

Leadership – making a difference



“The purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better.” – Robert F. Kennedy

One of the hallmarks of leadership is “making a difference”, not necessarily world making differences or even country making differences but simple everyday differences.

Here some examples (note, the “I” in the examples is not me):

I am on in the mountains with some friends and we have decided to be on the summit before 2.00 pm in order to have time to get back down before it gets dark; it’s a lovely day and we have spent so much time looking at the scenery and the wildlife that we now risk missing our deadline. I get everyone’s attention and start to discuss how they see the rest of the day spanning out; do we carry on as we are and risk getting caught in the dark, do we stop looking at the scenery and “yomp” our way to the top or do we do something else?

A group of adolescents has started hanging out on my street corner; they are not doing any harm (yet) but they are occasionally a bit boisterous and noisy. I go up to them and start a conversation with them about what they might like to do.

I am at work with colleagues and it's the twenty-fifth minute of our fifteen minute coffee break; there is a heated discussion with regards to the current project and the fact that the deadlines are too short. I suggest to my colleagues that we take look at how we could organise ourselves to use our time better.

I am in a parent teacher association meeting and almost everyone is criticising the schools choice for its end of term project. I ask those who have yet to express anything what they think about the pros and cons of the project and then get the group come up with concrete improvements to the project.

All of the above are examples of making a difference; it may not be MLK at the Lincoln Memorial telling everyone that he has a dream and it may not be JFK telling people to ask not what the USA can do for them but what they can do for the USA, but they are still examples of making a difference.

The above examples are simple but not necessarily easy; your group of friends might resent you trying to take control, the kids on the street corner might tell you to "get lost" (or worse) and your colleagues might accuse you of being on the side of management. Making a difference is never easy; the easy way out may be to let you and your friends become benighted, let the adolescents become delinquents and join in the winging and whining with you colleagues – but that's not what leadership is about!

"No work is insignificant. All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence." – Martin Luther King Jr.