

### INTRODUCTION

Ignatius never talked about “leadership” *per se* and he gave limited insights into what would constitute a good leader. As a written legacy, master Ignatius left us his understanding on this subject in part IX of the Constitutions. However, we can learn more about his leadership through his actions, for this endeavour, the letters he wrote are a very rich source of information. In the letters we can see him in action, with all the worries and stresses of day-to-day life. In addition, we can sense how the Spiritual Exercises had practical benefits for his leadership work. The way he managed to balance the tension of the stress in leading an institution and keeping a vibrant spiritual life can be a great source of inspiration and learning for those who wishing to grow in their leadership task.

### MAIN IDEAS

This documents suggests two main directions:

- 1) How Ignatius viewed leadership in the Society of Jesus (by reflecting on the qualities and portrait he sketched for the Superior General)
- 2) Elements that guide leadership from an ignatian way of proceeding (drawing from the growing body of literature on this field)

### The Portrait of Superior General as described by Ignatius

Chapter 2 of Part IX of the Constitutions is titled “*The Kind of Person the Superior General Ought to Be*” [723-735]. It provides a set of characteristics suggested by Ignatius 500 years ago and that are relevant for us today when discussing about leadership.

Given that some words in the original document are archaic and thus, difficult to understand, we turn to Fr. Nick Austin’s 2015 document: [The Qualities of the Superior General Today](#). Reading the full version is highly recommended but we provide the key highlights below.

The leader that Ignatius desires to lead the Society of Jesus is not a mere expert, but a particular kind of person, someone who is a ‘mirror and model’ for all of us (CN [726]), someone who can lead by example and who should have the following traits:

Above all, someone of *spiritual depth*, friends with God in prayer, action and relationships.

With *inner freedom* of heart,

Who leads with a *humble, just and strong love*.

Who is *proactive*: a starter and a finisher.

Who takes care of his *health and appearance*. Spirit, Soul and Body,

Who lives the *magis*.

#### The essentials:

A sound character

A deep love for the Society of Jesus

Good sense

We all fall short; we trust in God’s grace.

AMDG

These characteristics appear in order of relevance. The first is explicitly religious and the rest more humanist. Some of them are oriented to the leadership task and others more centered on the qualities of the person.

Fr. Austin's summary provides insights that are easy to remember, and if we go down into his analysis of the original text we find relevant information for our daily lives as leaders: *"Ignatius gives us six qualities, or, more accurately, six sets of qualities. They correspond to what I call Spirit, Heart ('affections'), Head ('understanding'), Hands ('executive power'), Body and Externals. Without dwelling on each, I shall try to single out what I consider most distinctive about Ignatius's vision of Jesuit leadership."*

**Friendship with God:** In the first quality, regarding Spirit, Ignatius wants someone who is 'closely united with God our Lord and [has] familiarity with him in prayer and in all his operations' (CN [723]). The spiritual qualities of a potential future Fr. General are the most important. The experience of God is different from an ideological or theoretical knowledge acquired through study. It is something that nurtures, excites, and inspires interiorly who we are and what we do. Such an experience is the first characteristic of an Ignatian leader.

**Magnanimity:** Ignatius identifies 'magnanimity' as especially important for Fr General (CN [728]). Traditionally, this virtue is defined as being willing to do things worthy of great glory. Some therefore bristle at the mention of magnanimity today, because it tends to connote a self-importance and insufferable pride. One need only consult Aristotle's famous portrait of the magnanimous man to be aware that the Greek ideal of the great-souled man, who is self-sufficient, looks down on his inferiors, and seeks honour for himself, is hardly biblical or Christian. And yet there is a core to this originally Greco-Roman quality, namely, the willingness always to go further in the good, which enabled it to be appropriated by the Christian tradition through a transformative marriage with the biblical virtues of humility and love. 'A big heart open to God and to others': an accurate description of the holy and selfless ambition of magnanimity, which, for Ignatius, leads us to 'initiate great undertakings in the service of God our Lord'.

**Practical wisdom:** It is not surprising that Ignatius emphasises the need for academic excellence in the superior general, since 'learning is highly necessary for one who will have so many learned men in his charge' (CN [729]). Today we are conscious of the importance of learning for the contribution the Society can offer the Church, as Pope Benedict XVI reminded us at GC 35. Yet even more important than intellectual accomplishments, for Ignatius, is another virtue. It is variously named 'prudence', 'discretion', or 'discernment'.

**Some other qualities:** there are also some other qualities that are worthy of mention: freedom, a kindness that is just, proactivity, and indifference to 'success'.

**Freedom:** Ignatius says that Fr. General must be 'free from all inordinate affections, having them tamed and mortified' (CN [726]). This paragraph reflects a traditional cluster of virtues especially important to Ignatius, temperance, decorum, modesty, which he understands as the manifestation of the indifference the Principle and Foundation at the level of affectivity.

**Kindness that is just:** 'he should know how to mingle the required rectitude and severity with kindness and gentleness' (CN [727]). In a superior, a soft heart without fairness and justice can degenerate into a kind of indulgence. Similarly, a justice that is not tempered by compassion and love can be cold and hard.

**Proactivity:** It is worth mentioning that Ignatius places emphasis upon the pragmatic virtues of the 'executive power, such as solicitude, constancy and perseverance' (CN[728]). For the general must not merely initiate great projects, but 'persevere in them with the needed constancy, neither losing courage in the face of the contradictions, even from persons of high rank and power, nor allowing himself to be deflected by their entreaties or threats from what reason and the divine service require.' He repeats this later by identifying the virtue of being 'vigilant and solicitous in undertaking enterprises and vigorous in carrying them through to their completion and perfection, rather than careless and remiss about leaving them begun but unfinished' (CN [730]).

**Indifference:** while Ignatius values the virtues of execution, he cannot justly be accused of a worldly attachment to success. For he also recommends the kind of equanimity of soul that is the fruit of discernment of spirits and freedom from disordered attachments. 'He should be superior to all eventualities, not letting himself be exalted by success or cast down by adversity' (CN [728]). This equanimity can of course only come from a profound spiritual indifference, an indifference even to 'success' and 'failure'. Even at his most pragmatic, Ignatius does not forget the underlying spiritual qualities required in the general.

### **Ignatius as a Leader - What do experts have to say?**

Ignatius' various writings, along with numerous articles and reflections written about him, give us an idea about the personality and leadership style of the Founder of the Society of Jesus. We list below some elements suggested by experts on the field, several of which have strong relations to the points raised in Part IX of the Constitutions. We invite you to go through the list of resources for a deeper exploration of the topic.

Ignatius' **leadership was inspired from his spiritual life**. His profound experience of God gave meaning to his roles and tasks. This relationship to God allowed him to experience personal transformation, where his **weaknesses and vulnerabilities** became a source of grace. He was able to accept his physical, emotional and spiritual wounds as a place to meet God's transforming power, and thus meet other people in their own humanity.

Probably one of the best documents to see Ignatius in action is the *Memoriale* of da Câmara which provides first hand examples of Ignatius' day to day dealings as a person and as a superior, it allow us to see him in a more intimate and human way, both in his gifts and shortcomings. He shares incidents where Ignatius had a very short temper and **treated people close to him with severity**, thus painting a more "human" Ignatius which allows us to connect to him. But da Câmara also shows how the most tender love was exhorted by the same man who was sometimes severe: *"But he always inclines more towards love, imo [indeed] to such a point that everything appears as love. And because of this he is so beloved by all; there is no one in the Society who does not love him greatly, and does not himself think that the Father loves him very dearly.*

In his address to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Pope Francis draws attention to the importance of **service and care for others** in Ignatius life: "if Ignatius' heart was inclined in one direction or the other, it was toward helping his neighbours; so much to the point that he would get angry whenever he was told that someone wanted to spend time with the Society in order to save his soul". "Ignatius did not want people who were good for their own sake if they did not want to place themselves at the service of their neighbours" (Aicardo I, point 10, p. 41).

In an interview with Fr. John Dardis SJ, ignatian expert Fr. Philip Endean SJ reflects on three interesting traits of Ignatius' way of proceeding ([video link](#)):

- First, his **ability to attract very talented people around him, connect them to a common purpose and free them to do their own things**. Spotting Fabre and Xavier's talents and sending them on mission, and later on channeling Polanco (an administrative genius) and Nadal's talents in setting up a Society that is much bigger and much more centered on the schools.
- Second, his **care for people who are very vulnerable**. This could be illustrated by how well and carefully he writes the paragraphs in the Constitutions about dismissing people from the Society - this is the part of the Constitutions where the word "love" occurs most frequently.
- Finally, **his ability to abstract from his own very powerful spiritual experience** (that we know of in the autobiography and the spiritual diary) and instead to leave us with two texts (the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions) that somehow or another invite us into a pathway of discovery. Ignatius was able to learn from his own experience and yet take that out of what he writes. His very colorful personality appears nowhere in these documents, and if we didn't have the autobiography, the spiritual exercises would tell us nothing about the author of this text.

During the year 2018 a group of leadership experts was brought together by the International Association of Jesuit Universities to reflect on "Leadership with an Ignatian way of proceeding in Jesuit Higher Education". After some research they came up with the dispositions and attitudes that leaders who want to incarnate Ignatian spirituality are invited to foster. We cite some of the following below:

- A familiarity with the foundational elements of Ignatian spirituality based on lived experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius
- A humility born from understanding one's self as beloved even as a person imperfect and limited. Out of this humility, the primary disposition of one's formal authority is in service to others (servant leadership / men and women with and for others)
- An understanding of one's self as interdependent with others and dependent on God for the fulfillment of apostolic and institutional goals. Along these lines, an Ignatian leader understands how to build and sustain effective teams conscious of grace, growth in the union of hearts and minds, etc.
- An acknowledgment of the partiality of one's perspectives and an active pursuit of other points of view in order to come to a more objective understanding
- A willingness to be open to being transformed in and through relationship and engagement with others
- An understanding of magis, a restlessness with mediocrity and a dedication to excellence rooted in gratitude rather than ambition or desire for prestige; Ignatian leaders discern on the basis of principles and faith, asking "what is the greater, more universal good?"
- A commitment to cura personalis—the personal and loving care and education of the whole person, including all the stakeholders involved in our institutions

- A commitment to cura apostolica - an appreciation of the Jesuit work as in the service of the Kingdom of God, according to the universal mission of the Society of Jesus, the mandate of the Church, and the specific contributions of Jesuit higher education
- A commitment to collaboration and networking, not only with colleagues within and among Jesuit works, but also with other religious orders, non governmental organizations, people of all socio-economic levels, and across cultures
- A commitment to serve those on the margins of society, especially those whose concerns or needs are not yet being met
- An awareness of the particular context and conditions in which people are working. The leadership needed in our current times is not simply management to sustain the status quo, but due to a variety of disruptive circumstances and conditions, we specify leadership capable to adapt and in some cases, transform our institutions to meet the increasing needs and opportunities of the times. Such leadership for transformation and innovation requires prophetic imagination and the capacity to envision a hopeful future different from the current reality; such imagination is especially characteristic of leaders informed by Ignatian spirituality, and the commitment to the mission of justice, healing, and reconciliation.

## EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Reflecting on Ignatius' style as a leader and recognizing in his vulnerabilities a place of meeting others in their humanity
2. Reflecting on the qualities that Ignatius provides for the leader of the Society of Jesus
3. Becoming familiar with the literature on leadership in the ignatian tradition

*“Leaders in an apostolic or gospel context must reinforce and motivate their members and communities to the values and attitudes that we consider evangelical. The primary function is the reinforcement and animation of these attitudes and values”*

**Fr. Adolfo Nicolás SJ**