



A Letter to  
**HOOSIERS**

A Call to Transform Indiana

**STEVE STOUGHTON**

Published & distributed by:  
Stoughton Group  
[www.stoughtongroup.com](http://www.stoughtongroup.com)

in association with  
IBJ Custom Publishing  
Indianapolis, IN  
[www.ibjcustompublishing.com](http://www.ibjcustompublishing.com)

Copyright 2007 by Steve Stoughton

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without the express written consent of the publisher. All inquiries should be made to Steve Stoughton at [www.stoughtongroup.com](http://www.stoughtongroup.com).

ISBN 978-0-9776675-5-0

First Edition

Printed in the United States of America

# *What is Leadership?*

*According to James McGregor Burns, author of Transforming Leadership*

Transforming Leadership:

Can produce social change that will satisfy authentic needs

Becomes moral in that it raises the level of human contact and ethical aspiration of both leaders and led and thus it has a transforming effect on both

*According to John Gardner, founder of Common Cause*

Leaders:

Think long term

Look beyond their institution at external conditions

Put a heavy emphasis on vision, values, and motivation

Reach and influence beyond their immediate jurisdiction

Have political skills to cope with conflicts

Think in terms of renewal

*According to Robert Greenleaf, creator of the concept of servant leadership*

Servant Leaders:

Go out ahead to show the way

Are servants first, then leaders

# *Acknowledgments*

There are five individuals who have significantly contributed to the direction of my journey as well as the ideas expressed in these pages. Although their names do not appear as often on these pages as their influence would indicate, their effect was considerable as they walked and talked with me along the paths of my life that are expressed in the following chapters.

On the last evening of a vacation several years ago in Florida my wife suggested that I write about my life's vocation—my aspiration to rebuild our communities by encouraging transformational leadership. **Edy** is my wife, partner, friend, and co-worker in this vocation. Each of us has different talents and callings, but our vision is much the same. Edy's contribution to my writing is immeasurable in terms of creative editing.

Over twenty seven years ago, **Don Schutt**, a chaplain and director of a pastoral renewal program, and I made an agreement in the name of Jesus to try to make our world a better place. We have met at least weekly ever since to exchange ideas, to challenge our growing and evolving theology, and to support and encourage one another in our work. The common thread throughout has been a commitment to reach an agreement on the opportunities as well as the problems that have presented themselves in our respective lives.

My brother, **Tom** and I started a business in the mid 1980s to work with leaders who wanted to positively change their organization and our overall culture through education and the media. We talked about being an issues advocacy company as a way to work with leaders who were change agents. Tom's steady hands, combined with his creative strategies in dealing with complex problems, have helped us find solutions to many of the crises in the public sphere. Tom has been a motivational partner and an integral part of the projects mentioned.

**Doug Coe**, head of a worldwide spiritual leadership movement, has been challenging me for twenty-eight years to search for and encourage godly men and women to work for our communities. I am eternally grateful for Doug's challenge, which provided me with a vision for my life's work. His world vision showed me the importance of staying in my state and working to improve it. He also helped me focus on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, which have been the cornerstone of my work.

When **Dr. Robert Lynn** was in Indianapolis working with Lilly

Endowment in the 1980s, he hosted Don Schutt and me for lunch on a monthly basis. Through our continuing dialogue, Bob gave me an invaluable basic layman's theological education. Along with this religious understanding, Bob's guidance and insight helped me grasp the significance of my journey. He helped me take the next practical steps when the way was not clear to me.

Without these five people, and many other unnamed supporters throughout the years, my life would not have taken the paths I have been privileged to pursue. At every turn a key person prompted or enabled me to proceed so that I could come to this place and write these thoughts expressing my deep concerns for our nation and my vision for our future.

# *Letter to the Rulers of the People*

## ***To all Leaders and Representatives of the People***

*We, the followers of Francis of Assisi and your coworkers in struggling for a better society, send greetings and peace and this message.*

*Keep a clear eye toward life's end. Do not forget your purpose and destiny as God's creature. What you are in his sight is what you are and nothing more. Do not let worldly cares and anxieties or the pressures of office blot out the divine life within you or the voice of God's Spirit guiding you in your great task of leading humanity to wholeness. If you open yourself to God and his plan printed deeply in your heart, God will open himself to you.*

*Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received – fading symbols of honor, trappings of power – but only what you have given: a full heart enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.*

*Embrace the God of us all and his Word wherever it surfaces. Imitate his preference for the poor and the powerless. Enter into his plan of liberating all peoples from everything that oppresses them and obstructs their development as human beings. Do not grow tired of working for peace among all people.*

*Help remove unjust social structures and patterns of exploitation. Uphold the rights and dignity of the human person. Foster the creation of a society where human life is cherished and where all peoples of the planet can enjoy its gifts, which God created for all, in a spirit of love and justice and equality.*

*one*

The “Naked” Public Square

## The Crisis in America

America today is essentially leaderless and directionless. Looking at the world primarily through my Hoosier experiences, I have found this is not only true in my state, but also at the national level and in other states and communities. Because of the lack of sustained transformative leadership, we have no compelling vision as a people, and without an inclusive vision, we cannot come together to work for the common good.

The way a culture regards its children is a key indicator of its priorities. “It takes a village to raise a child” is a familiar phrase derived from an African proverb. Yet, not every village raises healthy children. Outside the home, children are treated casually with little heart-driven care. I don’t hear the public or its leaders calling for loving caregivers; compassionate adult connections with young people; or accessible, healthy lifestyles. Communities must have a common vision of how to love, provide for, nurture, and teach their children—one supported by a cadre of leaders who inspire and share that purpose. There is a void of real leadership in regard to children and other social injustices: observe elected officeholders who make a show of caring for their communities, but in reality, make expedient decisions that reward their supporters and help themselves move up the political ladder to higher positions. They try to find a parade to get in front of so it appears they are leaders. They use public opinion surveys to discover what, where, who, and how to make their next image-enhancing move. These pretenders remind me of the story of the emperor who does not have on clothes, but “spins” it so people believe, or say they believe, that he is dressed in splendor. Our “emperors” have convinced their constituents that they have clothed themselves with successful policies, programs, and solutions to solve our problems. It is a lie. These self-proclaimed leaders rely on the modern art of spinning political propaganda to feign leadership. In truth, they are not tackling head-on, damn-the-risk, human injustices such as our callous treatment of children, the poor, the mentally ill, the unemployed and underemployed, the economy, the environment, public education, or healthcare.

I am not aware of many state and local government officials during the past twenty years who had a clear vision about the common good that they

could articulate; a creative solution to solve our many far-reaching problems; or the courage or sustainability to commit to lead until the problems were solved. One leader cannot do it alone. I have been fortunate to come to know some leaders who understand the difference. Their faith was strong and yet personal. They didn't claim that their beliefs were "God's only way." They were tolerant and discerning and they helped me understand the essence of the need for a circle of dedicated leaders. They were committed to the public good. They helped me define what I mean by transformative leaders: visionary, creative, courageous, and committed to the common good.

What will it take to reverse this decline in the public arena? What are the qualities of authentic leadership?

In the following pages I will explore questions of where transformational leadership comes from, why it is so crucially important, and how we can nurture its development. I will also take a serious look at the need for leaders with vision and purpose if we are to return to a just and compassionate society. Vision need not be a vague concept. A key to having vision is both prophetic and pragmatic - it is basically leaders guiding their followers. As Dr. Robert Lynn suggests, this metaphor involves listening as well as seeing.

I begin by exploring this leadership void that currently exists in America today. First, I want to make a distinction between a leader and a manager. Many public officials are good managers who make the current system perform well but are adrift if circumstances change the public paradigm. At issue is the current system: it is neither solving today's challenges nor preparing for our future needs. Transformational leaders will not accept dysfunctional and broken systems as "the way things are." They will not quit until the systems work for everyone's benefit.

## **The Public Arena Narrowly Redefined**

What do I mean by the term "public square"? It is not one specific place. "Public" stands for corporate, civic, community, and government. The public square symbolizes the places and spaces where public issues are addressed and policies are conceived, discussed, debated, and decided. The public square may simultaneously be the local newspaper's front and editorial pages; the local television and radio public air waves; the internet blogs and chat rooms; the mayor's and governor's offices; the city council; the state legislature; the judicial chambers; and wherever people vote and gather to discuss, debate, march, strike, or protest public issues.

Richard John Neuhaus wrote a book, published in 1984, *The Naked Public Square*. I believe these words provide an accurate description of the current crisis in leadership. Why do I call the public squares of my city, state, and nation “naked?” Because I have both seen and experienced a growing void of government, corporate, and civic leadership and an absence of citizen participation, including voting, in the public process. As a consequence of this void and absence of participation, policies and action plans have not been developed to focus on the ideals of the common good and human justice where the welfare of *all* of our citizens is addressed.

I realized early that my focus was on “public” leadership. But I believe that we define public leadership too narrowly. My definition of public leadership is corporate, civic and government leadership in the public square. Today “public” has a more restrictive definition. Parker Palmer, in his book *The Company of Strangers*, was quoted in the early 1980s as saying that in recent years the meaning of the word “public” has become limited to “of or pertaining to a government,” whereas historically philanthropists, businessmen and civic activists involved in leading their community, would all be considered public leaders. Now the concept of leadership seems to be limited to elected officials.

## **The Exodus of Public Leaders**

I began to observe the disturbing trend of public leaders becoming caretakers 20 years ago. Caretakers, in contrast to leaders, occupy a leadership position, but instead of using their position for the good of the people, their goal is to protect their jobs. They are absorbed in their own personal interests and they have little public integrity.

Transformative public leaders began disappearing in the 1980s and they have not been replaced. We have suffered significant setbacks from not having enough visionary, creative, courageous, and committed public servants. The result of this tragic loss in my city and state – and I would include our nation – is that we have lost our moral compass, lost thousands of high-paying jobs, lost college graduates who have left places like Indiana for more hopeful career openings elsewhere, and we have lost our way. We are perishing, as the Bible says, because we have no genuine compelling vision. We live in a time of crisis—a leadership crisis. We desperately need direction and guidance.

Today most state legislators (80 percent) in Indiana are over 46 years old and are entrenched bureaucrats who have been in the legislature for decades. Rather than encouraging new ideas and fresh solutions by mentoring,

nurturing and apprenticing young leaders to take their places, they have selfishly clung to their positions, redistricting themselves so new legislators cannot emerge. In the 2004 election only 20 out of 100 seats in the House of Representatives were being contested. I left the Indiana Legislature in 1982. Every legislator in a leadership position in 2004 was there when I departed twenty-five years before. Most of them have been there for thirty years. These custodians of government constitute three problems. First, most are not leaders. Second, they have prevented us from experiencing real leadership by hanging on to their offices. Third, they are not teaching and preparing future leaders to replace them. Mentoring is not in their vocabulary. One reason they are not mentoring may be that they have no new ideas to teach.

The same phenomenon has occurred in our nation's Capital. Over 90 percent of the Congressional House seats are "safe." This means that either the Republican or Democratic Party has an almost guaranteed 55 percent margin of winning in over 435 Districts. Therefore, because there is no need for compromise or moderation on the part of these candidates (as they only need to appeal to their own party loyalists), the result is that the winners represent the most extreme views of their parties. This is exacerbated by the fact that those in power have seen to it that the electoral boundaries are drawn to accommodate those party extremists. The moderates of both parties have been eliminated - so the political and religious centers have both disappeared.

## The Second Exodus: The Citizens

The public square is also vacant of citizens willing to participate in civic activism such as voting and working to help political candidates, participating in the legislative process, volunteering at community centers and community projects, or tutoring struggling students in after-school programs. The reason is that we, the people, need leaders to guide us. People, like sheep, will wander around aimlessly unless they have a shepherd to follow. Since there are so few leaders in the public square, the citizens do not congregate there. They can be found, instead, working longer hours for lower wages or looking for better paying jobs, shopping, or watching TV. They have become apathetic. As Robert Putnam who authored *Bowling Alone* asserts, citizens lost interest years ago after their leaders disappeared. They believe that involvement in the public arena is futile because their leaders have lost their vision.

In the 2002 Indiana state legislative election, the area with the highest voter turnout was only 42 percent of the eligible voters. The district with the

lowest voter turnout had an abysmal 12 percent. According to Robert Putnam, voter turnout nationwide is on a similar downward spiral. In 1960, 62.8 percent of voters went to the polls. In 1998 there was a 48 percent voter turnout. Voter apathy is significantly greater in non-presidential elections.

Putnam makes the case that cynicism has been a major cause of the abdication of the public square. The “baby boomers” born between 1946 and 1964 disengaged from politics and government, and did not develop an alternative political direction. Bob Greenleaf wrote over 25 years ago that this particular generation is anti-leadership. It is hard to test Greenleaf’s theory due to the lack of leadership that would inspire participation. Is it cynicism, insipid leadership, or a combination of both? Whatever the cause, like the rest of the nation, my city and state have a large group of citizens, the “Boomers,” who so far will neither follow leaders nor step up to serve as leaders. Are there ways to engage this generation? Maybe they are waiting for genuine transformative leaders who will inspire them to help solve our nation’s biggest issues including the environment and healthcare or the horrible problem of world hunger.

### **What Remains? Self-Serving Public Policy**

Public policies for the good of everyone emerge from a combination of strong transforming leadership and public interaction. Debates and competitive election campaigns in which there is dialogue about issues of importance are the bedrock of participatory democracy. This isn’t happening today in an environment dominated by self-seeking caretakers and an apathetic citizenry. Our policies in the form of executive orders, ordinances, laws, and judicial decisions are decided in vacant public places and spaces that favor the well-connected self-interests of financial supporters of those office holders who are in power. Although this has always been true to a certain extent, it is now the rule instead of the exception. Current winners in my city and state—all able to pay lobbyists to get what they want—are law firms, highway and school engineers, architects, contractors, gambling interests, and business owners who are friends and supporters of the current long-reigning officials. State parks, children, the mentally ill, the poor, the elderly, and the environment are among the many losers. Thirty percent of the state’s rivers, streams, and lakes are too polluted to fish or swim in (Indiana Department of Natural Resources, 2006). Our air, water, and land are all affected and global warming is a threat to our existence. Yet, our rulers often seem strangely oblivious to these large issues. In contrast to the Founding Fathers’ ideas that

the major responsibility of government was to protect the helpless, the pattern seems to be that those who cannot vote as part of a vocal bloc or who cannot contribute large sums of money are powerless and their interests are not considered in public policies. Now public officials protect their own interests. For example, there are legislative leaders in Indiana who are paid large salaries by a state university so they can ostensibly lobby for its interests and preferment. This is unethical. It does not matter what person or party is in power if there is not a vibrant electorate to watch and question those in power. The result of the naked public square is that today we have policies, laws, and budgeted tax dollars that disregard the needs of our citizens. Legislation is passed at the state and federal levels with little thought and in many cases there is virtually no time for discussion or debate. Public interaction is increasingly difficult because we have become a polarized, individually focused society. We have hundreds of television and radio choices that continually mold and reinforce our special interests and prejudice rather than being exposed to different views.

### **What is the Solution?**

A starting point is to identify how past leaders have been developed. Learning from our elders is an age-old practice that is worthy of consideration. Mentoring provides the opportunity to pass on time-honored ethics and moral codes. For example, one of my first ethical lessons as a freshman State Representative was the expectation to avoid a conflict of interest between one's job and one's duties as a public servant. In contrast, a member of the city-county council in Indianapolis recently justified her tie-breaking vote by stating she voted for what was best for her job. Her explanation was that she had been a lawmaker for two years, but she had held her job for ten years, so it seemed obvious to her that her job demanded greater loyalty. The public trust of those who expected her to represent issues important to them was not her guiding principle. This newly elected councilwoman exemplifies the current officials who have not been instructed on the basic ethical responsibility of being an elected representative of the people. This is a function mentors performed in the past.