

Prabhupada as a Role Model for Effective Leadership at New Vrindaban, West Virginia

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Introduction

The purpose of our case study is to understand how A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and his teachings are related to how members of the New Vrindaban community view effective leadership. While visiting New Vrindaban, which is the primary Hare Krishna community in West Virginia, we interviewed community members. New Vrindaban was founded by Prabhupada in 1968. After returning from New Vrindaban, we followed up with questions that were relevant to our case study. We focused mainly on how the community members have been affected by Prabhupada's teachings. After receiving responses from community members, we found some of the most important qualities in a leader. These include humility and selflessness, courage, support and motivation, strength of character, and vision.

Brief Biographies of Primary Sources

Varsha Graves

Born and raised in New Vrindaban, she left for school and work like many of her peers, but her parents still reside in the New Vrindaban community.

Amol Kulkarni

Born and raised in Mumbai, India he has lived in New Vrindaban since 2003. He helps with the accounting office in the New Vrindaban community and tries to raise funds for a charity hospital in Mumbai.

Radha Sundari

An active member in the New Vrindaban community, she holds a leadership position although she does not view herself as a leader because she believes her mission is simply to carry out the message of Prabhupada and Krishna.

Overview of Prabhupada's Influence

Prabhupada continues to be one of the most influential leaders in the New Vrindaban community even though he died in 1977. He is responsible for bringing Vaishnava Hinduism to the West and founding many Hare Krishna temples around the globe (Graves). "If he had not made the sacrifice to come to America with the Vaishnava Philosophy, there would not be any Krishna consciousness outside of India" (Sundari). Members of the community show their appreciation and gratitude for Prabhupada in many different ways (Graves). Members honor Prabhupada and the deities, who are gods or goddesses, through ceremonial services that are held at the Temple every morning, afternoon, and night. Also, seven ceremonial prasadam, or food offerings, are

given to Prabhupada and the deities everyday before the food can be eaten. Prayer is another form in which they show their respect to Prabhupada. New Vrindaban community members pray before entering the temple, before meals, and after meals (Graves). New Vrindaban community members understand Prabhupada's teachings and want their children to understand them as well. This shows true as Kulkarni's son's first word was 'Prabhupada' (Kulkarni).

Qualities of Leadership

Humility and Selflessness

Remaining humble is one of the five essential virtues for effective leadership. Assets should be known by actions and not be egocentric remarks (*What Every Principal Should Know about Ethical and Spiritual Leadership*). In the Vaishnava tradition, humility is considered the most important quality. "Naturally, a leader who can act with humility despite having a higher position in society will inspire others to follow." In addition, "it [humility] relates back to seeing oneself as a humble servant" (Sundari). Prabhupada was an important figure for his generosity, selflessness, and all of the contributions he made in terms of spiritual awareness. Prabhupada was willing to give himself completely to allow others in New Vrindaban an opportunity to benefit from those teachings that he learned in order to bring the highest philosophical principles and a better way of life to others (Graves). Graves tries to take a humble position, and she does not mind being seen by others as wrong because she values her integrity.

Courage

Leaders are expected to show bravery through their words and actions (*Expectations Placed on Leaders Require Additional Development*). Exhibiting courage is an important virtue, which includes the willingness to stand up despite opposition (*What Every Principal Should Know about Ethical and Spiritual Leadership*). Graves expects a leader to be someone who is responsible, brave enough to take risks, and resilient enough to recover and move forward after something goes wrong. Sundari believes that New Vrindaban community members need to see sacrifice and dedication in their leaders. A leader always shows courage and sacrifice (ISKCON Communication Journal, *Leadership: the Supreme Management Skill*).

Support and Motivation

Leaders in New Vrindaban should support members and members should support leaders. The leader should be proactive and is responsible for taking initiative to solve problems (*Expectations Placed on Leaders Require Additional Development*). Graves expects a leader to have integrity and initiative and be inspiring, motivating, and selfless. She believes that her own identity was shaped by her upbringing in Prabhupada's movement. The majority of her leadership experiences come from initiative, as she took the initiative to start an educational program to help migrant workers. "Inspiring devotion is the ultimate goal of every spiritual leader" (Sundari). An effective leader inspires devotion

and a sense of worthiness of the cause (ISKCON Communication Journal, *Leadership: the Supreme Management Skill*).

Strength of Character

Developing constructive relationships and maintaining impartiality are vital principles. A leader should be objective in all tasks. Confidence is another important principle. (*Expectations Placed on Leaders Require Additional Development*). “Most leadership skills might come from a healthy self-esteem and the confidence that you can actually make a difference” (Graves). Leaders should remain faithful to their educational and moral principles (*What Every Principal Should Know about Ethical and Spiritual Leadership*). A positive warm demeanor is also important (Graves). Graves’ students felt more comfortable coming to her for help than another teacher who was stricter and less approachable. Strength of character can include honesty. Kulkarni believes that if there is honesty, competency will follow.

Vision

It is important to think beyond the moment and to make decisions while considering the future (*Expectations Placed on Leaders Require Additional Development*). Leaders should hold a clear perception of the ultimate goal and a clear vision of the ideal situation. A leader must be able to communicate this vision and inspire others to step toward leadership (ISKCON Communication Journal, *Leadership: the Supreme Management Skill*). A long-term vision is very important (Sundari).

Conclusion

Through our research, we found that by having Prabhupada as a role model, the New Vrindaban community members have gained a better understanding of what effective leadership is, and therefore, they can try to exemplify his leadership skills. His teachings have given New Vrindaban community leaders the ability to build a strong foundation in the community and retain their followers. There are certain qualities that he possessed and demonstrated that left an impression on the New Vrindaban community members. Many feel a personal sense of gratitude toward him.

Works Cited

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