

Defining Leadership and Legacy

Michael Shimek
Crawford High School
Crawford, Nebraska

The History Day topic for 2015 may be difficult for many students to comprehend. A researcher must be aware of what a leader is and how their legacy impacts history. Personally, I have been able to expand upon what these two words really mean beyond a dictionary definition by the use of dedication to research through History Day. These two words can be better understood by investigating the past.

Leadership may be difficult for many to define. My study of leadership in individuals stems back to my very first History Day project in the seventh grade. I decided to create my project surrounding the individualism of Steve Jobs: The late CEO of Apple Computer. Steve Jobs exhibited his leadership skills from the beginning of Apple. First, he knew how to be firm with his influence. Jobs told his partner Steve Wozniak that his duty was to study and engineer the technological aspect of their future company. Jobs' responsibility (then and in the future) was to market and discover what would appeal to consumers. Apple Computer was literally created in Jobs' parents' garage. The initiative and determination to create new technologies that had never before existed were just a few of the skills Jobs possessed in his early years of leading Apple. To use Jobs as an example of leadership, we know that a leader must be brave, (not necessarily fearless), firm, innovative, and determined. Although many of Jobs' employees were often frustrated with the headstrong CEO, they all respected his direction and intuition. A leader often is entrusted to make decisions that will positively impact his or her group—although the consequences may be negative. Because so many trusted Steve Jobs to make these decisions for today's most valuable company in the world tells us that he was a natural born leader. Steve Jobs' leadership has created an infinitely large legacy: The continual contribution to the expanding world of technology in order to make that technology more useful for the public.

Leadership can be found not only in people who are often deemed as good, but also in people who are considered pure evil. During my sophomore year, I created a project on the power of Adolf Hitler's propaganda and how he used that propaganda to control. Although many would deem Hitler as the most evil man in history, he did possess incredible leadership capabilities. Before Hitler's dictatorship, Germany was in a crippling

depression due to the heavy monetary repercussions required by the Treaty of Versailles. After Hitler acquired totalitarian power over Germany, Hitler used his leadership skills in positive ways. For one, Hitler quickly improved the German economy. However, he did so in part by invading other countries and utilizing their resources. Hitler used his leadership to convince the German people that Germany should rule the entire planet. In doing so, he created an army that was close to entire devotion to Hitler. This translated into Germany becoming one of the most powerful forces in the modern world at that time. It seemed as if the Germans would at least dominate the entire continent of Europe. However, Hitler's character quickly overstepped the definition of leader: He became so controlling, egotistical, and reactive that his country lost World War II. Hitler has left behind an evil legacy, one that can teach future generations that hatred is a poisonous element of our world and that we must fight with everything we have against hatred to prevent the destruction of the world as we know it. Therefore, scholars must be cognizant of the different types of leadership and legacy; researchers also must be able to discern the difference between those types. For this, we can thank the respectable leadership of the Allied Powers.

The summer after my sophomore year, I participated in the Normandy Institute. The institute is dedicated to teaching young students the importance of the Normandy campaign in France. What I discovered is that the Allied Powers were the stronger leaders when compared to Adolf Hitler because the effort was headed by leaders such as Dwight D. Eisenhower and countries such as the United States and Britain. The ability of several countries to unite to overcome a power of tyranny is one characteristic of leadership. The Allied Powers funded the invention of new boats that would help in the campaign. The soldiers of the Normandy campaign were leaders as they sacrificed so much—even their lives; even the soldiers who were not leaders but followers nonetheless were important to the success of Operation Overlord. Leadership in this sense comes from not only one person, but a whole mass of people. One example many may forget is the leadership of the paratroopers that made parachute and combat glider landings; their bravery should be noted due to the incredible exposure to the enemy while suspended in the air. Leadership can even mean freeing the oppressed as the Allies freed the French. The participants of the Normandy campaign leave behind a powerful legacy. That legacy has inspired later generations that we must be diligent in our efforts to be rid of evil, to fight for one another, and to respect all those who sacrifice so much.

Jobs' legacy is that Apple Computer has introduced innovative technology (ex. the iPhone) to improve the lives of many and to continuously ask, "How can we make this better?" Adolf Hitler was able to use his leadership skills (ex. public speaking) to gain the trust of the masses. By doing so, Hitler was able to bring Germany to a position as one of the world's most powerful countries. Hitler's leadership has left behind a legacy that continues to scar not only Germany, but also the entire world. However, the soldiers of the Normandy invasion have given us a positive example of leadership and legacy. The leaders of the Normandy campaign exhibited qualities of sacrifice and determination to expunge a threatening power. Their legacy is an example that at times we must fight for what we believe in and that we must sacrifice much to protect our people.

Taking ideas from these three examples, we can deduce a basic and broad idea of both leadership and legacy. Leadership means that a leader or group of leaders has a plan to put their ideas and influence into the world. Leadership is difficult and can force leaders to make difficult decisions even if those decisions do not benefit everyone. Legacy is the permanent and vivid fingerprint that a leader leaves behind. That legacy can mean anything--which gives an idea of who that person was and what they intended to put forth into the world. I have done several History Day projects, and these are only three examples that I have been able to build an understanding of leadership and legacy.

Leadership and legacy are easy to define in a dictionary. The true understanding of leadership and legacy, however, comes from studying the histories, errors, successes, and failures of leaders in the past. Research of the past is useful in defining leadership and legacy by learning from the actions of leaders and past events. One can draw examples from leaders such as Steve Jobs or the brave individuals involved in Operation Overlord. If one can research individuals such as these, obtaining an understanding of leadership and legacy will improve the coherency of any research project.



About the Author: Michael Shimek is from Crawford, Nebraska and is currently a senior at Crawford High School. In 2012, Michael was accepted into the Albert H. Small Normandy Institute and has participated in National History Day for six years. Shimek has traditionally participated in the individual documentary category. Shimek is thankful for the wonderful opportunities afforded to him by participating in History Day.