

Jack Lindquist has had a long and illustrious career that is nothing short of impressive. It is apparent that his unwavering kindness and genuine concern for other people are motivating factors that have driven his ambitions since his roots as a county agent in rural Kansas. I found our interview to be inspiring for many reasons, but the main interest for me was listening to Jack talk about what we called his “trigger moment” or his initial catalyst that set him on his path. The farm crisis in the early 1980s was pushing farmers to their limits; many were unable to provide for their families and some were experiencing mental health crises so significant that suicide rates were rising due to the pressures that they were facing. At that time, Jack knew that he had to do something to help people who, at this moment, could not necessarily help themselves. He organized events and engaged with communities in ways that had never been done before. In my opinion, this was revolutionary. Mental health issues were so taboo at that time that most people were too scared to talk about it or find a solution. But not Jack. His commitment to helping people was inspiring to hear about. All of this catapulted Jack into his career as an educator committed to teaching the leaders of tomorrow.

After interviewing Jack, I was left with several key takeaways. The first being that in order to be a good leader, you have to have an open mind and consider all angles or viewpoints. When Jack chooses students to join his program, he looks for motivated individuals who want to learn and engage with others- and with the community. Transparent communication and being open with stakeholders is imperative to success as a leader. After getting to know Jack, I saw a connection between him and Myles Horton (*The Long Haul: An Autobiography*), who was also passionate about educating leaders in rural areas. Myles and Jack both created education programs to help leaders expand their viewpoints and engage in open discussions about important issues. Much like Horton, Jack seems to place a lot of value on individualizing a

situation and helping his students build empathy. Both men created environments where their students could learn, grow, and bring their new knowledge back to their communities. I also drew the conclusion that Jack and Horton view teaching leadership as an opportunity to put their students in real world situations.

My next takeaway is what democratic leadership looks like in practice. Based on our interview, I noticed that Jack focuses on teaching students by doing. In other words, he encourages his students to take control of their own learning while still guiding them in the right direction. In Chapter 2 of Johnson and Hackman's *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, the authors say that democratic leadership is all about engaging in supportive communication that facilitates discussion. It encourages follower involvement in the deliberation and decision making process. For democratic leaders, open and clear communication is key to making any system work. As Jack said in our interview, transparency, honesty, and clear communication with everybody involved (leaders, followers, stakeholders, etc.) is imperative. He also talked about how holding one another accountable and engaging with your peers when you are worried about the direction of a conversation is a big factor when it comes to his program. It is so easy to go down the wrong path and if we can't steer one another in the right direction we might end up missing our goals entirely. An example that Jack offered was one of his first projects with his students. He noticed that the project that they were working on could be construed as self-serving. After some students pointed this out at well, they came up with some guidelines for the next year to ensure that something like that would never happen again. Because those students spoke up, they were able to find a solution that was beneficial to the whole group. Jack encourages his students to engage and come to conclusions together. In my mind, another aspect of democratic leadership is leading by example. Jack and I agreed in our interview that role

model leadership and setting a good example is extremely important when teaching young leaders. How can you expect someone to act a certain way if you aren't holding yourself to the same standard?

Another connection that I saw between our class and Jack's work was his view on community engagement and how it aligns with *We the People: An Introduction to an Idea* by David Mathews. Jack has his students do a large project designed to help their community, for example cleaning up a playground or raising money to make repairs. Sometimes that means that his students have to engage not only with members of the community, but also with organizations or government entities. To unite a community around a problem is a first step to civic engagement, and to citizens becoming the actors rather than the people being acted upon. *We the People* discusses the importance of community members being actively engaged in civic life, working with one another to reach a common goal. Jack's students do research to pinpoint the needs of a community, and then work with that community and whatever necessary organizations to close those gaps. It is critical that community members have skin in the game and that everyone produces some sweat equity in the project to ensure that when he and his students leave, that park or whatever it may be truly belongs to the community. As Mathews states, citizens should be regarded as creators and producers. The students in Jack's classes help communities become actors, rather than people just being acted upon, and that is what civic engagement and democratic leadership should be about.

My interview with Jack gave me a unique educational experience that offered an opportunity to apply what we have learned about in class to the real world. He exemplifies democratic and role model leadership in a number of ways. You can see this through his commitment to open communication, how he leads his students by example, and his enthusiasm

for his pupils to engage with their communities. I saw so many connections between my interview with Jack and our class content. Democratic leadership, situational leadership, and role model leadership seem to be Jack's main points of focus. Additionally, he teaches his students (who in turn teach the community) the importance of civic engagement. His creative approach to leading, teaching, and organizing is unique in a lot of ways and demonstrates just how much you can accomplish when you put your heart and soul into something. Jack leads other, but his ultimate goal is to help other people lead. He finds joy in helping people help other people and has essentially focused his entire career on doing just that. But in my mind, what makes Jack such an exceptional leader is how much he seems to care for others. In just the short forty minutes that Jack and I spoke, I could sense his overwhelming kindness and see how that pervaded into his work. He is devoted to his work in a way that is special and hard to come by. I can honestly say that Jack is now a role model of mine, as he taught me so many lessons about leading, educating, and engaging in such a short time- I can't imagine how much his students learn from him every year! Overall, this was a great experience and I learned a lot about leadership and how what we learned in class can carry over into a career.