

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY ANNA FLORES
SARUK LEADERSHIP RETREAT WEEKEND - (THURSDAY EVENING)

Imagine a world where every individual, regardless of their title, position, race, age, and confidence level, steps forward as a leader. Envision a society where leadership isn't confined to a select few but is a quality that thrives within all of us.

We're going to explore three main points together today when it comes to leadership as an individual and as a team:

1. When you can see, you can hear
2. Inventions aren't made in a day, and neither are leaders
3. The friendliness of a capybara and the confidence of a lion

1. When You Can See, You Can Hear

The concept that having vision and clearly set goals allows for effective team communication.

I was in a business class during 2nd year at Burman and there was one day where I forgot to put my glasses on for the day (my prescription isn't super bad, so I guess I just forgot to wear them). During the whole class period because I couldn't really see, I wasn't learning efficiently. I even got called on to answer a question but because one of my senses was altered, I answered with the response, "Sorry I couldn't hear you; because I don't have my glasses on".

Now that may seem like it doesn't make any sense, but I promise it's true. It's like when you are looking for a parking spot, so you lower the music playing from your car speakers. Or when your mom tells you to look her directly in the eyes to make sure her lecture is getting across to you. When your vision is blurred or non-existent, your effectiveness and ability to hear people out with their ideas becomes muted as well – you don't know what the correct thing is to listen to.

Now, there's always talk about having vision as a team, or even as an individual. There's always talk about setting goals. But before we dig deeper. We have to ask ourselves the question, **"How do I even set a vision for my life, how do I know which goals in my life are the most important?"**

To simply answer that question, and mind you, there are many effective ways of setting goals. But what I do personally, and I think will help you as well as a leader is to define these two words first: **priorities and passion**. Knowing what your priorities are will drastically highlight your goals as a team therefore creates your overall vision.

Let's do a personal example:

Someone on campus asks you to be part of the exec of a club that you are not too passionate about, but you want to do your due diligence as a leader on campus. What do you do?

There's something I call the "yes syndrome". And that's the idea that you have trouble saying no to people. And I'm speaking on behalf of myself here and maybe a lot of you can also relate.

From the second I walked on Burman campus in 2019 as a freshmen, I wanted to join as many extracurriculars as I could. I got a little carried away with saying yes to every opportunity that would come my way. Partially for wanting to please people and secondly for just wanting to make the most of my university years. But as the first semester went on, I began to realize how burnt out I was starting to feel. Instead of giving 100% to the entities on campus that I was a part of – I began to feel as if I was giving 40% here, 10% there, even 5% in other areas.

To give you a glimpse as to how involved I was – here is a list of what I was doing on campus freshman year... I was the Freshmen senator, a small groups leader, a praise team participant, a choral union member, a chambers group member, part of the step team, part of gospel choir, part of the yearbook team, worked in marketing and enrolment, and worked as a lifeguard – AND THAT WASN'T EVEN INCLUDING ALL THE SCHOOL WORK I HAD TO DO – WHICH IS THE MAIN REASON AS TO WHY YOU GO TO UNIVERSITY.

Now this is not to discourage anyone from wanting to be active on campus, because it is an integral part of your university and social experience – but you need to think through what you are initially saying yes to. When I finally made the decision for second semester to let go of some of the roles on campus that weren't "necessary" – I found I was able to give a higher quality version of myself to the roles that I truly did care about and really enjoyed. On a personal level and on a team level – prioritizing based on your goals and what your team is passionate about leads to effective communication and effective time management.

The same goes with a team – as a team – whether you're part of an exec of a club, part of student association this year, the group leader of an assignment, or the housemate to other students – these lessons can be applied to you.

In a book I read this past year called, "Redeeming Your Time" by Jordan Raynor. He talks about his encounter with Mark Batterson, another well-known author. Mark says there

are often times where he says no to people that ask to meet with him for coffee. Now that might sound a bit harsh, but here's his reason why...Mark says that the time that he could spend working on his next self-betterment book is a better use of his time, because his best-selling books are equivalent to him spending 5 hours with over millions of individuals.

That doesn't mean you should say no to people that seek your help, but know how to manage your time as an individual as a team effectively. There are certain questions or discussions that can be held over text, over facetime, or even over email. As you and your team continue to learn how to work together – you'll begin to recognize which concerns are worth the time of a meeting and which concerns and reports can just be done over a group chat text.

Time is everything, if you do not have goals, you waste your time, your teams', and those you are trying to lead. One of the most accurate examples of this we can even find in the Bible. So let's take a look there to the story of Moses in the book of Exodus. To give a quick recap of the story of Moses –

The biblical story of Moses narrates the extraordinary journey of a Hebrew child born during a time of oppression, who was placed in a basket and set afloat in the Nile River. He was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the Egyptian royal court. As an adult, Moses learned of his Hebrew heritage and confronted Pharaoh to demand the liberation of the Israelites. Through divine guidance, he led the Israelites through a series of miraculous events, including the parting of the Red Sea, towards the Promised Land.

Now it sounds like the perfect rescue out of bondage to freedom story at first glance, but there were a lot of unexpected roadblocks and extra turns in the story of the Israelites making their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. Kadesh-Barnea was on the border of the promised land, and it was intended that the children of Israel would go from there and inherit the land. In other words, it took the children of Israel 40 years to travel the distance they could have done 11 days.

Moses had many great traits as a leader, even with his doubts at the beginning of his journey, he was able to stand up to Pharaoh. He was determined to fight for his people's freedom.

The Israelites' goal was to get out of Egypt– to just get out of the rut that they were in for hundreds of years. Once they got out, did they stop to think – “well, what's next after we do get out?” It got to the point where they ended up wandering the wilderness, living in extreme conditions, experiencing trials that could have all been prevented if they accepted the goal of

getting to the promised land from the start. Encouraging your people, your team, and yourself that there is an end goal makes the journey more bearable.

Leading 5 people can be hard let alone millions of people. And with that big of a group, you really must know where you're going. There will be times in your leadership journey – whether alone or as a team – where you will face friction from your followers. Even if you and your team have clear-cut goals, there is a high possibility of pushback.

It is impossible to please everyone. Even if you are doing everything humanly possible on your end to reach your goals – there is a chance that your followers will not see those goals in the same light as you do. And that is okay, that does not mean that you should give up on those goals or steer away from your vision just because of the obstacles being placed on you and your team.

Be kind to yourself, be kind to your team. Let your team know that even with the pushback, your goals are still attainable. In a book I read this year called the Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg he mentions a man by the name of Howard Schultz – most commonly known for being the CEO of Starbucks, where he says,

“I really, genuinely believe that if you tell people that they have what it takes to succeed, they'll prove you right.” (Duhigg, 149). Believing in your team and letting your team know that you believe in them will without a doubt ease the process of hitting your goals, even when they may at first glance seem impossible.

Ask yourself, ask your team...what do we want to accomplish this year? What legacy do we want to leave? Is our goal to have more events/initiatives on campus to create connections within our study body? Is our goal to push for the academic betterment of our university courses? Is our goal to bridge the gap between freshmen and upperclassmen?

And the list could go on. But the amazing thing is, once you set that clear cut goal – the decisions that you make as a team going forward will be much more efficient. When ideas are being discussed and decided upon, having those clear endgame goals will help to sift through those ideas. Ridding the ones that do not align with your goals and focusing your team's energy on the ones that do.

In a podcast I listened to about 3 weeks ago called “How I Built This” – which is a podcast about innovators, business owners, etc. There was an interview with Gary Erickson – the founder of Clif Bars. Erickson shares how Clif Bars was going to sell their business to Quaker

Oats due to his partner in the business wanting to sell (as the business was growing too rapidly and she got scared with all the responsibilities and potential issues that could arise).

They were about to sign on the deal when Erickson at the last minute decided he did not want to sell. He had a gut feeling not to sell. This company meant everything to him. He had built it from the ground up and even named it after his dad. He knew that getting bought out by a larger company would change the way his company ran.

Because he had a vision of how he wanted his company to look like years down the line, he listened to that gut feeling. Because he could see where he wanted his business to go – he was able to listen, to listen to what he knew would be best for his company.

Because he chose not to sell the business, he had to come up with the 60 million dollars that his partner would have received from selling the business (due to her owning 50% of the company). At first, his employees saw this as an impossible task, but Erickson did not give up. He didn't give up on his company and he didn't give up on his employees.

He spoke with them every day, telling them that it was possible to achieve their goal. Because he was consistent with telling his people that they could do it – they started to really believe for themselves that they could. After 9 years, they were able to pay off the 60 million dollars.

Even if you don't see the repercussions of your work during your lifetime or the time you are in that leadership position that initiates a domino effect – that doesn't mean your goals won't be achieved one day, even if not directly by you. Moses never got to go into the Promise Land Himself – many of the Israelites that he brought out of Egypt didn't get to either – their children did. Even though Moses messed up a lot, He was still one of the best leaders of all time – highly favoured by God for His dedication to the children of Israel.

God does not bash us for the mistakes we make as a person, so why should we ever think that He would be disappointed in us for the mistakes we make as a leader? Struggling is human. Hitting roadblocks in your leadership journey is something that every leader goes through.

As a leader, going through those difficult times in your leadership journey helps build your character, allows you to become empathetic and relatable to your team and those you are leading, enhances your problem-solving skills, creates credibility, boosts adaptability, and most importantly creates a humble servant leader.

Listen to those that keep you accountable, those that critique you... when you as a leader can listen to the constructive advice being given to you, that means that you can use those obstacles to reach your goals. It is up to you to take those mistakes and use them as tools for you to become a better leader. And that takes me to point number 2.

2. Inventions Aren't Made In A Day, Neither are Leaders

This is the concept that you should take note of everything that you learn in life – you never know when you will use that information. Nothing should go unnoticed or glanced over when it comes to bettering yourself as a person and as a leader.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was a true Renaissance polymath—a person with expertise in a wide range of subjects. I guess you could say he was a man of many talents. He was a painter, sculptor, architect, scientist, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, and more.

His curiosity and thirst for knowledge led him to study various fields in depth. Throughout his life, da Vinci was constantly observing and learning from the world around him. He kept detailed notebooks filled with sketches, scientific observations, artistic concepts, and ideas for inventions. He studied anatomy to create more accurate depictions of the human body in his artworks, made groundbreaking observations on the flow of blood in the human heart, and designed innovative machines that were way ahead of his time.

Da Vinci's ability to apply knowledge from multiple disciplines allowed him to create unique and groundbreaking works that have left a lasting impact on art, science, and engineering. His growth in knowledge over his lifetime allowed him to create a legacy that continues to inspire and influence people even today.

Leonardo da Vinci's story is a testament to the power of continuous learning and the profound impact that can be achieved by applying accumulated knowledge over the long run.

Whether it's a conversation you have with someone while waiting in line at the cafeteria, a podcast you listen to on your daily run, an impactful verse you come across when doing your devotional, or even a lyrical masterpiece you come across on Spotify for new music Friday, those are all possible tools in bettering you as a leader.

What that could look like is different for everyone, but one thing we all have in common is that there is a very low chance that we could track everything we've ever heard or learned all in our head forever. The information you gain through the years must be tangible.

For me, I have a notebook where I write notes from the books I read, the sermons I hear at church, the small group sessions I join, and the podcasts I listen to.

As Albert Sweitzer – a Doctor, Missionary, Philosopher, Musician and 1952 Nobel Peace Prize recipient said, “Learn as much as you can about as much as you can”. To me what this piece of advice means is to not limit ourselves. Keep an open mind, have a willing and teachable character. By doing so, we will all gain a more well-rounded perspective on life.

As we gain more and more understanding of the world and of the people we lead – it will push us to become more and more committed to our goals. Our minds are very powerful–telling yourself you can do something – greatly increases your probability of being able to do it.

“Don’t just be gifted, be committed” be committed to your goals – this was a line I had heard and taken note of at the Elevate Conference in 2019 which was a program in Banff that partnered with Burman. 4 years ago, I was a freshman, listening in on an inspirational talk – now God provides me with the opportunity to do that for others. Absorb every piece of information – it may not be nourishing or relevant for your life in that exact chapter or season – but it may be just a couple years down the line – you never know! Continuously take and actively seek opportunities to invest in your growth. Knowledge can and will come in full circle. Take initiative for yourself.

Now, contextual intelligence is the ability to spot opportunity where others don’t (Chase the Lion Page 58 by Mark Batterson). Being able to identify opportunities for growth can be one of the most beneficial traits to build on. One person may view a workshop or an inspirational talk as a waste of time where they could be doing something else – whereas a person with contextual intelligence would see it as a means of bettering themselves.

I want to applaud each and every one of you here today – each of you in this room have that trait of contextual intelligence. You did not have to be here this weekend; you were not forced to be here...you made that decision for yourself. You recognized the Saruk Program for Leadership Development was and is an opportunity for you to become a better leader, a better person – a person that strives to continue to build on becoming the best version of themselves. **I applaud you for being here** and I have no doubt that as we continue throughout this weekend – that we will all gain incredible insights from the various talks, workshops, and networking opportunities.

Speaking of seeking opportunities...The 2021-2022 Burman school year was my 3rd year being a student at Burman. This was the year that I got the call from God to take a year off the

following year to become a student missionary. At first, I was really scared and to be honest there were moments where I did not want to continue with the process because I felt as if the year was going to be a huge pause on my life.

Growing up, I had always pictured myself going to university, completing the four years of my degree, graduating, starting a career, so on and so forth. Taking a year off seemed in my human mind as a year where I would get left behind by everyone else my age.

I had thoughts like, “My accounting classmates at Burman have been my classmates since high school, we’ve gone through the whole program together, cried over final projects together, and thankfully had many times as well where we succeeded together.” Now that would all be gone because I was going to take a year off.

I would see my classmates all graduate without me, get degrees without me, start careers ahead of me – these were the doubts that were being placed inside my head. Even though my classmates that graduated this past spring weren’t necessarily part of my “team”, it still felt that way, because they were the people that I had shared my entire university experience with.

As my mission year went on, I began to see more and more God’s purpose for me taking a year off. I learned how to work with people I had just met, that were very different than me, different childhood backgrounds, different ethnicities, different ages, but not different goals. Each of us as missionaries had the shared goal of being a blessing in the school we were teaching at and being a servant for the church and community we were a part of. Even though we worked with teachers that were over 30 years older than us, we were able to work in harmony, because of that shared vision of changing our kids’ lives for the better (educationally, and spiritually).

Each of us missionaries worked alongside a main teacher in our school. I was the secondary teacher for the grade 5-8 multi-grade classroom. My partnering teacher was Mr. Joey Freitas (who was also the school principal). Even with our age gap of 30 years, we both had that shared vision of being a solid figure in our kid’s lives – where many of them were coming from broken homes.

Any time a situation would arise where a child needed discipline or extra love we would take turns handling the various conflicts that would arise. I really appreciated how Mr. Freitas would give me autonomy in handling conflicts with my students. He never micromanaged me

or made me feel as if I did not know how to handle the situation because of my age or life experience of 21 years.

There was a particular situation in which we took in three boys from the other multigrade classrooms into our classroom instead of suspending them. These 3 boys (2 in grade 2 and 1 in grade 1) did not know how to properly use their words and would act out violently instead – leading them to being sent into our classroom for a couple of weeks to learn from the upper graders on how to play fair during gym class, how to share school supplies, and how to be a good teammate/group participant for classroom activities and projects.

One day we allowed these three boys to play with a strategy game called “kadoodle” they had been in our classroom for a couple weeks already and we had seen their growth in learning how to get along with one another. Mr. Freitas and I came to the executive decision that we both gave the 3 boys the benefit of the doubt that they could handle working together on this game. Within only a few minutes 1 of the boys had cursed out one of the other boys using very vile language. Now mind you – these boys were only 6-8 years old.

Mr. Freitas and I then had to have a very serious sit down talk with the boys. And something that I continued to learn as I would handle these types of situations throughout the school year, was that the reason why these kids were acting out this way was not out of mere spite of wanting to cause a ruckus at school, but it was because of the way they were being treated in their homes. School was the only place where they experienced true love and respect from their peers and from their teachers.

As a leader and as a team player you will come across many moments in which you will have teammates making decisions or setting a tone with the team based on mere emotions because of what is going on in their life. This has the potential to cause a drift in your team dynamic. **When these moments arise**, it’s essential to look to your shared vision that you’ve set and the goals you’ve created as a reference point during these times of disagreement and conflict. As you and your team refer to your common purpose and objectives – it will create a common ground to resolve issues.

Another example of conflict management that took place during my mission year to some may seem minute – but had the potential to grow into something big. Living in an apartment with people you know normally is easier, or even becoming roommates with someone you knew in high school. But to live with 3 other adult women who I had just met was something completely out of my norm.

The mistake we made was not clearly defining our household duties at the **BEGINNING** of the school year. We dragged it on for a couple weeks to the point where some of us felt as if we were pulling more weight than the others – like filling the generator with gas every day, being the person who always did all the dishes or cooked the dinner. **It got to the point** where we even got quite annoyed with one another. Don't wait until there is back talk, annoyance, or frustration within your team before you clearly define your roles. What I realized was that you can do nothing wrong and still do nothing right.

When I started to see that this was beginning to happen, I created a spreadsheet of who would be responsible for what chore every single day. A simple 5-minute task saved us for the rest of the year – preventing any confusion between us as to who was responsible for what. Having clearly defined goals not only improves communication but also **accountability**.

The number of lessons I learned about leadership and team effectiveness in my mission year are quite endless. By the time my mission year came to an end – I had learned and experienced a boatload of strategies on how to work on a team. These were experiences that I most likely would not have experienced had I not taken a year off to serve on the Big Island of Hawaii. **Once again – inventions are not made in a day** – a leader is not made in a day – I took note of what I had learned on my mission year, big and small. Because I know without a doubt that the lessons I learned will be applicable to me today and repeatedly in the future.

One of the biggest lessons I learned and am continuing to learn is that leadership is multifaceted. There are many traits that make for an excellent leader. Which leads us to our final point.

3. The friendliness of a capybara and the confidence of a lion

The concept that you should build connections with everyone while leading with strength and confidence.

I did a quick Google search one day while I was working on this talk - searching what the friendliest animal is and the top result that kept coming up was a capybara. A capybara is the largest living rodent in the world - they're known for their social nature. A capybara gets along with turtles, birds, ducks, rats, monkeys, cats, dogs and even crocodiles. They have no issues sharing their space and they get along with both predator and prey. Sometimes capybaras serve as a cruise guide for other animals, letting them sit atop their heads as they swim through the water.

Like the capybara, we too can grow in building a network with those we meet. As a leader, it's important to be willing to talk to people. I personally am still working on this - there are times where my introverted side comes out and I feel intimidated to talk to people - even when I know I should. **Being friendly and approachable** helps you establish trust with your team members and colleagues. When people feel comfortable around you, they are more likely to communicate openly, share ideas, and express concerns. This then creates a positive and collaborative work environment.

As leaders - our influence and persuasion is very dependent on the way we interact with our people. A friendly demeanor allows you to connect emotionally with others, making it easier to convince them of your ideas, motivate them to take action, and align them with your vision. When you have vision – you will attract people of the same mindset. When you set goals for yourself, you realize you can't stay stationary. **Meaning you have to go outside** of your comfort zone to achieve those goals. You actually have to get up and move. You have to get up and meet people. You have to get up and communicate with God. You have to get up and take a risk.

Harvard PhD – Mark Granovetter did a study on 282 men – and their current employment – he discovered that weak-tie acquaintances were often more important than strong-tie friends, because weak-ties give us access to social networks where we don't otherwise belong. Your friends are in the same “world” as you – you come to realize how much they know that you also already know. **Acquaintances on the other hand** are more likely to know something you don't.

Acquaintances, in short, represent a source of social connection, and the more acquaintances you have the more connections you can build off of. We rely on acquaintances to give us access to opportunities and a world to which we don't belong. – (the Tipping Point – by Malcom Gladwell.

Friendliness also helps contribute to the creation of a strong team spirit. When team members perceive their leader as approachable, they are more likely to feel valued and motivated, which can boost their engagement and lead to commitment towards the team's goals. The way you treat your team has long-term impacts.

Friendliness and a strong network can lead to a lasting legacy. People remember leaders who treated them well and offered support. These positive impressions can lead to enduring professional relationships and a positive legacy that continues to influence your school or organization even after you've moved on.

I'm personally learning how to be more vocal about telling people I appreciate them - whether I'm working on a team with them or not. I'm working on actively showing and telling people that I value them. I'm learning how to be more affirming for other people. I'm still growing. And what I'm learning as I grow is that people will want to contribute when they feel valued by the leaders.

I know for myself, these points once again are aspects I'm trying to grow in. You may be thinking to yourself, well if I'm not friendly, does that mean I won't be a good leader? No. Leadership is made up of many different components. Friendliness isn't the only one of them - but I do believe that the more we are willing to speak with people regardless of their status or personality and just have that desire to connect with people - that it will help us gain more and more perspective as to how we can make a difference anywhere we are at.

In the 2021-22 school year - when I was in my 3rd year at Burman, I was the SA President. We were working under unusual circumstances - but we did what we could under the circumstances we were in. We didn't get to lead in the same way as years prior. Everything had an extra step - or an extra three steps. We as a team were trying to rebuild that Burman culture - which was without a doubt quite a hard task. Our leadership situation as a team looked different than how it did in Burman from previous years - but that was more than okay.

As Trey McLaughlin the musician says, "The reason why you should listen to great artists (or in my words - learn from great leaders) is to learn from their technique – not to sound exactly like them." As a leader – don't think that you're doing leadership "wrong" just because it looks different than another strong leader that you know.

Having an approachable personality makes for a great leader - and just as much does having confidence and drive.

And those are the characteristics of a lion. When hunting, each lion takes up a specific position or role - just how clearly defining responsibilities improves productivity. Having more than one vision creates division (Kyle Smith).

A lion's authority is as far as its territory stretches – when non-pride lions invade – the alpha male asserts authority. As a leader – you should never ignore conflicts, as small as they may be. Act upon issues quickly. Leaders need good strategies for resolving disputes – if that means getting a third party involved, then do so.

Lions go bravely in their own direction – they make their own path - they don't follow the herd. Even if you and your team are doing things the unconventional way, doesn't mean it isn't effective. When a lion attacks they are bold, they are committed. In the same way you and your teammates must be committed to your vision and goals.

The interplay between the capybara's nature and the lion's authoritative leadership encapsulates a powerful concept: the art of forging connections while showing strength and confidence. Much like the sociable capybara, we too can nurture networks, as leaders, by engaging in conversations, even when challenged by introverted tendencies. **Remember**, leadership is multifaceted, and while friendliness is effective, it coexists with confidence and drive. Just as the lion asserts its authority, addressing conflicts efficiently and boldly, effective leaders act promptly.

To wrap up - these three main points display the importance of a holistic and strategic approach to personal and leadership development. The analogy that "When You Can See, You Can Hear" emphasizes that having a clear vision and well-defined goals is essential for effective team communication.

The concept that "Inventions Aren't Made In A Day, and Neither are Leaders" reminds us that every piece of knowledge and experience acquired along the way contributes to our growth as individuals and leaders.

Lastly, drawing inspiration from the friendliness of a capybara and the leadership of a lion, the idea that we should build relationships with warmth while demonstrating strong and confident leadership emphasizes the balance between approachability and strength.

These points intertwine to define that true leadership is a continuous journey of learning, adapting, and connecting with others, guided by a clear vision and unwavering determination for you and your team. Thank you to you all for your time and attention. And I hope we all have an amazing weekend ahead.