Andrews University

School of Education

REFLECTING ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Leadership Program

by

Janine Lim

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Introduction

In this reflection paper on social responsibility, I consider leadership sources of social responsibility and my personal sources of social responsibility. I reflect on the evidence of social responsibility in my life, ways to improve my practice, and my future growth and learning.

Potential Sources of Social Responsibility

Throughout my reading on the topics and issues of social responsibility, a question kept rising to top. *What makes a person or an organization feel socially responsible?* What are some potential sources of social responsibility? What made the Andrews Leadership faculty include this in the list of competencies for leaders?

The definition of this competency is: *Leadership is accountable to others and endeavors to see that family, community, and environmental needs are met in local, and, as appropriate, in global ways.* What makes a person feel accountable to others? To family, the community, and the environment? Are there other areas to feel accountable?

As an educator, the common good is a democratic value built into my psyche. I think all educators want to make a difference in the lives of their students. Certainly this is one foundation for feeling socially responsible.

But what about the business arena? Leadership authors often focus on business. Exemplary socially conscious organizations exhibit social responsibility in different ways. Fullan (2008) referenced Firms of Endearment in his focus on change. However, these companies also exhibit excellent social responsibility. They are companies loved by

everyone who interacts with them: customers, employees, suppliers, environmentalists, and the community; and over 10 years provide much higher return on investment than the *Good to Great* companies (Sisodia et al., 2007). Firms of endearment focus on service to all five stakeholders without favoring one over another: investors, partners, society, employees and customers. Instead of focusing on just numbers, these companies focus on service to all five areas.

The focus on service with Firms of Endearment reminds me of Servant Leadership. Greenleaf suggests a new kind of leadership model, one focused on service others "including employees, customers, and community … Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; the promotion of a sense of community; and a deepening understanding of spirit in the workplace" (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 4). A focus on service certainly creates a sense of social responsibility and concern for caring for others and the community.

Another potential source of social responsibility is the concept of systems. Senge (Senge, 2006) suggests that leaders should be systems citizens, able to see the systems that we have shaped, and which shape us. Seeing systems involves seeing the patterns of interdependency, such as between the five stakeholders of a business (firms of endearment), or between globalization, climate change, and capitalism. Seeing a systems perspective invokes a sense of social responsibility, to do the right thing for society in addition to business. Fullan's (2008) sixth secret of change is that systems learn. This includes the concept that leaders "need to be aware of the global system's potential impact on their business and on others" (p. 113). Leaders need to be "aware of the world's larger systemic problems" (p. 115). The firms of endearment are not content to work their patch of earth; instead they realize their stakeholders include global society

(Fullan, 2008; Sisodia et al., 2007). Clearly an awareness of systems is critical to a leader's sense of social responsibility.

Of my reading and understanding of leadership theory, the preceding references are the main sources I found that seemed to create a sense of social responsibility or lay the foundation for it. However, my own social responsibility is much more rooted in my experience and faith. My leadership reading certainly reinforced my social responsibility, yet it began much earlier, as I will describe in the next section.

Sources of My Social Responsibility

My own sense of social responsibility is deeply rooted in my personal experience and faith. Reading and learning more deepens my sense of social responsibility and adds more weight to the rationale for caring. My responsibility strength also contributes to my sense of social responsibility (Rath & Conchie, 2008). I feel responsible for that which I am passionate about, and this includes four specific areas: nature and the environment, Adventist education, international understanding, and service to my church.

> *Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.* – Rachel Carson. (Louv, 2008)

As a child and teenager, I enjoyed many opportunities to experience nature – in my backyard, on family camping vacations, in Sabbath afternoon family walks through the woods. Birds Hill Park in Winnipeg; Hiran Minar in Shekihupura, Pakistan; the "windy guardians," trees that I named behind my grandparent's home; Mt. Rundle over Banff, Alberta; these places and more have connected me to nature and my Creator. For three years, from age 14 – 17, each summer we returned to Alberta for Pakistan for our furlough. I spent most of the time helping Grandma around the house, and taking my books to escape to the woods when I finished my chores. I named places, including The

Quiet Place, The Interfering Drawbridge, the Sanctuary, the Peaceful Picnickers. John Muir said, “There is always something deeply exciting in the sounds of the winds in the woods” (Muir, 1894). Listening to the trees, I dreamed. Listening to the trees, I sought my place in the world. Walking the road from Grandma’s house to the church, I soaked in the vast sky, knowing God’s love for me. The great expanse of awesome prairie sky inspired me. The farm gave me roots; a place to belong. The sky and the fields and the trees helped me see my “place in the larger fabric” of the earth (Louv, 2008, p. 98). Not only was a love of nature instilled early in me, my belief in God also inspired a love of creation. I believe God created the earth and gave it to humanity to care for it (Genesis 2:15). In addition, God threatens judgment on those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:18). For these reasons, and also because in nature I am inspired by the wonder of God’s love for me (Psalm 8), I feel a social responsibility to care for nature and the environment.

The second area of social responsibility for me is Adventist education. Education itself is a passion of mine, passed down through three generations of teachers, with both of my grandmothers teaching. The purpose of general education is to help children become citizens of a democratic society (Alexander & Alexander, 2009); however, the purpose of Adventist education is to prepare the child “for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come” (White, 1903, p. 14). As a product of Adventist education, I feel a responsibility to continue to give back to Adventist education. As a Christian, my concern for Christian education is founded in the biblical command to teach children God’s commands, when sitting in the house, when walking, in the evening and in the morning (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

A third area of social responsibility is my passion for bringing international experience and perspectives to students in both public and Adventist education. This passion is rooted in my experience as a missionary kid and third culture kid (Cottrell & Useem, 1999; Useem, 2008). Having lived in Pakistan for six years, attended school in Singapore for three years, and traveled to more than 20 countries during those six years of teenage years, I care more about geography and the people around the world than is typical for others. Adult third culture kids are more likely to weave an international dimension into their life and work (Cottrell & Useem, 1999). For me, this means exposing students to international experiences in as many ways possible. I want others to experience, if in a smaller way, a connection to the people and places in the rest of the world.

Finally, as a Christian, I feel compelled to answer Jesus' commands to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) and to love others through service (John 13:34-35). This social responsibility is fueled not only by my faith, but also by my experience. My pastor, teacher, missionary parents modeled giving of one's self through loving service to others. My own experience as a student missionary reinforced the conviction to serve others. Again, both my faith and my experience has instilled a sense of social responsibility.

Evidences of My Social Responsibility

In this section, I reflect on and describe some of the evidences of my social responsibility within the four areas of nature and the environment, Adventist education, international perspectives, and service to my church.

Nature

smooth green turf
cool shady breezes
blue blue skies
deep green woods
chirping birds and bugs
white fluffy clouds piled high
pure white snapdragons
    with golden hearts hidden deep
        for shimmery green hummingbirds
            to feed with long sharp beaks
green tomatoes hanging waiting
    for the blush of summer sun
        to sink deep into red sweetness
a lazy swing and a sleeping cat
rich thick fresh fruit smoothie
    reds of strawberries and
        blues of berries and
            golden red sweet dripping peaches

gratitude simmers inside me.

-poem written August 15, 2007

My care and concern for the environment has increased throughout my journey in the Leadership program. It began with the worship thoughts from *The Comforting Whirlwind* during Roundtable 2007 (McKibben, 2005). I learned that one response to an amazing creation is simply to witness the glory around us. “Luckily, of course, there are whole huge categories of activity for which reason is utterly suited and which do not also spell destruction for the rest of the ecosystem. *Witnessing* the glory around us — that is a role no other creature can play” (McKibben, 2005, p. 67). After reading, I recommitted to spending my Sabbath afternoons at Fernwood Botanical Garden, watching the new flowers grow, being silent in the spring sunshine, listening to the rustling of the leaves and the chirping of the birds. I realized again the importance of planning our annual vacataion trips to include a healthy dose of the outdoor wildness. To take time to feel the

wonder of creation and our smallness. When I was a student missionary on Arno in the Marshall Islands, I loved to walk down the beach past the village. Sitting on the beach for my morning worship, the silence was immense. The ocean stretched infinitely past the horizon. Pondering nature puts all our problems into perspective. The scene calls us to humility and joy (McKibben, 2005, p. 47). It is critical for my health, development, and well being to take time for witnessing the glory around me (Louv, 2008).

In addition to spending time in nature and worship of my Creator, I also work with my family to continue to improve our care for the environment. One of our cars is a hybrid, and we hope to invest in an environmentally friendly second car soon. We have worked hard to reduce our exposure to chemicals, and thus reduced our use of chemicals which are dumped into the environment. For example, our hand soap, shampoo, and laundry detergent are all biodegradable, natural, and eco-friendly. We have started separating out the organic trash in addition to recycling, and regularly emptying the organic trash into a compost pile. We are slowly working on replacing our home lights with low energy LED lights. We continue to monitor and modify our energy use as we learn more. My own horror at the environmental effects of oil and natural gas extraction in my beautiful home province of Alberta (Marsden, 2008) inspires me to continue to reduce, reuse, conserve, and simplify.

McKibben suggests that “the secret weapon of environmental change and of social justice must be this — living with simple elegance is more *pleasurable* than living

caught in the middle of our consumer culture" (2005, p. 68). Of the gifts of joy, home, and service, "the most unique and the most paradoxical is the ability to restrain ourselves. Conscious self-restraint belongs to no other creature, and for us it is the hardest of all tasks, both as individuals and as societies" (McKibben, 2005, p. 69). I choose restraint. I choose to be content with what I have. I choose to spend less on expensive chemical cleaning and beauty products so that I can give to others. I choose to resist and reject commercialism as often as possible. Instead, I will walk in the sunshine, the glory of God revealed in the world, and focus on His greatness and love always.

McKibben also challenged me to think about a Christian paradox. We know that the earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10); yet God created the earth and commanded us to care for it (Genesis 1:28). Some Christians think that since the earth is going to be destroyed, it doesn't matter what we do to it now. We have more important things to do; no time to think about the environment. Yet if we destroy the earth, or even greatly reduce our contact with nature, we are destroying one foundation of our faith. "The images of God's power that help us locate ourselves on an axis with the divine come largely from nature. It is no accident that many of the best-loved hymns of our faith draw on this emotional power" (McKibben, 2005, p. 62).

> When God spoke to Job he did not reveal Himself; He revealed His works. … Even the most committed doubter can often be shaken by the transcendent pleasure of sitting in a field of native flowers or standing on a wild beach. The sense of rightness, the intuition that the experience is more than the sum of its parts, is both profound and common. When such experiences begin to vanish (as the wildflowers grow less wild, and the beaches reflect our carbon emissions) their religious meaning will fade as well (McKibben, 2005, 64)

Thinking that we don't need to care for the earth because it's going to be destroyed anyway is like not washing the dishes because they are going to get dirty again. It doesn't matter if as one person we can't change the course of a materialistic society.

We can and should do our part. It doesn't matter what we know about prophecy, about the end of time. It isn't futile to care for the earth now because it will be destroyed later. We should obey God and take care of His creation because He commanded us to. Just like we obey the Ten Commandments because He said to; we should care for His creation too. Not just care for it; but take time to immerse ourselves in the natural grandeur that reminds us of our smallness and God's greatness.

As my understanding of the environment and challenges to it have grown, I have been able to change and adapt my behavior. One of the books I read was *Silent Spring*, which was one of the first voices of the environmental movement. Rachel Carson's (Carson et al., 1962) work was written as a reaction and warning on the prevalent use of chemicals and pesticides such as DDT in the 1950s. Carson, a biologist, wrote at great personal cost about the effects of chemical sprays, dusts and aerosols applied to farms, gardens, forests and homes. Many of these effects were hidden by the powerful chemical companies. Chapters in the book describe the uses of chemicals and their effects on our surface waters, underground seas, the soil, plants and grasses, birds, fish, our food, children, farm workers, pesticide workers, and reproduction. In addition, Carson described the ineffectiveness of non-selective chemicals; how parasites and insects surge in population after a treatment of chemicals. She offers alternatives to widespread overuse of non-selective chemicals, including using natural predators to control insects. PBS did a special program on her in the 1990s, and what struck me is the voice of a lone woman against powerful chemical companies. That voice was heard and is often credited for the beginning of the environmental movement.

I was interested in Carson's work because I have run into references to it throughout my study of Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (Gibson, 2000), experienced by

several family members. Often research and articles on the environment and environmental illness reference Carson's work. I wanted to get to the source; to read the first thoughts of a researcher in this area. We learned from Dr. Covrig in Roundtable summer 2007 that we should follow the roots & fruits of research. Carson's work is definitely a "root" in the environmental movement and referenced in environmental illness studies as well. From a leadership perspective, Rachel Carson is an inspiring role model. From her own biological research, she was convinced that something was wrong with current policy. In the face of incredible opposition, she published a book that shook the foundations of current agricultural practice. And policies changed as a result; the use of DDT was banned in the United States.

From a greater understanding of the impact of chemicals on our lives, we have tried to reduce our chemical exposure within our home. We have ripped out the chemical-releasing, and allergen attracting carpet, replaced with hardwood floors. As an added benefit, avoiding carpet uses less petroleum, a nonrenewable resource (Thompson, 2004). We have added plants to help clean the air, in addition to electronic air filters (Thompson, 2004). We have reduced our use of personal beauty products filled with chemicals, avoiding dry cleaning, synthetic fragrances, and abrasive cleaners (Thompson, 2004). We continue to learn, dream, and plan ways to make our home and our lives even more environmentally friendly.

Adventist Education

As mentioned earlier, having time to give back to Adventist education is important to me. My current work contract allows me extra time for consulting and work, mostly within the organization, Adventist Virtual Learning Network (AVLN). Through this organization, I have had opportunities to organize distance education conferences,

write and teach online classes, and present workshops and seminars to Adventist educators in K12 and higher education. After my Ph.D. studies are finished, I will again have more time to give to Adventist education, and am currently planning to write two more online classes on integrating technology in the new K-8 reading program. In addition to service through AVLN, we continue to give to support Adventist education.

Bringing International Perspectives to Children

Based on my own international and cultural experiences, I want to bring these same opportunities to both public and Adventist education. In the public arena, I enthusiastically embrace every opportunity and possibility for international videoconference exchanges between students in rural southwest Michigan and the world. Our classes have connected to Canada, England, Wales, Mexico, India, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Japan, Pakistan, Namibia, and Taiwan. I know that this breadth of experience is due in part to my interest in, sensitivity to, and passion for international cultures. The local teachers who participated in this connections continue to express their gratitude and the lasting impact on their students. In addition to this, I provide online materials for Adventist and Christian schools to use in worship time to pray for and understand the countries in the 10/40 window (Johnstone & Mandryk, 2001). This window spreads between the tenth and 40th parallels and includes the most unreached countries in the world. Much of the Middle East and Asia are included in this window, spanning large populations and fascinating countries. It is my passion that students will learn more about these countries and gain a passion and interest in them as well.

Serving My Church

Finally, I feel a social responsibility to serve my church, locally and globally. I do this through giving my time, resources, and energy. I serve on the web team for Pioneer Memorial Church, bringing messages of hope to people around the globe via the Internet. I also serve in the kitchen with my husband at the Michigan youth camp, Camp Au Sable, for three weekends a year. Through this service, the camp is able to serve more people at a lower cost. More people can then enjoy nature and be drawn closer to God through His creation. For more reflection on serving my church, please see Competency #5: Servant Leadership Through Technology Facilitation and Collaboration.

Improving My Practice

It is difficult to see the exact line of improving my practice or even inspiring new practice in this competency. All four areas I have described are my passion and an integral part of my life. In addition, they are areas where I continue to learn and grow. As I read for this reflection paper, my understanding deepened; my theoretical base broadened. I made connections between what I have learned in other competencies, i.e. change (Fullan, 2008) and law (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). During my Ph.D. studies, we have adapted our behavior based on reading (Carson et al., 1962; McKibben, 2005; Thompson, 2004), and these adaptations to our home and lifestyle will continue in the future.

Future Learning

As I look to the future, I know I will continue to read to understand better the environment, its effects on us, and our effects on it. I will continue to read to understand how to balance my passion for technology with a love for nature (Louv, 2008; Schultze, 2002). Future learning on leadership principles and theory will affect my ability to lead, to make a difference, and to exercise my social responsibility.

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