

Alabama Voices
Leadership Montgomery Catalyst for Progress
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My wife and I have been residents of Montgomery for 29 years and now consider this city our ‘hometown.’ When we travel to Georgia to visit family and share bonds of love, we always look forward to returning to Montgomery. Prior to coming to Montgomery, we had lived in Florida and Georgia, but we found a place to reset roots in this place. If it sounds as if I ‘wax philosophical’, then let the shoe fit because I don’t mind wearing it.

In all the years of military service, sitting in classrooms to earn degrees, and professional development, I have encountered a considerable array of leadership development. I have also come to think of the most profound leadership style as servant leader, whereby the individual is a person of strength, moral fiber, and well informed decision-making—yet, this person achieves goals and outcomes to serve others and promote organizational success.

To say that I don’t make errors in judgment is corollary to confusing the sun and moon. In this regard, I have many books about leadership, frequently read journals about leadership, and do my very best to understand—and with a servant’s heart—apply what I have learned. Have I failed at times as an assigned leader? Yes. Do I take from this failure a sense of renewed purpose to do better? Absolutely. Will I make honest and sincere mistakes in the future? As long as my God gives me breath and life, I am subject to making best-judgment mistakes.

Recently, I learned about an organization right here in the City of Montgomery that deals with leadership development, but does so from a perspective that to better ourselves we must step out of our comfort zone and challenge who we are and how we think about our responsibilities as citizens—particularly future and current citizen leaders.

Bobby Kennedy once said, “There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?” This statement epitomizes a core question that each citizen of Montgomery should ask himself or herself. The easier part of this profound statement is to simply ask: Why are things like they are in Montgomery? Or, we can look at how our city functions, and ask: Why not? Why not seek to become a cleaner place to live; why not work together as citizens to fight crime each and every time it rears its ugly head; why not support our law enforcement for all the right and good that it does; why not foster the well-being of all citizens so that Montgomery is a place where life is worthy to be lived here;

and, why not stop all the tearing down, and instead build up one another as neighbors-helping-neighbors?

Leadership Montgomery analyzes operations and outcomes in Montgomery not simply to ask why, but to seek the overarching and innovative answers to ‘why not.’ It fosters creative bonds of teamwork, whereby participants in the year-long program are tasked with thinking about our city in ways heretofore unchallenged. The program asks each one of us to consider what we might do individually, and collectively, as future city leaders—whether in community service, building projects, politics, serving on boards, funding drives, or wherever we may be called to serve—to improve the lives of each and every citizen in Montgomery.

The fundamental principles that undergird Leadership Montgomery are based on the proven construct of physics that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. For every action that a citizen takes, there is within the totality of the action, an equal and opposite reaction. What this means in reality is that for every action that we take, the balance sheet will show a balanced reaction. For example, if downtown development is an action to promote business to flourish in the city, the equal and opposite reaction is simply whether the citizens of Montgomery utilize these businesses and/or services. Just like in the movie, *Field of Dreams*, if you don’t build it, how can the people in Montgomery (and elsewhere) attend a Biscuits game, or visit *The Alleyway*, or participate in so many other things throughout the city? But, if you build it, it then becomes within the purview of the citizens of the city to avail themselves of opportunities presented by the very city in which they live, work, and raise families.

The program, Leadership Montgomery, guides its yearly classes to investigate how Montgomery works—not from a distant birds-eye view, but from a holistically drilled-down view to assess elements of the overall process and design a project to improve the lives of all citizens. In other words, as team members, we are asked to think in terms of: Why not? The goal of each project is to review what is and ask why not; why not make improvements, why not work together to solve problems, why not challenge one another to respect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; why not work to foster positive racial relations; why not fight crime with all our strength and with all our might; why not produce an educated group of young minds; and, why not make tomorrow better than today, one day at a time, one life at a time, and one city at a time—namely Montgomery, Alabama.

I've made some close friends in the short time that this year's program has been on-going. I've learned about their lives and understand that our lives have so many things in common; yet, our lives across the city are so different that we often forget that we are not islands within the boundaries of the city limits, but we are but one among many. While we tarry to earn a living to provide for our families, we are dependent on one another for many things; yet, we each have the responsibility to be initiators for positive outcomes in our lives. My neighbor's family and my family, whose houses are no more than 20 feet apart, share a fence, yard, street, city services, and so forth. If I don't take the responsibility to cut my part of the grass, it reflects on our yard and his. Leadership Montgomery is precisely like those adjoining families and yards.

The program asks us as participants to remember that we are not separated from others in the city, but we each have responsibility to be motivated to care for ourselves as well as others. To be responsive to the job market, it is my personal and professional responsibility to ensure that I obtain an education, participate in professional development, become a diligent team player, and do what I am reasonably able to do within the realm of community service. Leadership Montgomery addresses these personal and professional aspects of living in Montgomery, but from a leadership perspective so that once I have completed the program, I am not graduating from Leadership Montgomery, but graduating into service as an alumni of Leadership Montgomery—in other words, servant leadership.

You might be saying to yourself as you read this: He sounds like a commercial for Leadership Montgomery. If it sounds as if I 'wax philosophical', then let the shoe fit because I don't mind wearing it. Whether you agree with his views or not, Machiavelli noted something so profound that to miss its intent is to miss a life-altering axiom: "It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."

The new order of things in this context is to build, not tear down; improve, not allow dysfunction; truly care for one another, not build walls of separation; embrace a city, not find excuse for blame without justification, but to properly seek the righting-of-wrongs; political service for those you serve, not political gain so others must serve you; obeying the laws because this is right, not doing whatever you want, the law be damned; community service to help your fellow citizens, not hoping your fellow citizens will take care of community service so you don't have to get involved; and, the opportunity for service is endless.

I know beyond any doubt, that by the end of the Leadership Montgomery program in 2013, I will understand the city that I have come to enjoy to a new level. That's but one reason for seeking to enroll in the class. The other myriad reasons include being a better citizen for myself, my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my friends, and for the citizens of Montgomery that I haven't even met. One day, before I leave this Earth, I hope to use what I have gained in Leadership Montgomery to make a significant difference for my neighbors throughout the city. I would like to think that this sentiment is the hope and prayer for everyone in the City of Montgomery.