

Date: 10/15/96
To: Ronald Heifetz
From: Vladimir Petit Medina (MC-MPA)
Subject: Questionnaire for Lean On Me.

1)The purpose of Eastside High School and some tasks which flow to that purpose:

As any High-School, the purpose of Eastside *was to give education and instruction to those who attend it*. Then, some tasks were:1)to maintain the necessary environment to ease and to ensure the learning process:2) to meet the education quality standards imposed by the upper level;3) to maintain and stimulate the necessary discipline within the institution which makes possible to get the people to teach, to learn and to work, simultaneously.

2) a-Emotional or visceral responses to Joe Clark?

- Emotional: Many. The first one was *admiration*.. I admire the way Joe Clark faced the crisis itself. Also, I admire *his tendency to act with authenticity and creativity* even when violating the law. Something else: Joe Clark's role was similar to some roles I have played before. So, some positive hidden issue captured my mind and senses while watching the movie. Secondly, I felt that in analyzing this movie, *I began to practice some new analytic skills*. It was just great. And Joe Clark was my first real experiment. The creative and authoritative Joe Clark.
- Visceral (from *viscus* and *viscera*, then, profound, from the very insight, with no filter, from the *instinct*): Just two visceral reactions, and both to condemn some abuses of authority made by different characters: Joe Clark's abuse with the acting Principal, and the Mayor's abuse with Joe Clark . *The first one, was mitigated* by a second action (being thankful is such an easy way to make some people happy). *The later, pushed me to a deep and interesting reflection on my life and past experiences in politics*.

b.- In what ways was the manner in which he exercised authority and managed boundaries effective or ineffective, attractive or repelling ? : Some important ideas before responding: -Joe Clark made an outstanding assessment of the adaptive work, involving not only the reality but also a sort of clarification of values: for teachers, for students, even for the personnel. Then, his work extended to the whole system.- Leading that change (from a house of madness to a real institution for education able to meet the required standards), was a tremendous effort which demanded new methods. Those methods were exceptional and the recurrence of routine recipes was out of question. Then, *the adaptive challenge was such a complex gap to be closed only by risky actions because the level of existing distress*. Those risky actions were assumed by a man who had the formal authority and in accomplishing the adaptive work gained the informal authority and *became a charismatic authority*. Therefore, changing attitudes, habits and behaviors became easier.- Minutes before the end of the film he lost the formal authority for a given period (while in prison) but the informal remained constant. -

-Clark's authority became necessary component of the holding environment (*the need of passing the State Test, a sort of "new deal" for that system, provided a relationship in which Clark had the power to attract and to direct the attention of the educational community, easing the adaptive work*) and, suddenly, the system was complete. It was going back to stability and, finally, it reached it.

- His way of exercising authority was the appropriate to face the problem. He identified the adaptive challenge (*the gap between the school needed in order to ensure the quality of the given education and the messy Eastside was not possible to be overcome in few weeks, even in few years, by acting routinely*). The real situation and its relevant items, also, were properly assessed: the **Durkheim's anomie concept**¹ itself, embodied in the existing instability and insecurity and its correlative manifestations : drugs, lack of commitment, absence of real values, absence of any sense of command. *The situation itself called for extreme actions in order to get protection (for life itself), direction (to give a clear sense of command and orientation) and order (to restore the certainty) .* So the state of emergency was assumed and *the level of the extreme actions was imposed by an initial and deliberately increase of the distress* (expunging all the identified criminals, chained the doors and facing the problem directly, *vis a vis*) and a subsequent decrease that made the adaptive work possible (also the restoration of the infrastructure was important) . Then, the work was given to the people again (*the initiatives and some new ideas were appearing as soon as the distress level seemed to be managed properly: the community started doing productive work again*). At the same time Clark *was imposing extreme actions and a direction of the attention*. Drugs, disobedience and laziness were exposed as *ripening issues*. Finally, managing boundaries while exercising authority in times of distress is hard . That is the reason why, preserving some room for reflection and for the need of learning from mistakes became necessary. He was not the kind of man who accepts his own mistakes, but he was capable of both learning from them and finding a way to make indirect corrections .
- **Effective?** *Of Course it was effective*. His authority led the whole community to the intended effects: *the students passed the test, order and the appropriate environment were restored, the quality of education was increased, and finally, the educational community(teachers, parents, workers and students)was put in another path*. With the analytic skills: *the adaptive work was done and the expectations were fulfilled properly, the exchange implicit in the notion of both formal and informal authority was successful (they gave authority and in return, the school met the State's requirements and order and equilibrium were restored)*
- **Attractive?** *It seems to me that it was attractive*. Perhaps, it was not nice or soft but it definitely *had the power to compel my admiration* and attention. **Repelling** ?, just when he lost his temper and became upset at the deputy Principal. That was a sort of abuse of authority. He didn't like what the report said but it was not her fault. Then, he should not have reacted in such an explosive and inadequate way. Also, she didn't deserve it. Finally, I think that scene depicted a real misuse of his authority, because he used it to reprimand her improperly.

c.- How would you take up the role of authority if you were appointed principal of Eastside?

I would have acted in the same way. I have been involved in cases like this, and my conclusion is that no progressive change implemented by tenuous and transitional measures is viable when there is a real anomie in progress.

Just exceptional measures and strong leadership may restore order, direction and protection.

d.-Do you experience any conflict between the type of school or organization that you career brings you to, an your own ability to create, manage or administer that kind of institution?

¹ Emile Durkheim defined the anomie as..."the absolute social disequilibrium caused by the absence of a valid system of social values and standards ". Derived from nomos (law, regulation) and the prefix a (without), then, a lawless situation, in which the law of the jungle becomes the regulating norm.

Yes. In fact, being a member of the House of Representatives of Venezuela implies a severe and constant conflict for those, like me, who want to create a new system of values. Although the level of distress within the Congress has not reached the maximum point yet, the people's attitudes toward the institution itself and toward its members has become deteriorated . After the Leadership assigned readings, I am trying to elaborate on some creative measures to be adopted when I get back home. I am deeply concerned about the real relationship between the external environment and the internal organization dynamic.

3) Connections:

I think I already made some connections between the film and Professor Heifetz's analysis of the social functions of authority by assessing the required elements to fulfilling them: adaptation and creativity in times of distress.

Weber's observations on charismatic authority: at the very beginning of this memo I pointed out that when the level of distress was reduced and the system started noticing some kind of progress, Clark's authority became charismatic. In fact, as the film goes on, some of the characteristic of the charismatic authority appear: 1) According to Weber's theory charisma itself rejects any pecuniary gain and all rational economic conduct (Robert Guilleaume, as The Superintendent, stated: " Look what you are: nothing. Your wife left you, you don't even take into account your own economic situation...") ; 2) Charisma is not deduced by codes and statutes: in this case, the example was a radical one: Charisma was stronger than law obedience (chains in the doors and the fire department) and mayor's orders: 3) Devotion is the explanation of the obedience born of distress and enthusiasm: while making important progress, a new relationship emerged from the authority: the devotion or the ardent affection to the Clark's authority and image. The whole system got mobilized by Clark's imprisonment and the motto was: We want Clark. And Clark became the father for those who didn't have one, and a great affection to him appeared: 4) Charisma in times of distress is such a specific gift not accessible to everybody, then, the charismatic authority gift is unique, and that is why they just wanted Clark, and not a new principal like him.

Peter Senge's "Mental Models": Perplexity was the real state of some parts of the system when Clark began exercising authority in such a peculiar and controversial way. Not only because they were used to the previous situation but also due to the mental models. The generalizations, patterns and models of authority were broken by Clark' strategies. I am also sure that many of my classmates rejected the way Clark exercised his authority. Perhaps, the real explanation for that is the existence of some kind of stereotype that most people like and it is not represented by Clark. But in my case, the fact that I have experienced situations as the one depicted in the said film has influenced me a lot. The scenes I have still in my mind and the way I understand the problem itself is produced by a sort of mental model, full of insights, perhaps, a recollection of hidden issues related to my most private values. This kind of acting influence is a hurdle to overcome in assessing a problem or situation appropriately.

4) Description of uses and abuses of authority in the life of your small group so far?

Uses: I have been thinking just on one: the setting of the preliminary operational rules by the chairperson and the direction of the debate . That is a weekly use of authority by which the order of the session, the protection to the case presenter and the orientation are set and the dynamic itself is preserved . Also, the level of distress is managed by the chairperson with some sort of personal style. Abuses: None, so far.

