

ADVERSITY AND OBSTACLES IN THE SHAPING OF PROMINENT LEADERS:

A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Howard Edward Haller, Ph. D.

The Leadership Success Institute and

Gonzaga University Doctoral Dissertation in Leadership Studies

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was conducted to investigate the possible relationship or impact that adversity, obstacles, and challenges had on the shaping and development of prominent leaders. The sixteen research participants were two current U.S. Senators, a retired U.S. Army Special Forces Major General, a President of a large educational foundation who previously was chancellor of one large university and president of another, several well-known authors and motivational speakers, two Billionaires, and the Chairman and Chief Executives Officers of six major companies.

The nine primary participants, prior to becoming prominent leaders, experienced various degrees of adversity in their youth and adult lives. These difficult experiences included being a Holocaust victim and being interned in a Nazi concentration camp at age 7; seeing his mother killed in front of him at age 14; two tours of duty in U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam; losing a right arm in battle in World War II; the premature death of a parent; discrimination including racial, gender, or age; death of a business partner; going broke in businesses; take-over attempts of his business; losing an election; personal relationship strife or divorce; coping with dysfunctional and deceitful regulators; being investigated by regulatory and legislatures who had their own political agendas; extreme poverty; and other adversities.

Several themes became apparent during the interviews and in the explication of the data, including the following: (a) early adversity in their youth, while important, was not the most important or seminal event in their lives; (b) obstacles and adversity were perceived as challenges which could be turned into opportunities; (c) facing adversity and successfully overcoming obstacles was important in their progression and growth as leaders; (d) having mentors to help guide, motivate, and inspire them was very important; (e) being a Servant-Leader, serving people, and being humble were essential; (f) having a strong religious faith and or strong family ties, or both, was important and helpful; and (g) their concepts and ideas about the nature of leadership influenced their experiences heavily.

This doctor research included a peer debriefing of my research findings by five well-known leadership and overcoming adversity scholars: Dr. Ken Blanchard, Dr. John Kotter, Professor Jim Kouzes, Dr. Paul Stoltz, and Dr. Meg Wheatley.

Dr. Haller's Doctoral dissertation on Leadership and Adversity has been published:

“Leadership and Adversity: The Shaping of Prominent Leaders” [Published- Nov. 2008]

VDM Verlag Dr Müller AG & CoKG and LAP Lambert Academic Publishing AG & CoKG

ISBN 978-3-639-09841-9

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