

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



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He Changed The World

In Cresco, Iowa on March 25, 1914, future agronomist and humanitarian Dr. Norman Borlaug was born. After attending a one-room school house, Dr. Borlaug went on to the University of Minnesota where he received his Bachelor's of Science in Forestry and his Ph. D. in Plant Pathology and Genetics. With finances running low, Dr. Borlaug put his studies on hold and took a job as a leader with the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC was one of the Federal programs started during the Great Depression to provide meaningful work for the many that were unemployed. Dr. Borlaug later recalled that many of the men in the CCC were starving and he saw firsthand how much food would change them. Upon recalling this, Dr. Borlaug stated, "All of this left scars for me."

After studying plant diseases in college, Dr. Borlaug traveled to Mexico where farmers were battling a fungus called wheat rust. Over four years Dr. Borlaug grew thousands of lines of wheat in two different ecosystems. As a result of his efforts, a rust-resistant strain of wheat was developed that improved wheat yields by six hundred percent. Mexico went from being an importer of wheat to an exporter. Dr. Borlaug's wheat strains later led to the elimination of starvation in India. Once a starving nation needing to import wheat, India became an exporter.

In 1970 the Nobel Prize committee recognized Dr. Borlaug's work awarding him the Nobel Peace Prize and stated: "More than any other person of this age, he has helped provide bread for a hungry world." For his efforts and contributions to humanity, Dr. Borlaug also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977, the Public Welfare Medal in 2002, the Medal of Science in 2004, the Congressional Gold Medal in 2006 and several others.

So, what can we learn about leadership and growth from this great man?

1. He allowed experiences outside his primary focus area to speak into his life. It was the scars he bore in his soul from seeing his fellow countrymen starving that propelled him to a lifelong pursuit of greater yields in agriculture. A pursuit he maintained his entire life. In fact, in 1970 when the Nobel committee tried to reach him to let him know he was chosen, they could only reach his wife because Dr. Borlaug was in a wheat field outside of Mexico City. His efforts resulted in forty important strains of wheat.
2. Dr. Borlaug remained humble. When his wife finally reached him with the news of his Nobel Prize, he refused to believe it and replied to his wife "someone is just pulling your leg."
3. Dr. Borlaug lived the Law of Legacy. His students whom he called Hunger Fighters, continue the legacy of a man who helped provide bread for a hungry world by following his example of dedication and by applying his ideas to other crops.
4. He finished well. In 1984 at the age of 70, Dr. Borlaug began teaching and conducting research at Texas A&M University. At the age of 95, he passed away holding the title of Distinguished Professor of International Agriculture and the holder of the Eugene Butler Endowed Chair in Agriculture.

What about us? Who is the next Norman (or Norma) Borlaug with passions and abilities just waiting to be unleashed? Do we have someone on our team that with a bit of watering and fertilizing will blossom and change our world? Dr. Borlaug's example should inspire all of us to allow outside experiences to speak into our life and the lives of our team members. Are we making sure that we all are taking the time to experience life through trips, books, and volunteer opportunities? Will we remind ourselves each day that we have not yet arrived and that there is so much more to learn? Will each one of us take the time to pass on our passion and excitement to those who look up to us? And will we finish well? Will the memories we leave behind be of someone consumed with self and the pleasantries of life, or will those left behind say "until the end he continued to give to others"?