

LIGHT REFLECTIONS ON LEADERS I HAVE KNOWN

Dinner Presentation: Dr Keith Suter

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I have been privileged to work with a number of leaders over the years. I left school at the age of 15 [as an “educational disaster”] and went to work immediately in what was then the War Office in Whitehall. My real education began at that point. I have been on the fringes of power ever since. In 1967, as a young bureaucrat concerned with Army finances, I was told: “*Laddie: don’t annoy the Field Marshal.*” I have been trying to avoid annoying Field Marshals ever since - not always successfully.

I was also fortunate to join the United Nations Association about two years later [1966] and that has been my passport to international affairs. I came to Australia in 1973 and retained my contacts with the United Nations Association; last year I stood down after 20 years in various presidential capacities within the United Nations Association of Australia. I met three of the four people mentioned in this address through the UN Association of the United Kingdom.

The point of these reflections is to highlight the strengths or flaws in the characters of the leaders. Intelligence is a fine quality in a leader but character is more important.

• **Jeffrey Archer: Stranger than Fiction**

Jeffrey Archer [now Lord Archer] joined the UN Association staff in the late 1960s. I was then Chair of the UN Youth Association. He was employed by Humphry Berkeley [a former Conservative MP and then Chair of the UN Association] to improve the UN Association’s finances.

The youthful Archer was a brilliant fundraiser. Indeed, looking back at the staid world of British charity fundraising, he was one of the sector’s most creative forces ever to get involved in it. For example, he talked the Prime Minister Harold Wilson into hosting a UN Association dinner at No. 10 Downing Street, at which the leaders of commerce etc., paid about 1,000 pounds per course [a lot of money in those days]. This was the largest single fundraising operation in the history of the UN Association. It was a brilliant idea - and now very common. But in those days, no charity had ever tried it. He showed that it was better to go for one grand project rather than dissipate one’s energies in a variety of very small scale fund-raising activities.

Tragically, it was also Archer’s gifts of creativity and speaking that have been his downfall. He did not inspire trust. You could never be sure if he was telling the truth. For example, he later entered the House of Commons and claimed that he was the youngest MP elected since Pitt the Younger. That was a lie - even at the time there was a younger MP in the House. But he kept on saying it - and the mass media often repeated it.

Being economical with the truth has been his trademark ever since. His most recent problem has been the revival of allegations over a 1986 sex scandal, which has meant that he has had to withdraw from running for the new position of Lord Mayor of London.

Archer is unbelievably creative but he does not inspire trust. He has also made a lot of enemies. That he has got as far as he has [a peerage, successful novelist, and being worth at least five million pounds] says a great deal about the values of modern British society!

• **Peter Archer: Politician with a Passion for the Possible**

In 1972, having graduated from university and waiting to travel to Australia to do my PhD at the University of Sydney, I was employed by the UN Association as Human Rights Secretary [that is,



executive officer]. 1973 was the 25th anniversary of the *1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and my task in 1972 was to get events and publications organised for that year, prior to my coming to Australia.

Peter Archer [no relation to Jeffrey] was then a Labour MP and a member of the UN Association Human Rights Committee. He is now Lord Archer, a member of the House of Lords, where I had a coffee with him a year or so ago.

Peter is very different from Jeffrey [and probably does not have all his wealth, as a consequence!]

Peter did - and still does - inspire confidence. I tend to be very critical of many politicians, not least for their lack of integrity and the superficial way in which they approach issues. Politicians approach issues with an open mouth.

For example, I never knew where Jeffrey Archer stood on any issue. He was very good at the technical matters [such as whom to contact to get events organised, how to hire a venue at a reduced rate or how to issue a media statement]. But I am not sure that he ever bothered to learn much about the UN itself. There seemed to be no substance behind that all glitter.

Peter Archer, by contrast, is a person of great substance. He has maintained his interest in UN and human rights issues. He has been in for the long haul. He keeps on keeping on. He is still active on UN and human rights affairs. He is also President of the British Association of World Federalists [I am Chair of the Australian Branch]. Well beyond “retiring age”, he is still campaigning for good causes.

Peter, then, is a politician who has long been identified with good causes and maintains his link with them, irrespective of the political fashions of the day. He is not here for the headlines.

- **Martin Ennals: Human Rights Champion**

Martin Ennals was the Chair of the UN Association Human Rights Committee, when I was the Secretary. He did not become a Lord [though his brother David did - the UN Association seems to be a path to the peerage!]

I had known Martin not only through the UN Association but also through Amnesty International [AI]. I was one of the earliest members of AI. The Human Rights Committee often met at the AI international Headquarters in Turnagain Lane in the City of London, where Martin was the Secretary General and where he oversaw its expansion to become one of the world’s most important human rights organisations.

Martin was one of the pioneers in the international protection of human rights. When he eventually left AI he went on to create two other very important human rights non-governmental organisations: International Alert and Human Rights Documentation Service [HURIDOCS]. He later died in Canada, where he had taken up a post as Professor of Human Rights at a university. He lived and breathed human rights.

Martin was one of the pioneers of the human rights revolution. It is very easy to forget just how much the world has changed since World War II. Before World War II, no government could criticise the internal affairs of another country. That would have been contrary to international law. For example, as soon as Hitler came to power in January 1933 he started violating human rights but no government ever criticised his policies because they were an “internal matter”. The WWII war crimes trials never dealt with the crimes committed in the period January 1933 to September 1939 because the activities were an “internal matter”.



All that has now changed. We live in an era of human rights transparency. Australia - like all other countries - is having to get used to being accountable to international organisations and being monitored by the international mass media. Martin Ennals was one of the pioneers of this work.

Martin was very creative in thinking about human rights. He could “think outside the square”. He conveyed a sense of passion and enthusiasm about the international protection of human rights. His passion was infectious and inspiring.

- **Reverend Dr Sir Alan Walker: “Mr Methodism”**

I joined the then Central Methodist Mission in 1976 as Director of Administration. Alan was then the Superintendent. In 1981, he formed the *National Goals and Directions Movement*, of which he is the Chair and I am the Executive Director.

Alan is a committed Christian. I have learned from him the importance of evangelism and social justice; evangelism wins souls for Christ and social justice is about how Christians are to live responsibly in this world.

He has been willing to go against conventional, secular thinking [as in his pacifism and his opposition to racism, alcohol and gambling], even though these views may have made him unpopular at the time. We are not here to win popularity competitions!!

But in the long term, Alan has often been vindicated by history.

Alan is the first person to admit that he has no sense of humour. Working with him has not been a bundle of laughs. [but then, Methodists aren’t here to be comedians!] However, association with him has brought me a wide set of challenges and experiences that I would not have missed for the world.

The American political scientist James David Barber made a name for himself with a typology of leadership, which some people saw in the early 1970s as a prediction that Richard Nixon would destroy himself in office - and so he predicted the eventual resignation of Nixon in 1974.

Barber suggested that the personalities of all US presidents could be divided into “active” or “passive” characters and that they could also be divided in “positive” or “negative” characters.

This typology then gives the following format:

	Positive	Negative
Active	Kennedy	Johnson, Nixon
Passive	Eisenhower	Coolidge

An Active/ Positive person is a life-enhancing person, who is full of enthusiasm. However, they may be a joy to their friends and an embarrassment to their relatives.

An Active/ Negative person is a driven personality, forever fighting against the world. Barber said that such persons often have tragic ends to their careers, or at least ones that are not happy. He was certainly right about Nixon.

Passive/ Positives do not work too hard. As Ronald Reagan once said, “*Hard work is supposed to have never killed anyone - but I do not want to take any chances.*”

Passive Negatives are rare in leadership positions. But we do encounter them a great deal in the social welfare sector as clients, who are bitter about life and have a poor self-image.



It is not always easy to distinguish between the “Positive” and “Negative” characteristics. All the leaders I have known have been “Active” people; perhaps a bit too “active”! Some have been “Positive”, others “Negative”.

Leaders come in all shapes and sizes - but they are nearly always memorable.

Lessons for Educational Institutions

- First, intelligence is fine but we need to remember the importance of “character”. This is a very old-fashioned viewpoint but one that strikes me as still very relevant. Honesty and the ability to inspire trust are very important.
- Second, we should encourage students to be “Active / Positive”. They should approach life with a sense of enthusiasm and a sense of confidence - and not to give in to all the prevailing doom and gloom.
- Third, students should get involved in campaigns bigger than themselves. It is very easy in today’s society to become obsessed with oneself. Television is full of doom and gloom. There are many social justice issues, such as the international protection of human rights, in which people can get involved. Simply working for a better world in itself gives a person a sense of hope that life can be made better.
- Finally, having found their passion in life they should stick to it. As Winston Churchill said: “*Never give up. Never. Never give up*”. Even Jeffrey Archer to his credit has shown as much persistence [not always for the right reasons] as all the other leaders mentioned in this presentation.

All the people mentioned in this presentation have, in various ways, shown that it is possible to make the world a better place for one’s having been in it.

Dr Keith Suter is a social commentator, strategic planner, conference speaker, writer and broadcaster. He received the Australian Government’s Peace Medal in 1986.

