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At the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

The Future of Leadership

synopsis of the April 2005 WFS Washington DC Chapter luncheon program with Herb Rubenstein, Growth Strategies, Inc.; synopsis by Dave Stein

Just when we thought we had read every self-help book and watched every video on leadership, along comes Herb Rubenstein as our guest speaker at the WFS Washington DC Chapter luncheon meeting last April, co-sponsored by the **Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars**, to give some valuable new insights.

Leaders are people who see existing problems and develop solutions for those problems with the support of the group they lead, said Rubenstein. In contrast, “leaders of leaders” play the more important role of developing organizational “platforms” for preventing whole classes of problems from arising in the first place and guiding leaders when problems arise within the organization. The future would be brighter if society encouraged more leaders of leaders to emerge, but most Western societies encourage the emergence of only leaders, not leaders of leaders.

People don’t like to be marginalized and will increasingly demand participation in decisions that affect them. The future of leadership is about inclusion, notwithstanding the tendency of those who continue looking at life as a chess game, win-lose. Even with the trend toward inclusion, so many leaders in business, government and voluntary organizations build “Berlin walls” around themselves.

Examples of inclusion vs. exclusion abound in government, sports, and business. In sports, the person who creates the schedule is the most powerful person, as it is he/she who manages the “conversation.” Likewise in the case of scheduling shifts for firemen, policemen, and nurses. The airlines exclude passengers from their own conversations about how prices are set. Religious authorities have been known to stifle conversation among their followers. Similar examples are pervasive in contemporary US politics.

How do we get to a future of inclusion, asked Rubenstein? Via IT. IT can help decision-makers manipulate people, but it also helps those who struggle to lead more than it helps those who try to keep them from leading. The cell phone, especially the camera-enabled cell phone, makes everyone a member of the Fourth Estate. IT can help one process public opinion information faster and at virtually no cost. At the same time, it can exacerbate GIGO (garbage in, garbage out). Additionally, it can support another

means to manage a conversation, in which one makes it free-for-all and then sifts through it via word searches to extract those facts that supports his/her position.

***Herb Rubenstein** has written, lectured extensively and developed a unique perspective on leadership that he supports with many examples of successful leaders. He is an attorney, a Founding Director and member of the Association of Professional Futurists, and a Founding Member and Advisory Board Member of the Society for Leadership Change. His consulting firm, Growth Strategies, Inc., conducts leadership audits and designs custom leadership courses for clients. Many of his writings on leadership and other management topics are available at <http://www.growth-strategies.com>. He is co-author of Breakthrough, Inc.: High Growth Strategies for Entrepreneurial Organizations. His next book will consider whether in the modern world people who have been only followers can easily become leaders.*

POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM (send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):

- *It's your turn to be a leader of leaders! How would you transform the conversation and provide opportunities for people of opposing persuasions to engage in "constructive dialog" – and on which highly-polarizing issues?*
- *What other important issues are excluded from "the dialog"?*
- *To which types of leaders are Rubenstein's comments most applicable? Emergent leaders or appointed leaders? Conviction leaders or consensus leaders? Task-oriented, people-oriented, or process-oriented leaders? And which of these types of leaders will be most prevalent several years from now?*

Send your thoughts to forum@futuretakes.org, itself a promoter of constructive dialog.