The Unheroic Side of Leadership: Notes from the Swamp
Jerome Murphy

Effective Leaders should:

- Possess a clear personal vision
  - Provide a sense of purpose central to success
  - Define the purpose for the organization
- Be extremely knowledgeable
  - Right answers to most problems
- Be strong
  - Display initiative, courage and tenacity
- Communicate forcefully—convey the vision aggressively and persuasively
- Amass power and use it for organizational improvement
- Take charge and move toward goals

The Unheoric Side

1. Developing a Shared Vision

Programs are typically characterized by shifting goals, changing activities, and wide variation.

Policies are less often installed than negotiated to maturation over time.

Top administrators tend to point out a general direction:
  - likely to provide scaffolding for collaboration that becomes a blueprint for action
  - take initiative, set agenda, establish pace, and contribute to the conversation
  - involve other key actors while clarifying and synthesizing views
  - foster organization

Administrators should be catalysts—the grain of sand, not the pearl.

2. Asking Questions

Gathering intelligence is critical.

Much of what happens or should happen depends on information that administrators frequently do not possess.

Develop an informal system to constantly gather information.

Administrators should be judged by the quality of their questions.

3. **Coping with Weakness**  
Match talents and abilities with the problems at hand.

Surround yourself with staff who have complimentary skills.

Communicate with candor—forthright and critical self-disclosure. Without candor, significant information is withheld.

The more a leader acknowledges and accepts personal weakness and feelings, the more effective he/she becomes.

4. **Listening and Acknowledging**  
Recognize that people are different and give others the benefit of the doubt.

Good listening involves an active effort to understand the world from another’s perspective. Good listening is critical for gathering information.

A leader needs to understand the feelings, the meanings, and the perceptions tied to presented facts.

Listening is the best, and sometimes the only, thing that a leader can do.

5. **Depending on Others**  
If those at the bottom do not accept the responsibility for solving problems, change efforts will come unglued.

Share power and ask for help.

Sometimes you need to be a follower and depend upon the followers to be leaders; changing roles can often achieve significant results.

6. **Letting Go**  
The challenge is to be responsive while simultaneously developing a sense of responsibility in others.