

# Leadership lessons from English literature

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## —Abstract—

Great leaders like Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi who struggled to get equal rights, served the helpless people or inspired freedom movements always came out to the world when we needed them badly. But there hardly had been leaders to guide us managing ourselves better and enhance our well-being. We got leaders when we were in a time of great confusion and suffering, but illuminative pioneer is scarce. This research aimed at bringing the inspiring command and guidance out of everyone to help those around them. We live in a time where the negativity of the outside world terrifies us, where the thought of restraining ourselves from other people's problems is implanted in our minds from the early childhood. Studying literature enlightens us, gives us insight and teaches us how to use that knowledge to solve problems in our own lives and help others to do that who cannot do it themselves. The objective of this study is to investigate and register the strategies to both develop and evaluate leadership skills. This paper presents a critical study of literature and fictional characters and suggests directions for future leaders.

*Key Words:* Literature review, instructions on life, influence of literature, leadership guide, people management.

# **Introduction**

Literature is important for individual character building as it is the largest collective reference of information and one of the most direct ways of stimulating the imagination of one's mind. Reading more than one narrative of a specific topic allows one to compare and contrast the topic from different point of views which enable one to have a more complete understanding of the topic. This trait helps shaping one's mind to make critical decisions about the types of individuals they want to be in the future.

## **Importance of studying literature in leadership**

1. Literature expands our horizons. Reading a piece of literature and knowing someone's life experience through the eyes of other people, one can understand things through a fictional world. A leader must have the quality to see clearer than others because when he sits on a perch, people expect him to see and do something that they cannot see or do themselves.
2. Historical characters allow a leader to learn about past leaders. Through literature, he gets to know a situation that he perhaps has never seen or heard before. He learns from their mistakes and it helps him have a perspective of his own. He gets to know himself better and passively moulds his role as a leader without even realizing.
3. Visual imagery offers less room for imagination, but studying allows one to take such an inventory that it illustrates how it would feel to live through famous battles, famines and both the times of prosperity and depression. This enables a leader to gain empathy, which is an essential part of the leadership as without empathy he cannot inspire people to follow him and elicit loyalty.
4. People do not always announce themselves explicitly, but as a leader one has to know how the followers feel and how it impacts their perception. Otherwise, he can be a boss whom people fear and obey, but not a leader whom they follow and trust. While reading stories and the characters one

adept at dissecting the codes and extract the details from them, which makes him understand other people better in actual life. This is momentous as one cannot lead his followers if he does not understand them.

5. Reading regularly chapter after chapter helps one's concentration and attention span by improving brain's connectivity. Literature helps a leader to focus more effectively on his followers and manage organizations.

## **Lessons and instructions from literature**

Among so many fictional characters, Gandalf the Grey from *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1968) is one of the most celebrated and popular leaders as he depicts the true nature of leadership.

When the head of the White Council, Saruman delivers Gandalf the news of the missing ring, Gandalf refuses to believe Saruman blindly and sets out on a quest to seek out the truth himself. Knowing that the fate of the world depends on the ring, he begins his journey to understand the authentic power of the ring. He has done his research before making a decision and building his own fellowship. Similarly a leader must research inside out before building and leading his team. Without proper knowledge of his work, he is to surely fail as a leader.

Gandalf does not hold himself back from taking up all the risk or doing all the hard work. He endures hardship and guides them in every way possible. He may be on top of the hierarchy, but he still considers himself as part of the team. This is an important trait for a leader as a leader of a team binds the whole team together and each member is connected to him directly.

Being wise does not stop Gandalf from seeking help, even after gathering all the information on the ring he can, he asks every stakeholder such as elves, dwarves, men and hobbits, to share their thoughts on the ring and he let them know that he is open for suggestions. The head of the hierarchy does not distance himself from the others and he discusses the problem with everyone and finds the best solution that

is to destroy the ring in the fires of Mount Doom in the land of Mordor. A leader should be someone who is easy to find and communicate, who stays with his team and grows together.

Gandalf treats each member of the team equally whether he is experienced or not, whether he is just a hobbit or an elf. He gives them all equally important tasks, delegate responsibility and only rebukes the hobbits so that they can improve themselves. A leader knows every member of the team and makes sure all of them are contributing equal to the greater good of the team. For a true leader there is no room for the disparity. Because of this trait, the fellowship continues to fight even in Gandalf's absence as they know that is what he would have wanted. The exemplary wizard loves all and so he is respected by all.

Unlike Tolkien's mythology, the habitual world is fractured in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (George R R Martin, 1996-present). This is a series of books that has a specific structure with many plotlines slowly developed in the narrative and each chapter representing someone's perspective. Therefore, one can observe a situation with the eyes of different characters from their point of views and learn their tactics to lead their own team. In Tolkien, one can learn several traits of an ideal leader from one character, whereas in Martin, they learn different sides of a single characteristic which helps to establish the indispensable qualities of an efficient leader.

From the very first chapter, Lord Eddard Stark personifies the leading and managing skills in every possible way, which can be followed by the political leaders even in this generation. He knows he must be accountable and must embody the values and beliefs, he wants others to follow. He is kind and just, but he is also strict and strong. He helps his people and so everyone respects him, but he also punishes people who betray and passes death sentence. According to him, "The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword. If you would take a man's life, you owe it to him to look into his eyes and hear his final words. And if you cannot bear to do that, then perhaps the man does not deserve to die" (Martin, 2012, p. 28). He is someone who always means what he says and does what he means and that is the reason of being a role model in all aspects of his people. Putting the need of the people before his own, he shows them the way to do everything in an ethical and correct way and inspires greatness in them. He is so honourable that even five

books after he is beheaded, the mere mention of his name inspires the north to stand beside his family. Everyone remembers his teaching that when the snows fall and the white winds blow, the lone wolf dies but the pack survives.

Daenerys Targaryen is another character from *A Song of Ice and Fire* (George R R Martin, 1996-present) that shows leadership and managerial skills in a larger scale. At first she is introduced as someone who just has a name and a noble title. With no power she is sold to her husband, but she accepts her fate and learns to please her husband with what she has and slowly gains his favour and affection. She is given the title 'Khaleesi' meaning queen, which she embraces with its savageness. When she is insulted she watches her brother die without flinching, when it is time to save her husband, she sacrifices her unborn child, when it is needed, she abandons her soft side. She is a risk taker from whom the business and economic leaders of this generation can learn a lot. She is a leader who is strong, confident and strict with a vision to free the world from the chains. She is the mother of dragons who rises from the ashes who never gives up to make her dreams come true.

Everyone wants their leaders to be like Jon Snow, who is human like the rest of the world, making mistakes in his life and learns from them. His failures and mistakes are what push him to grow so much. For someone who was born with the name 'Snow', he had no rights and would have no title. He used to be ashamed of his status and did not think he deserved better than that or could rise above the given state. He was taught by Tyrion that "Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armour yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you" (Martin, 2012, p. 60). Eventually he turns his mistakes into opportunities and becomes the 'King in the North'. This is not a result of his birthright. He never wants to be a king, but the people wants to follow him. Throughout Jon's entire life, all he ever thinks of doing is protecting the people in the north. He depicts "I am the sword in the darkness. I am the watcher on the walls. I am the fire that burns against the cold, the light that brings the dawn, the horn that wakes the sleepers, the shield that guards the realms of men" (Martin, 2011, p. 817). His core values of trust and courage leads him on a righteous path and ultimately to become a king. He makes every decision with the best intentions for his people even if they do not see it themselves. For this, when he tries to make peace with the wildlings and he believes that just because they are born on the

wrong side of the wall, does not make them monsters. For this he is stabbed and killed by his men. Leaders are forced to make tough decisions every day, which will eventually make the future of the company or nation. When Jon comes back, he remains humble and stays with his code of honour. He focuses on the alliances of his people understanding that he cannot win the war alone. To make his alliance stronger, he aligns with the wildlings and join forces with Daenerys. He knows very well that he cannot defend the north if only half the population is fighting. Like him, business leaders often build partnerships to solve their problems because there is power in unity.

Tyrion Lannister, the dwarf teaches everyone that even if you are not in a position to be able to manage or guide numerous people, still you can be a leader in your own life helping those around you. He is wise and he makes his knowledge with his power. “Well, my legs may be too small for my body, but my head is too large, although I prefer to think it is just large enough for my mind. I have a realistic grasp of my own strengths and weaknesses. My mind is my weapon. My brother has his sword, King Robert has his warhammer, and I have my mind... and a mind needs books as a sword needs a whetstone, if it is to keep its edge.” Tyrion tapped the leather cover of the book. “That’s why I read so much, Jon Snow” (Martin, 2012, p. 114). He proves that even if he has a small stature, he is capable of ruling behind the scene and even leading the leaders. He is appointed as the advisor to Daenerys in spite of being born in a rival family. He also serves as the hand of the king for a brief period because of his knowledge of history and politics. He comes from one of the wealthiest families and he knows money plays an important role. He utilizes this wit correctly when serving for the king. He is humiliated and deceived by his own family for being born that way, but he learns to embrace that and spreads his knowledge. “Don’t call me Lord Snow.” The dwarf lifted an eyebrow. “Would you rather be called the Imp? Let them see that their words can cut you and you’ll never be free of the mockery. If they want to give you a name take it make it your own. Then they can’t hurt you with it anymore” (Martin, 2012, p. 165). His character should inspire people to discover their strengths and use them wisely in life to reach the top in their lives. Tyrion is driven by his only strength, the only thing he is good at and he never stops to develop his skill.

Elizabeth Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) is another spectacular character to learn from. She is one of the most strong and popular female characters

of all time because of her wit and stunning personality. In a male dominating time, she is shown as an exception who is well read and quick-witted with a sharp tongue. She is the most intelligent and independent among the Bennett sisters. In the novel she overcomes all the obstacles, including her own inner conflicts to be united with her true love Darcy. Being different from the rest of the antagonising and snobbish ladies of her time, Elizabeth almost always has to navigate the familial and social turmoil and cope with the situation on her own in every occasion. But she never becomes bitter when dealing with others. She takes care of everyone around her, specially her sisters. Although her initial prejudice against Darcy leads her to make the mistake of rejecting his proposal for marriage, it is accepted as a good decision to the readers because Darcy makes a proud comment about her social inferiority to him. Rejecting Darcy even after being attracted to him and his status is considered as an act of self respect for Elizabeth's part that is scarce in her time. Feminists even in this era can learn a lot from the character who is both sensitive and sensible.

One can learn numerous lessons from the cunning and quirky character of Sherlock Holmes about business management and leadership. He is the best detective of all time because of his experiments and never-ending thirst for knowledge. What makes Sherlock always able to find the truth is that he never overlooks any probabilities no matter how unimportant and petty it seems. As a business leader, one has to have these two abilities. He has to know everything he possibly can because people will always look up to him for answers when they cannot find it themselves. When finding a solution one has to make sure he is not missing any single probable solution. He has to take every outcome into his account and choose the best from them. He has to know the right questions to ask and there can be more than one way to solve a problem. Sherlock never quits learning "...but it is better to learn wisdom late than never to learn it at all." (Doyle, 1892, p. 146). Another great thing to learn from him is that his love for challenges, he does not take up cases that are easy which is boring to him. "There is nothing more stimulating than a case where everything goes against you" (Doyle, 2013, p. 526). Sherlock never gives his opinions before studying the case completely even though he solves them almost at first glance. He collects data from everyone related to the case just like a leader should do before taking a major decision. The courage to take the hardest job, be good at them and overcoming any obstacles that come along the way is something that makes one a good leader whom others want to follow deliberately.

In *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719), the protagonist's life is filled with too many ups and downs. Ignoring his family's advice, he leaves his comfortable house and goes to the sea. There he is nearly killed, but sustains, goes to Guinea, gets rich, sails again, gets captured by pirates and is sold into slavery, escapes and goes to Brazil, acquires wealth, sails again and gets lost in the Caribbean. He is the sole surviving man in the storm and washes up onto shore where he lives in an uninhabited island all by himself for twenty eight years. These experiences affect his personal growth as an individual and a leader. All this time, never once he decides to go back to his house. He sticks to his decision to follow his heart. Every time he faces dilemma, he moves forward with more courage and confidence. He keeps facing his own fears and in the end he comes to realize that fear of danger is more terrifying than the danger itself. His practical measures to survive make him able to establish a life on the desolated place. He salvages whatever he can, keeps a journal to investigate his progress, makes plans for survival, plants crops, builds shelter, keeps pets and even finds a way out to know the day of the year. He thinks himself as the king of the island and when he encounters savage cannibals on his island, he kills them, frees the captives and takes them under his command. Even though he chooses the form of dictatorship, he shows empathy. This depicts that a ruler who believes in dictatorship can also be caring and loving to those he has power over, if he is a ruler with all the abilities a good ruler should have. He feels dominance over everyone and takes credit for everything but he also takes responsibility. He thinks himself a religious teacher and makes others follow his religious beliefs and values. "I was greatly delighted with him and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper and useful" (Defoe, 1719, p. 165). He guides and transforms the captive from a savage cannibal to an obedient and loyal servant. His spirit and adaptability is a paradigm for the leaders.

The feminist icon and brilliant witch, Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-2007) is one the most intelligent and brightest leader in fiction world. She is the only person other than Harry and Dumbledore, who has the guts to call Voldemort by his name. She does that for the first time in public with a trembling voice because she knows that if others can see her being courageous after pushing aside her fear, they will be inspired to do the same. She does not have to make others to follow her lead, she sets an example by doing what she wants others to do. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003), when the



necessity arises, she convinces Harry to build Dumbledore's Army to fight against the dark lord. She has friends in Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw, so she uses her connections to other houses to initiate a secret class taught defence against dark magic by Harry. She takes responsibility of her generation boldly. With proper knowledge and planning she builds power with others not over them as she knows she cannot do this alone or with just two of her best friends. Being a muggle-born does not stop her from reading books about spells, potions, mysterious creatures, magic and its history, gaining knowledge and spreading them to others. Whenever there is injustice, she speaks loudly against it and she never gets intimidated asking the authorities the right questions. In *Harry Potter and the goblet of fire* (Rowling, 2000) she fights for the freedom of the house elves even if they are not willing to fight themselves because she thinks that it is the right thing to do. She builds an organization called S.P.E.W standing for the Society for the Promotion of the Elfish Welfare. She is a nerd and peaceful, but when a pure-blood boy Draco, from higher class makes fun of her friend, she does not hesitate to punch him in the face. Her confidence and strategic planning is something everybody can take lessons from.

Everything does not always go according to plannings and when that happens, people look up to the leading person to guide them even if he is in the same dilemma as they are. In this turned and twisted position when things do not happen as expected, the leader has to improvise like Indiana Jones. *The Raiders of the Lost Arc* (Black, 1981) has imprinted the improvising ability of the courageous Indiana Jones. His might to embrace change and accept uncertainty should be adapted by the leaders. He takes a leap of faith in improvising every time his plan goes awry, which proves he is an adventurous and quick-witted person. Before starting a new quest, he does his homework and takes calculated risk to have a favourable outcome. The business leaders should follow this trait before starting a new business or launching a new product. They have to take risk many times in order to grow their business, but they cannot afford to be unstable and take unreliable risks. It is one thing to risk everything one has worked so hard to establish, but as a business leader, he cannot be responsible for making so many people's lives miserable. They rely on him and it is a great responsibility. He should keep his target audience in mind while researching and making the critical calls. If his business is successful, he gets the credit, similarly if it fails, he has to take the accountability. Jones is not perfect, even he has flaws like his fear of snakes. But it does not stop him from climbing down the Well of the Souls. He even fights the

Nazis bravely. He comes out of his comfort zone whenever needed and continues to seek new experiences. One cannot be perfect everyday, but with enough courage and wit he can surely overcome any obstacles that life puts in his way.

After analysing the above characters, one should aim to have a balance of the each to be an efficient and never to be forgotten leader.

## **Discussion**

Leaders can be seen in many forms in this world- military leaders, political leaders, religious leaders, economical or business leaders. Proper leadership instructions are important for every kind of them. The only global mechanism is economy and it bridges all the others. This means that economical leaders can cross the boundaries and they are most likely to bring the silent revolution in this planet. Leadership lessons are important for them like it is for the social leaders so they can impact many people positively.

Very few people in the world like to go to work and genuinely love their jobs because the leaders fail to motivate them and provide them with the environment that they want to work in. There is a huge scope of improvement in here for the leaders who actually want to lead his people toward prosperity and not just be a boss, literature can teach this to leaders. Doing a job unwillingly creates stress, but loving something one does, forms passion. If the leader creates pressure on them, they get the feeling that he does not care for the employees so when the situation arises, they are unwilling to make any sacrifices for him too. Eventually they lose faith in him and this often leads to failure. The company is bound to thrive if the employees are passionate about what they do.

The role played by social leader is also indefinable. People beneath him always look up to him for help if they are in crisis. They find hope in him in their times of depression. Problems appear in everyone's life, including the leader. He has to solve his own problems and then others. He has to be able to do what other people cannot, this is efficiency. Literature tells us this is about with how much less, how much

more one can do. By making one focused, driven and empathetic, reading helps one to become a good leader.

The leader in the military takes life and death decisions. His fellow members follow him and fight side by side. He is responsible for the defence of the nation to a great extent and even for the death of his subordinates. He cannot compromise on his lessons in morale, proficiency and discipline. On the other hand, religious leader shapes people's social values and promotes responsibility. He gives them a sense of belonging to the community where they can get social support and find meaning and purpose of their lives. He is the most privileged with the power of influencing people's attitude, behaviours and practices.

Some people are born with leadership qualities in them and sometimes having an outgoing and emerging personality can help them to be comfortable around people and managing others. This allows them to take charge and be able to guide everyone in a new unexpected situation. However, all kinds of leaders stated above need to develop their skills. Over time they have to improve themselves with dedication and self training. Studying literature is essential for this even if they already are leaders in their fields. There is a difference between being a leader and being good at it.

## **Conclusion**

The critical reading and thinking have a variety of applications which cannot be calculated. It influences our thoughts and actions passively when we pay attention to the nature of the characters, to how those stories are narrated and how they are interpreted by others. We live in an age of competition and we need skills to survive in here because antagonism comes even to the easiest and most natural lifestyle where those skills can help us outlive the struggle. Studying literature makes us mentally matured and motivated. It teaches us to respect other's opinions and values. Giving us perspectives, we gain empathy, which grants us to forgive them when they make mistakes and give them another chance in life. This is important for leaders so that they can harness everyone's best because we are capable of more than we think we are, all we need is guidance. This is their responsibility to make sure that we understand our strengths and use that strength to fulfill our needs.

Sometimes reading critically allows us to imagine some possibilities much ahead of our age and we can make sense of our place in this world.

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