

Insight

Unparalleled Preparation for Life

By David Goodwin

I'm often asked why I became involved in k-12 education before having any children of my own. I must admit that initially, I simply desired to help establish a strong academic option in Idaho's Treasure Valley with a solid Christian influence. Over the years, I have learned much more about Classical and Christian education and now realize that it provides unparalleled preparation for life.

During 15 years of employment in the business world, I have had the opportunity to observe leaders at many levels. In this role, I came to recognize some of the leadership traits that seem common among successful people and recognize the unique role classical education plays in cultivating the key attributes of leadership.

Excellent leaders are excellent communicators

First, excellent leaders are excellent communicators—they can articulate complex, detailed ideas in ways that impact the intended audience. Whether a leader conducts a departmental meeting or presents to the Board of Directors, the content is bound by his or her ability to communicate it. The best communicators I have observed have an innate capability to understand and empathize with the audience. They can predict what will motivate the audience and what will be received negatively. They know the context in which to place every key point—and they recognize the key points. Classical and Christian education uniquely focuses on these skills in the school of Rhetoric. Classical schools train you to tailor your message to your audience, place it in their context, articulate your essential points and build a consistent flow of information.

Wisdom requires perspective

Another key leadership attribute is the ability to perceive whole systems from the detailed parts. This allows leaders to recognize “root cause” rather than simply treating the symptom. Classical education treats the world systematically. As in the real world, subjects are interrelated; history is tied to literature, which is tied to philosophy, etc. Classically educated students are trained to seek the root of a problem. They understand how to get to the principles that drive behavior. They are able to resist simplistic answers that, while seeming to be obvious fixes, really make the problem worse. For example, socialism as a solution to poverty.

In today's world of technology, decisions are made difficult because of information overload. The ability to digest large volumes of information without losing perspective is critical to leadership success. The loss of perspective is often viewed as a “lack of common sense” in the business world. Classical education exposes students to volumes of conflicting information and expects them to properly distil it into salient conclusions. Students defend their position by recognizing evidence on both sides, but most importantly by placing a proper perspective on the situation as a whole. Some questions may not have a clear answer, but there are wrong *ways* of arriving at your position. Classical educators work very hard to train leaders how to gain a proper perspective, which in turn leads to solid decisions.

Two rare but essential qualities for leaders

Finally, two “must haves” for leadership are diligence and character. Classical education instills diligence in each student beginning at an early age. From the earliest grades, students are expected to independently learn challenging material and work hard to meet high expectations. These skills are not lost in the workplace. While independence and hard work are essential in leadership, combined with the Rhetorical skills learned in a classical school they help produce leaders who have innovative ideas and who also work very well in groups.

Business schools are rolling out new ethics courses in an effort to stem the wave of ethical scandals in business. “Goodness without knowledge is weak, but knowledge without goodness is dangerous”—this truth was written by Samuel Phillips in the charter to Phillips School at Andover, one of America’s most famous classical schools. Classical and Christian education makes the cultivation of Christian character the cornerstone of education. Character isn’t taught as an added class, it permeates the educational model. We believe this is the best way to truly instill high moral conduct into our students.

Classical Education’s ancient “Secret Weapon”

Armed with the capabilities mentioned above, I’m confident that a graduate of our school is uniquely prepared to lead in government, business, or ministry. Some educators believe that technology and science will better prepare students for the modern workforce. 10 years after the student graduates from high school, any technology they learned will be obsolete and much of the science will have changed. Through Classical and Christian education, leadership traits will have been built into their thinking for life.

The unique preparation for leadership provided by Classical and Christian education should be no

surprise to those who study early American history. Most of our founding fathers were trained classically, either at home or in early American schools. They became the world’s greatest leaders - great artists, great craftsmen, great businessmen, and great scientists. I believe that Classical and Christian education will turn out the greatest leaders of the next generation as it has in the past.