

# U.S. Department of Transportation news:



Office of Public Affairs  
Washington, D.C. 20590

TALKING POINTS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION NEIL GOLDSCHMIDT, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE, YOUNG NATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE, WASHINGTON, D.C., MARCH 28, 1980.

You have all come together as young leaders to Washington, D.C. which, presumably is the national repository of leadership.

But what is leadership? And what is the true measure of a leader?

It is popular to equate leadership with "Charisma," with high visibility and with popular appeal. But it was Charles De Gaulle, who scored high on all these qualities but was driven to distraction by his people's indifference to his leadership, who once said, "how can you govern a nation which makes 135 different kinds of cheeses?"

In our pluralistic society, we may not make 135 different kinds of cheeses, but we easily have that many interest groups, each convinced in the justice of its cause. In the past, the job of the political leader in orchestrating these groups was made easier by institutional structures -- such as strong political parties -- and stable assumptions about the world and the future. Today, both those institutions and those assumptions are breaking down. It makes the task of the leader that much more difficult.

But just for the record, here is my description of leadership in America in the 80s.

A leader is a questioner of old truths, an integrator of new information.

As old assumptions reach obsolence, we must find new ways to understand our experience that represent old values but new directions. A leader is not afraid to disregard labels or stereotypes, if they stand in the way of those new understandings.

At the same time, it is not enough to have a grand vision or strategy, and leave it at that. There is an old saying, "God is in the details." So it is with leadership. Ultimately, the question becomes one of product, rather than vision, and product requires tenacity and attention to detail.

As product is the measure, credit for the product is not. The fastest way to get something done that you really care about is to give the credit for it to someone else.

Finally, it is the responsibility of the leader to face the facts as they are, rather than as people would like to see them. Demosthenes told the Athenians 2,000 years ago, "our peril comes from those who seek to please us, rather than serve us." Particularly during this period of national transition, as we face new energy and economic realities, we need leaders at all levels of government and in the private sector who do not seek to avoid the hard choices and the difficult remedies.

And as we need this kind of leader, so we need these kinds of followers. For leadership implies followship -- even you who are leaders must, at times, be prepared to follow the lead of others -- as you elect members of Congress or local officials, or the President. As followers, your task is no less difficult than that as leaders. To look for men and women of vision and tenacity, who are looking for new directions and most important, to reward with your support those who have the courage to face difficult tests with forthright responses.

#####