Great discussion in class last Friday. Before I begin describing it, I need to clear up my misunderstanding on last week's homework assignment. Maybe I was taking it too literally. Let's try again. Roger would like us to study our ego-utility, which isn't quite the same as usefulness. Think about what are you are known for, what people count on you to do, and about your self identification in the organization. In addition, contemplate the shadow of your ego-utility. That probably won't be as fun, but try anyways.

Now I will relate some of our discussion with our guest Provost Koob, who will henceforth be referred to as Bob. Roger first invited us all to keep in mind what our relationship is to hierarchy during our discussion. Where are you coming from and how does that affect what you hear? Very interesting, and in addition, you now have to sift through MY relationship to hierarchy and how it affects what I write. Let's see if I can relay a reasonably accurate account of our conversation.

So our class was interested in asking Bob how the 'expectations' of your ability go up as you move up in rank in academia. You don't actually change overnight, but somehow others can't tell that. We asked Bob if he is sure of himself or does he question himself. Bob is comfortable with his values, but not always confident that he has the right answer. So he listens carefully to what people say. Kind of what Roger says about leadership being 'the quality of your attention'. And Bob's story about confidence, if I got this correctly, is that he once had a fear of heights so to overcome it learned to be a pilot. That is a reasonably dramatic way of increasing one confidence. Ground school, anyone?

Bob says he learns from failure. Once you fail, you know what you didn't know, so you can fix the problem and not make that mistake again. His story on this was from his first week as a department chair where he learned that he needed to consult with all the faculty before making a decision. Raise your hand if you learned this one the hard way too. OK, you can put your hands down now. Bob also learned that people are far more likely to own a decision if they are involved in making it. Collaboration is a good thing.

Bob's philosophy seems to be leadership as service. He encourages people to aim to work themselves out of a job. Gosh that's brilliant (author editorial). Bob employed this with Charlie, the retired Associate Dean. Charlie was encouraged to educate people to solve their problem themselves and Charlie was successful. Tonia also identifies with this approach, which is her main task in her job. Tonia doesn't see succeeding in working herself out of a job any time soon. Nonetheless, Roger asked us all to reflect on when we help others to solve their own problems and when we just solve them.

Ever wanted to be a Dean? Bob sees a Dean as the ultimate middle manager. Are you as Dean a leader? Maybe someday, but at first, it's all about context. You have to convince everyone of the other sides position at all times (administrators vs faculty). Bob thinks communication skills are very important for a Dean. You need to be able to understand what is possible in the given context, and perhaps you earn respect from both sides along the way. Bob has navigated being a Chair, Dean, VP and President, and yet somehow all that potential was not apparent because he was once told he should become a barber. How is that possible? So can someone help me out here? I won the Home Economics award for my high school graduating class. Any idea what I'm destined for???

Roger wanted to hear about the relationship between leadership and conflict. Bob sees everyone as having a self-interest and those interests needs to be aligned. One good technique is to stay on message and keep the message simple. Kind of like his 'Student Success' campaign. Kurt and Roger both saw how Bob has created a shared stable point in the dynamic tension model of vision and reality. It's like what Roger says about leadership as narrative.' Cal Poly is a story we all enact every day, and we can change the story over time. But does Bob know how to do this without being in Roger's class?

Roger commented on the 'throw away' lines that Bob makes while speaking and how effect they are. Bob responded that he seems to have a smarter person inside. Roger concludes that Bob is intuitive. That leads both Tonia and I to agree that some people just 'have it' when it comes to leadership. Bob says that it's different for everyone. For example, he sees himself as always being interested in a problem to solve, but Bob Glidden sees it as always having people to be interested in. Both are valid.

Class ended with people trying to ask just 'one more question' and Bob got to tell us the story of how Cal Poly faculty retreat to helping students as a mechanism for surviving tough times. Bob seems to always have a story to tell, so Roger is asking us to write our own leadership story for homework this week.

Many thanks to Bob and everyone in the class for making last week's discussion so enlightening. Bring your leadership stories to class on Friday.