Michelle Obama: Living Life as a Leader

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According to Theo Haimann, “Leadership is the process by which an executive imaginatively directs, guides and influences the work of others in attaining specified goals”. Leadership is a position that allows one to exercise personal influences on a group of people and attain a set of goals by the collective effort of leader and followers. In a group of people, a leader arises by virtue of their incomparable personality traits and capabilities or by the common agreement of people. Leaders are expected to carry out certain roles and responsibilities; they generally leave a legacy behind. Women leadership has elicited quite a few debates that gender should not be a factor in whether an individual can become a leader or not. In the past few decades, women are able to break the traditional ceiling that barred them from taking a leadership position and demonstrated exceptional leadership skills. They are evolving constantly and attaining new milestones in contemporary time. the world has witnessed great women leaders such as Oprah Winfrey, Nelson Mandela, Margaret Thatcher, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Michelle Obama. Women generally have to strive against a myriad of odds as a leader especially when they belong to a group who has a long history of facing racial and ethnic discrimination. Michelle Obama, lawyer, community outreach worker and 44th First lady are seen to many as a strong leader owing to her undeniable great leadership traits and qualities.

# About Michelle Obama

Michelle Obama, is a writer, lawyer and remained the First Lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017. She got fame for being the spouse of the 44th U.S. president, Barack Obama. As the first lady of the states, she juggled between being a mother, a lawyer, a social rights advocate and a community activist. During the course of her life as the first lady, she stressed on many social issues such as poverty, education and health care. Her memoir, Becoming, shares her journey and experiences that shaped her life; from childhood to being the first lady (Obama, 2018). It is said that when she left the White House, she was more famous than her husband (Mundy, 2009). She emerged as a powerful woman in the midst of American elections when she took an active part in her husband’s election campaign, supporting him through all the defies and trials and became an insatiable supporter of Obama.

She was born to Fraser Robinson and Marian on January 17, 1964. Her dad was a city-pump operator by profession and mom was a secretary at Spiegel's. They were a close-knit small family lived in a small house on Chicago's South Side; they shared meals and enjoyed playing games collectively. By the age of four, she and her brother learned to read owing to her family’s high influence on education and hopped the second grade. The moment she reached in sixth grade, she learned French in her school's gifted program. She joined the first high school in the city for gifted children, Whitney M. Young Magnet High School. Following the footsteps of her brother, she joined Princeton University and completed her B.A in sociology. At Harvard Law School, she studied law and took part in many demonstrations aimed at the hiring of minority professors and students (Mundy, 2009).

She wedded Barack Obama on October 3, 1992, at Trinity United Church. She met her during her first job as a lawyer and she was assigned as an advisor to Barack. She caught the eye of a national audience and general public after she delivered a high-profile speech in 2004 at the Democratic National Convention. He was elected as a senator from Illinois in the same year. Furthermore, in 2007, she scaled back her own personal and professional life and worked really hard for her husband's run for presidential nomination (Mundy, 2009). Finally, Obama won the election and he was elected as the 44th president of the US in January 2009. Again in 2012, pursued reelection in 2012, she conscientiously crusaded on his behalf; during this time, she made many public appearances and travelled the country.

# Leadership Principles, Qualities and Traits

Michelle Obama was a brilliant, accomplished, superb first lady and in fact, one of the most outstanding in history. She engaged the American community in numerous ways from involving children to adults, plus she brought numerous concerts to the White House. Her tenure represented class, memorable speeches, and sadness at the end of an era. Although she was fashionable, she did not fall prey to her clothes, she was just as comfortable in jeans working in the garden (Matthews, Chaney, & Opiri, 2015). She is sorely missed by the Americans and It is because she put her own career aside and acted as a traditional First Lady, but with a twist. She embraced the popular culture and reached out to the younger generations in a way no other first lady has done before. She came from a humble background and that helped make her appear more genuine. Also, one could see she enjoyed the work she was doing. Since the First Ladies don't get a salary. Thus, her attitude and hard work make her the ultimate public servant.

Not in any particular order, but she is classy and graceful, compassionate and warm, highly intelligent and well-educated, down-to-earth, strong, energetic, and approachable, and naturally beautiful. *“One of the lessons that I grew up with was to always stay true to yourself and never let what somebody else says distract you from your goals,”* this quote of her well describes her. She is said to have incomparable traits and no one matches her in having so many strengths and attributes. She obviously has a wonderful relationship of mutual respect with her husband and is a devoted mother. She made the USA proud everywhere she went. In the face of incredibly ugly, vicious, juvenile vitriol directed openly at her by the racist right, she embodied the spirit of “When they go low, we go high.” Good leaders abide by the mores of the job to which they have been elected, like releasing their tax returns and not doing business with countries that are our enemies while they are in office. She led by shining example, just by being herself; zero phoniness, and no false steps. She has an instinctive grace and judgment that stood her in good stead during her White House years. Also at the end, everyone witnessed Michelle and Obama’s tact and grace welcoming Melania Trump, to the White house.

She has always held a strong position in the hearts of others, that makes her a great leader. A true leader stands before a crowd and is so vested in the interest of the success of their own party yet recognizing that it has the only goal to make America a better place. She possesses traits of an exceptional leader, something that makes her a strong leader. One of her most prominent traits is self-respect and respect for others. Good leaders show compassion, even for those with whom they disagree. They don’t pick fights for no reason. The best leaders are respectful of the people who are following them (Maxwell, 2007). If the leader is unable to see eye-to-eye with those who are helping accomplish your goals, they are much less likely to succeed. Additionally, those who guide with understanding, empathy, and care are often the individuals who produce the best results (rather than tyrannical types who dictate through intimidation, fear, and anger). Michelle has always shown respect to others as demonstrated by her choice of words in her speeches; decency, integrity, pride, and dignity are some of the words always witnessed in her speeches. She has always respected opinions of the Republicans, despite her own political stance as a Democrat.

Michele Obama has been such a popular First Lady because, although she is very intelligent, she has not used her intelligence for personal gain. She has applied herself to making Americans healthier rather than merely enriching herself. She has also been brave, courageous and gracious in rising above some of the unprecedented attacks on her appearance and race. The racism she and her husband and family have faced has been particularly vicious and hateful but she has been steadfast in ignoring it, even the threats of violence and focusing on making our country a better place. Truthfully, her efforts have been almost superhuman. She has been an exemplar of grace, goodwill, warmth, and courtesy. She has been everything any objective person could ask for in a First Lady and more.

Good leaders communicate and good leaders don’t denigrate (Maxwell, 2007). Good relational abilities is an expertise that can be educated. She is a capable speaker or a great presenter, she is a strong and well-versed or social advocate on a number of political topics, culturally aware, and she is socially connected. She was vocal about the harsh realities that American minorities had to face. She also utilized her incomparable communication skills to inspire others. Inspiring others is the sign of a compelling pioneer (Maxwell, 2007). Inspiration is best done by demonstration and direction, not by issuing a summons. In her speeches she has shared personal anecdotes, form her relationship with her husband to her life as a mother. She shared her personal story with to be able to resonate with other women of the country and empower black women towards breaking odds.

Good leaders stand up for what they believe in and give reasoned arguments for it. They always reach out, even if they know they will be rejected, to the other side (Maxwell, 2007). Michelle Obama stood up for what she felt was right; it was her strong character that made her fight for the social issues regardless of the fact how controversial they were. The strength of her character is reflected in this quote of her “*Through my education, I didn't just develop skills, I didn't just develop the ability to learn, but I developed confidence*. In addition to this, she demonstrated confidence in multiple ways, such as she never shied away from speaking out her mind. She further said, *“One of the lessons that I grew up with was to always stay true to yourself and never let what somebody else says distract you from your goals.”* Owing to her great confidence in herself, her voice resonated with the hearts and minds of many all over the world.

Good leaders foster good relationships with allies who we depend on, not dictators who have had their families murdered or jailed. Putting together solid groups that work excellently is another characteristic of amazing leaders. The opposite is additionally valid: if a group is helpless and wrecked, it is, for the most part, a disappointment in the advantage (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). Individuals are more inspired when a pioneer verbalizes his or her vision for a task or for the association, alongside the strides or objectives expected to accomplish it. Moreover, if a leader is unwilling to work at the same level of effort as what they are asking from the team, no would respect such a leader. Michele is an excellent example of ‘Leadership is earned’, and the best way to earn something is by working as hard as possible.

# Culture and Leadership

Leadership styles and traits have received much attention in the fields of psychology. Differences in the leadership styles have also been observed relating it to the culture, race and ethnicity. Leaders from ethnic minorities demonstrate a different leadership style as compared to the leadership style of others (van Emmerik, Euwema, & Wendt, 2008). Studies on the differences between the leadership styles of black, white, and Chicano subordinates reported that black supervisors were rated higher based on their work facilitation, cooperation, goal emphasis and managerial support. They are also considered to be more supportive of their subordinates. Findings of other studies also suggest that cultural background heavily influences the style of leadership adopted by many leaders. In addition, it is also supported by studies that leaders from ethnic minorities revel relatively highly engaging and dynamic leadership styles, that highly relates to the transformational leadership (Mandell, & Pherwani, 2003). Such leaders generally inspire others and do not take a rigid attitude. Michelle Obama has always been an inspirational leader; once she said, *“You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world’s problems at once but don’t ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own.”*

Culture impacts the leadership style that will be effective within an organization. Does the culture support centralized decision making or decentralized decision making? A culture that supports "taking risks" will allow for a more innovative leadership style. In the same way, leadership styles of political leaders also depend on their ethnicity and culture. Minorities leaders generally have more capability to connect with their people in a meaningful and effective manner. In her books, Michelle Obama has acknowledged how her leadership approach had to make an influence on the black community that has a long legacy of sufferings owing to racism and apartheid. Being a leader from the black community, she managed to connect with others in a meaningful manner. This trait of Michelle enabled her to develop a unique blend of steady leadership, humility and interpersonal skills that sets her apart from other leaders.

The history of racism and segregation has also influenced the leadership styles of ethnic minorities. It shapes their views and their view of the entire world. Owing to their experiences, they are able to create a leadership style that is generally participative, their assumptions of how things should happen are later reflected in their leadership styles. *“All of us driven by a simple belief that the world as it is just won’t do — that we have an obligation to fight for the world as it should be.”* – Michelle Obama. This quote by Michelle reflects her leadership style and viewpoint. Furthermore, her participation in the community services, working for social cause and children is also reflective of her approach as a leader utilizing her platform and changing others’ lives for good.

# Michelle Obama Legacy

Michelle’s name stirs a sense of enthusiasm among the millennials, minorities and most of the democratic voting class. Though she never had political motives for herself, she always remained huge support for her husband. However, she struggled hard to make the best use of her platform. She acknowledges that the Obamas made history and that this name would be an inspiration for the people of colour. When they left the office, they knew they had created a legacy entailing an inclusive change and improved race relations than in the past. Michelle left a tangled and emotive legacy in a way that she presented her life as an insinuation of hope and courage to accept challenges. She had seen the economic grind of her parents and realized the importance of family and hard work. She made her way through the tough times and returned to her home as a lawyer. It was a huge turn of events for a girl from a poor family in Chicago's South Side. Later, when she met Barack, everything escalated and it was a new beginning for the young determined black woman to mark her persona in the history of the United States.

The Obamas have led a deep romantic life, full of love and bonding and became the ideals for an exemplary American family. However, it was no fairy tale as they had their own personal issues where even their marriage needed counselling. Michelle knew that in this political journey they have embarked, she would have more sacrifices than her husband. She realized that she would have to maintain a balance between their personal life and Barack's ultimate commitment towards his work. She also struggled hard to make difficult choices in life such as maintaining a career and motherhood. She set examples for all the working women and in her book ‘Becoming’, she has mentioned how working mothers can relate to this hard time in life. She had suffered through identity crisis and stress when her husband got extremely busy in his political campaigns (Tett, 2018). Yet she continued to keep an exemplary upfront and always supported her husband in his endeavours while raising her daughters who embody their mother's will and determination.

She also managed to make the right use of the position she got after stepping in the White House. She made sure to dedicate her life as a black woman and the first lady to promote change without being stereotyped as the angry black woman. She understood that she would have to go extra miles to gain that grace that her white predecessors had. She managed to inspire others with her charisma and intelligence and brought a realization of humanity within the insignia of the presidential couple. She has been an inspiration for the women and especially young girls as she has been repeating her famous slogan 'Keep Strong'. She has inspired so many girls by using her intelligence, humanity, and humour. Her speeches, passion and her aura had been the limelight of the white house and she still continues to inspire others with her utmost dedication to fight for America and promote her tangible vision.

# Conclusion

Michelle, like most highly ambitious people, is nearly impossibly polished, physically fit, and articulate. Her book *Becoming* is highly recommended by many. It gives others a wonderful look at her upbringing, her relationship with Barack, the campaign trail, and life in the White House. She is an unusually intelligent and self-disciplined person. Health-conscious, double-degrees, physically-fit, great speaker, super-intelligent, connected to nature, highly literate, loves children, and more importantly, children love her; all of these characteristics inspire many like me as well. Leaders like her leave countless messages for others, for managers, leaders and those who are capable of reflecting on her leadership abilities.

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