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Leadership is a broad concept that encompasses different characteristics relative to individuals and organizations. Therefore the proposed assertion, “Leading is getting somebody to do something or getting somebody to believe in something,” could be interpreted in different ways depending on how we look at “Leading.” The three concepts that strike me the most in this assertion are “leading”, “getting… to do”, and “getting… to believe”. All three concepts could have positive as well as negative connotations and could be interpreted in different ways. It depends on what context this assertion is used, and it depends on who the leader is and what he/she is getting his//her followers to do or believe in. Model, contrary, and borderline cases of teachers were created below to illustrate some possible interpretations of this assertion.

Professor Tyler teaches Instructional Design in the College of Education. The course that she teaches involves a semester long design project of an educational technology application. She guides her students to design the application by providing them with material to support the design and implementation phases. Professor Tyler does not tell her students how they should do the project or what topic to choose, however, she scaffolds their learning so that they produce an artifact that demonstrates the learning goals of this course. Professor Tyler encourages her students to bring up their thoughts about their learning experiences in front of the class, and she appreciates how the different teams in this class have different plans to develop their design project. At the end of every semester, Prof. Tyler’s students say that they have learned so much and this course has given them the opportunity to present their educational applications at conferences.

Professor Ferrero teaches statistics in the Mathematics Department. This is an advanced statistics course, and he uses a teacher-centered approach to teach his students different statistical models. The students study to the test and they do the homework assignments that they are asked to do. Creativity is not part of the process and the answers are either right or wrong. Professor Ferrero and his book are the only providers of information. The students have a midterm and a final exam so that their professor can assess their learning. They have to study hard for the exams because those are their only chances to pass the course. Prof. Ferrero’s students say that they study to the exam and they do not enjoy learning about statistics in this class. They even do not know how they could apply the statistical models in real life.

Professor Price is another professor in the Mathematics department. He also teaches an Advanced statistics course. His teaching is a combination of Professor Ferrero’s and Professor Tyler’s methods. He uses the direct method of lecturing to teach the course material and the students have to take a midterm and a final. However, the students have to work on real data sets throughout the semester to answer real research questions based on the statistical concepts that they are learning in Prof. Price’s course. Throughout the semester, the students are guided by their professor’s feedback to build up their final paper. Professor Price’s students say that they learn from the project that they have to submit at the end of the semester, but they prefer if they could be guided to learn about statistical models instead of being told what they are.

In light of those three cases, the assertion that leading can get someone to do or believe in something can be interpreted in several ways. In Professor Tyler’s case, leading can be illustrated by the way she is guiding her students to create the educational applications. She does not tell the students what to do, but rather provides them with opportunities to learn and to select the best strategies for their learning. The students seem to be satisfied with her approach and this is evident in how much they have learned in her class. Professor Tyler can be a model case for “leading is getting someone to do or believe in something.”

Professor Ferrero has a different approach to teaching. His leading is more of an objectivist because he does not provide the learners with opportunities to explore statistics outside what he knows. The only source of information to the students is himself and the book. Therefore, the students are provided with no opportunities to experiment with the statistical tests and models in order to apply them to the real world. Prof. Ferrero makes his students do what he knows how to do and what he wants them to do. The students are led by fear of failing the class and that’s why they do what their professor thinks is right for them to learn statistics. Prof. Ferrero is a representation of a contrary case.

Professor Price who represents the borderline case is still fluctuating between his traditional method of teaching and engaging the students in the learning part. He is leading his students to learn following two approaches: teaching by telling and apply what they have learned in a real data set. I am not sure how effective the course would be to the students who need to apply what their professor teaches them to a real data set. This case could be efficient if the professor engages the students in real life examples every time he introduces a new statistical test.

Leading in the model case as represented by Prof. Tyler is more of guiding, scaffolding, and leaving it up to the students to decide how they want to approach the learning. The “getting to do” part in this case is happening, but more in a democratic way. Even the Professor who is supposed to be leading the class to learn might be learning from his students. Leading in the contrary case of Prof. Ferrero is more of a “Machiavellian” where the teacher is traditional, imposes his ideas on his students, and expects them to do what they are supposed to do. In this case, students “get to do” what they are supposed to do out of fear of failing the grade, not as a result of critical thinking to understand the material. However, in Professor Price’s case, leading is a combination of guidance and teacher/leader-centered. He imposes his knowledge on his students and asks them to apply it to a project. “Getting to do” in this sense is giving the students limited opportunities to create something.

Therefore, all three cases show a kind of leadership. Leadership can have positive and negative connotations depending on the context. The Arab Spring is a result of “getting someone to do something” out of fear rather than out of understanding and opportunities. It is forceful doing and believing, and the followers do not have better examples to look at. In other words, it is dictatorship coming from only one person who imposes his thoughts on others and claims that they are happy. In many other cases, “getting someone to do something” is based on guidance rather than force. In such a situation, a leader is loved rather than feared because he is guiding his followers to have their own beliefs based on the input he gives them. So which is the right way to lead? Or is there a right way? Does the borderline case provide the middle case to lead, where the followers are led by set guidelines and given freedom to act and express their perspectives? I believe that leading depends on the context, but leading with fear which is represented by the contrary case, is at the lowest level of the leading hierarchy because the leader is a one-man show.