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The Great Dereliction

by Umair Haque | 11:00 AM June 21, 2013

A quick thought experiment: name a leader in a position of power you (really) admire, trust, and respect. Not just the head of an "alternative" company or political party, but a well-known, mainstream, orthodox, leader of the status quo. Can you?

Even after a few moments to reflect and consider, most people can't name a single one. Obama? Bernanke? Cameron? Blankfein? They're hardly Churchill, Roosevelt, Lincoln, or even JP Morgan.

I'd like to advance a simple thesis: today's leaders are failing on a grand, epic, global, historic scale — at precisely a time when leadership is sorely needed most. They're failing me, everyone under the age of 35, and everyone worth less than about \$50 million. I can excuse leaders who are boring, mean, stingy, greedy, uninteresting, self-obsessed, vacuous, and generally lame. I can even excuse lying, cheating, and stealing. But I can't excuse the fact that they've failed.

If I had five seconds with today's so-called leaders, I'd simply, firmly, gently say (and I bet you would, too): You've failed to provide us opportunity. You've failed to provide us security. You've failed to provide us liberty. You've failed to provide us dignity. You've failed to provide us prosperity. So: resign. Quit. Step aside.

The world is (still) wracked by crisis. But here's the thing. The solutions to this crisis are straightforward. While there are nuances, and complications, it's also true that today's leaders can act, right now, right this second, in much greater degree, with much fiercer conviction, to make things not just marginally better — but dramatically so.

I used to think (<http://www.amazon.com/The-New-Capitalist-Manifesto-Disruptively/dp/1422158586>) : this is an institutional crisis (<http://hbr.org/product/betterness-economics-for-humans/an/11135-PDF-ENG>) . We're surrounded by "banks" that blow up economies composed of "corporations" which mostly make you want to submit to lethal injection rather than show up for your soul-sucking "job" so you can deliver another few pennies of "profit" that doesn't have much real value except how many megabucks were looted today in "markets" that are populated by zombie vampire cyborg robots trading worthless bits of imaginary "money" at lightspeed for the benefit of "shareholders" who are mostly pension "funds" that don't provide security for anyone but "chief executives" who don't execute much but the careers of "managers" who don't manage much but the mass assembly of powerpoints for the production of "goods" that don't actually benefit anyone to buy with "money" we don't have anymore to live lives we don't really want to impress people we mostly hate so our "gross national product" adds up to more and more and more McShit every quarter.

But all that's not even really the problem. Now I think: this is a crisis of leadership — because though these institutions are deeply broken, they're not going anywhere anytime soon. Why? Because today's leaders are their staunch allies, not their

adversaries. It's going to take nothing less than a new generation of leaders to reform, re-imagine, and redesign, and revolutionize all the above, and more. Real leaders — not high-fiving, bro-hugging wannabes.

What we've got, then, is a great dereliction: leaders who are incapable of fixing the broken institutions that are creating a lost generation, a planetary meltdown, a never-ending series of financial crises, mass unemployment, and a (at least another) lost decade. You'd think with all those icons blinking in the heads-up display, our leaders would act at least a little, well, concerned. But mostly, they seem to be clueless.

Let's admit it. Today's leaders don't just seem out of touch with reality — they are. It's like somebody decided to put Krusty the Clown, Homer Simpson, George Michael Bluth, and the Kardashians in charge of the world. Actually, I retract that. Homer, Krusty, and George Michael would probably do a better job. But we'd probably fire the Kardashians, amirite? That's the point: we can't seem to fire the tragicomically hapless, perpetually bewildered, totally bungling crackpots that are in charge of, well... the rest of our lives, the planet, and humanity's future.

Scared yet? You should be. Here's the simple fact: the leaders of the world aren't fit for the job. And it's time we sent them — yes, most of them — packing.

So let's you and I speak seriously for a few moments.

We're orphans in the gutter, disowned by the past, abandoned by the future. You know it and I know it. We're a lost generation that's being sacrificed by our leaders, who could and should act, if not to stop the hurricane, then at least to shelter us a little bit from the wind.

The old, greying men wag their fingers (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/11/opinion/brooks-the-solitary-leaker.html?hp&_r=2&) and sneer at you and I. Their hypocrisy comes to infect us with the slow, sure poison of cynicism. Why, we ask, should we bother to be leaders — when they, giving themselves the name, have surely proven unworthy of the word? When the men who call themselves our leaders are barely worthy of the term "managers", why, then, should we believe in their principles, ideologies, dogmas? When our leaders fail us, why should we believe, anymore, in leadership? When our leaders can't lead, why should we look anywhere but backward, downward, inward?

And yet it is in obligation that we find not imprisonment, but liberation; the chance to become who we are capable of becoming. It is obligation to the possibility of one another — leadership's purest form — that frees us to be more than mere lovers, friends, partners, fellow travelers on a dusty road; but to become husbands, wives, father, mothers; to be worthy of the proud titles: citizens, councilors, executives, representatives, Senators, Presidents, Prime Ministers — to be worthy of the word *leaders*.

If we don't lead now, it is clear: no one will.

The world needs a new generation of leaders. Now. And it needs the old generation of leaders — failing and unable to even comprehend their own failure — to step aside.

Leaders: We don't come to supplicate you; to beseech you; to beg you; to petition you. We come to replace you.

Every generation believes, "It's our time now." While still young, every generation presumes that they will be the ones to change the world. Here's the truth: some do.

Will we? Or will we, too, be derelict?

There's only one way to find out.