VI described the situation surrounding his brother’s kingship, Logue attempts to boost the King George VI confidence saying, “you could be king, you could do it.” Unfortunately, Logue’s motive is misunderstood, and Logue ends up only angering King George VI. (Scene Time: 1:03:32-1:04:57)

The Democratic Style

- King George VI and Elizabeth told Logue that they wished for the speech therapy sessions to be “strictly business [with] no personal nonsense,” which was not all that Logue wanted to do to cure the king’s stutter. However, after talking the matter over, Logue, who is in this situation the leader figure, decides to do what they believe would be best (Scene Time: 34:27-35:37)

The Pace-Setting Style

- During the first session he has with the duke, Logue says, “I bet you that you can read flawlessly right here, right now,” setting his expectations considerably high in the eyes of the duke. As Goleman said, the pace-setting technique lowers morale. When a leader sets goals too high so that people cannot achieve them, they feel like a failure, which

helps to explain why the duke became so disappointed that he gave up and left. (Scene Time: 25:04-29:07)

The Coaching Style

- The father of King George VI attempted to help his son with his stammer by coaching him through a reading, saying things like, “Get it out boy,” and “Just take your time; form your words carefully,” as he read. Eventually, after listening to King George VI stammer continuously, he gets so frustrated that he starts yelling at him, “Just try it!” and “Damn it!” (Scene Time: 32:08-32:52). For obvious reasons, his father’s attempt at coaching was unsuccessful, which is not to say that the coaching style itself is unsuccessful, as is proven by the successful coaching of Bertie by Lionel (see Mentoring section). “He may have had good intentions, but his methods of leadership proved to be ineffective” (“Leadership Roles”).

Discussion Questions:

1. Was it wise for Logue to use such disrespectful leadership tactics (coercive, pace-setting) on King George VI in the beginning of their relationship?
2. Why was Logue so curious about the king’s personal life and so persistent in his attempts to get him to talk about it?
3. Could Logue have produced the same effect on King George VI using a different style instead of pace setting – setting a high goal and then showing him that he accomplished the goal?

Part 3: Wildland Fire Values and Principles in *The King’s Speech*

Objective:

Students will apply the Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles to the events in the film and analyze them specifically with respect to Lionel Logue and King George VI.

Duty

- Be proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader – *King George VI and Lionel Logue practicing in the abbey for the coronation* – When King George VI confronted Lionel Logue about the fact that he had no credentials; Logue admits that he is not a doctor but points out that he never claimed to be one. While he may not have been a doctor, Logue had a long list of success stories with his “patients.” His proficiency came from his own experiences as a speaker and actor and allowed him to improve upon even the worst cases.
- Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished – *Logue explains to King George VI what exercises would need to be done to cover the “mechanics”* – When the king’s wife asserts that nothing personal would be discussed and that they only wanted to improve the mechanics of King George VI’s impediment, Logue explained what exercises would have to be done and how they would improve upon his problem. He led

the king through each exercise, doing it with him, ensuring that he was properly progressing.

- Develop your subordinates for the future – Logue’s entire purpose was to help King George VI overcome his speech impediment so that he could properly lead his nation, first as a prince and then as king leading his people into the “dark hour” of World War II.

Integrity

- Know yourself and seek improvement – *King George VI returns to Lionel Logue for his help* – King George VI knew that his speech impediment was a problem and sought help, however reluctantly. As a prince and then later king, he had the responsibility to lead his people. In order to do so, he had to know himself well enough to recognize his problem and have the courage to address it.
- Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions – *King George VI accepts the Prince of Wales’ abdication of the throne* – King George VI accepted his responsibility as a leader of his country, both as a prince and in ascending the throne. Part of this responsibility was to be present for his people: in seeking improvement, he sought to fulfill this responsibility.
- Set the example - King George VI could have easily hired someone to speak for him over the radio or rejected the Prince of Wales’ abdication of the throne. In graciously accepting the throne and seeking improvement upon his speech impediment, King George VI set an example as a strong leader willing to do whatever it took (no matter how humiliating or difficult) to properly lead his people.

Respect

- Know your subordinates and look out for their well-being – *King George VI insults Lionel Logue as they walk through the park* – Logue suffered unnecessary abuse at the end of King George VI’s temper in order to better understand his past and its effects on the king’s speech impediment. In constantly persevering, Logue was going above and beyond to look out for the king’s well-being.
- Keep your subordinates informed – *Logue praises King George VI’s efforts after he delivers his speech* – Logue constantly explained his methods to King George VI and praised his progress often. He made sure that the king was aware of his progress, which was especially important because King George VI was so cynical about his ability to overcome his speech impediment.
- Build the team – *Logue gives King George VI the recording* – Logue knew that King George VI eventually would be unable to resist listening to the recording and would realize that he had such great potential. Logue helped the king to recognize that potential and reach for it.
- Employ your subordinates in accordance with their capabilities – *Logue pushes King George VI to not give up* – Logue took the time to truly understand King George VI’s problem and truly worked to get to the bottom of it. He knew that the king had potential to be great and pushed him to reach it.

Discussion Questions:

1. King George VI was obviously a leader to his people, but was technically a subordinate in his relationship with Lionel Logue. How does this reversed relationship affect their individual duties, respect, and integrity?
2. Is Logue's blatant disrespect of the king's position – such as calling him Bertie – a violation of the king's integrity and the respect he is due?
3. Discuss how duty compels King George VI to try and improve upon his speech impediment.

Part 4: Rowley's Mentoring in *The King's Speech*

Objective:

Rowley uses the idea of a good mentor to connect both experienced and new teaching staff at high schools and middle schools. The objective is to connect and discuss the 5 qualities of a good mentor below to Lionel Logue in *The King's Speech*. Below each quality is a brief example or elaboration on the quality and how it relates to Lionel Logue's character, after reviewing and discussing each quality and example, find one or two examples of when Lionel Logue was not a good mentor and discuss the repercussions of his poor mentoring. A mentor, more specifically a good mentor is a leader who has a positive and lasting impact on a person's personal or professional life, and Lionel Logue is the definition of a good mentor. Lionel Logue possessed five basic yet essential qualities of a good mentor:

The good mentor is committed to the role of mentoring.

- Lionel Logue was committed to help King George VI until his stammer was gone. He was there by his side for every speech, and even when the King showed doubt or frustration when working on his stutter, Lionel refused to quit, and even made the experience an enjoyable and beneficial one. Such a commitment from a mentor to their students flows naturally from a belief that mentors are making a significant and positive impact on the life of another.

The good mentor is accepting of the beginner.

- Lionel was never one to judge the King for his stammer. He showed empathy, and was accepting King George VI without making judgments. Being a good mentor, and empathetic mentor, means temporarily setting aside personal beliefs and values. The good mentor as Lionel was, recognizes the power of accepting the beginning student as a developing person and professional, and uses that to help their student achieve their goal on their own as Lionel does in one of the final scenes when King George VI realizes he has his own voice and that voice is important.

The good mentor is skilled at providing instructional support.

- Lionel Logue was an expert in the field of speech therapy. While he eventually admits to not being a doctor in such field, he has had plenty of experience working with war veterans and soldiers who developed stammers, and is well qualified when speech therapy is considered. Good mentors are willing to coach to improve performance

wherever their skill level, and Lionel does exactly that. He trains and coaches King George VI until he is comfortable enough and able to make speech debut.

The good mentor is effective in different interpersonal contexts.

- Good mentor teachers recognize that each mentoring relationship occurs in a unique, interpersonal context. And from the beginning, Lionel understood that King George VI was a different kind of patient, and would require such a unique interpersonal relationship to be successful in his quest to become a natural speaker. Lionel adjusted his methods to help the King understand his capability in becoming a public speaker. This is evident in his first encounter with the King in which he proves to him that he has the ability to speak without his impediment by having him read aloud while listening to music unable to hear his own words. Lionel immediately realizes that the Kings simply just has to believe he can and work hard to achieve it. And so he adjusted his methods to fit the King's needs.

The good mentor communicates hope and optimism.

- Good mentors such as Lionel Logue capitalize on opportunities to reassure their mentees of their potential in both private conversations and in public settings. And Lionel constantly reassures the King of his ability to overcome his speech impediment, which keeps his attitude positive and his dream of speaking publicly a not so distance goal. And his comforting words are always honest and sincere, with the sole intention of helping King George VI overcome his impediment.

Discussion Questions:

1. Sometimes the mentor can become the mentee as well. Do you see any mentoring from George to Lionel?
2. Mentors can also be considered “formal” or “informal”, that is, an established agreed upon situation versus a casual relationship. How do George and Lionel have some of both?
3. What experiences do you have being a mentor or mentee?

Contributions to this document were made by the following students in the Pennoni Honors College of Drexel University enrolled in a course titled Leadership in the Movies in the fall of 2012 facilitated by the author, Dana D'Angelo:

Amanda Tilles, Stephany Rosa, Michael Lee, and Kate Kavanaugh

Valuable Articles and Resources for *The King's Speech*

Rowley, James. "Educational Leadership." *Educational Leadership*. 56.8 (1999): 20-22. Print. (https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/docs/pdf/good_mentor.pdf)

"Leadership Roles in *The King's Speech*." *Humphrey Fellows as Cronkite*. Arizona State University, 10 Sept. 2012. Web. 1 December 2012. (<http://cronkitehhh.jmc.asu.edu/blog/2012/09/leadership-roles-in-the-kings-speech/>)