

On Leadership

John W. Gardner
(Free Press 1990)

Since the Alliance is considering developing a John Gardner Academy for Regional Stewardship to provide opportunities for sessions for regional teams, it seems time to review one of John Gardner's classic books *On Leadership*, originally published in 1990. It summarizes a lifetime of scholarship and public service as President of the Carnegie Corporation, Secretary of HEW, Chairman of the Independent Sector co-founder of Common Cause and Chair of the National Civic League. John Gardner has been an advisor to the Alliance from its founding and wrote the foreword in our first monograph that help us define regional stewardship.

John Gardner is an optimist. He believes in people and he is committed to the principle of self-renewal. It is also clear from this book that he thinks that everyone can be a leader.

The development of leaders is possible on a scale far beyond anything we have ever attempted. . . . Many dismiss the subject with the confident assertion that 'leaders are born not made'. Nonsense! Most of what leaders have that enables them to lead is learned. Leadership is not a mysterious activity. It is possible to describe the tasks that leaders perform. And the capacity to perform those tasks is widely distributed in the population. . . . We have barely scratched the surface in our efforts toward leadership development.

In this practical book John Gardner offers his hands on advice for type of leadership required for the increasingly complex challenges that regional stewards face today. He outlines how strategic leaders distinguish themselves in at least six major respects.

1. They think longer term
2. They grasp relationships to the larger realities
3. They reach and influence constituencies beyond their jurisdiction, beyond boundaries
4. They put heavy emphasis on the intangibles of vision, values, and motivation
5. They have political skill to cope with conflicting requirements of multiple constituencies
6. They think in terms of renewal.

Gardner goes on to outline in detail the key tasks of leadership:

- Envisioning goals
- Affirming values
- Motivating people

- Managing
- Achieving workable unity
- Explaining
- Serving as a symbol
- Representing the group
- Renewing.

Beyond these specific leadership attributes and tasks which are described in each of the chapters of this well written book, there are two other features that stand out: the moral dimension of leadership and the importance of releasing human possibilities. At the core of John Gardner's view of leadership is the idea of responsibility. In fact, in he has spoken and written about regional stewards as the "responsibles". Here is what he has to say on what characterizes morally responsible leaders

1. *The Release of Human Possibilities*: "There are great untapped reservoirs of human energy an capacity awaiting leaders who can tap them and societies that deserve them"
2. *Shared Values and Beliefs*: " Societies need shared values and beliefs. Among the fundamental values in our society are justice, liberty, equality of opportunity and dignity of the individual.... We must hope for leaders that will help us keep alive defend these fundamental values"
3. Individual Initiative and Responsibility " Given our ideals of individual responsibility, our leaders have obligations to encourage the active involvement of constituents or followers in pursuit of group goals"

In re-reading *On Leadership* in light of the many lesson learned on regional stewardship through the Alliance over the last two years as well as the events of September 11, 2001, I was struck by the following:

In time of crisis, individuals discover unsuspected strengths and a capacity for bravery, endurance, generosity and locality beyond expectations. An increase in the incidence of crises would not be welcome, but one must not dismiss the thought of those hidden capabilities. In all of us there are undiscovered gifts, untested strengths.

Thank you John Gardner for your faith in us.