

Commentary: A Framework for a Twenty-First Century Hmong Leadership

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Abstract

The passing of General Vang Pao in January 2011 invoked many emotions throughout the Hmong communities in America and abroad and became an impetus for transitional leadership efforts in the Hmong American community. As such, the authors were compelled to share some thoughts on a leadership framework that could serve as a guide, resource, and reference for those who find themselves within leadership positions in the Hmong community. Our proposed framework consists of three major components: 1) knowledge of the Hmong leadership continuum, 2) the infusion of a culturally embedded leadership structure into one's leadership style, and 3) an embracing of the key attributes of leadership. The leadership framework utilized in this commentary article is drawn from several key sources including the academic literature, ethnographic observations, and professional experiences.

Keywords: Hmong Americans, Leadership

Introduction

Shortly after the death of General Vang Pao in January 2011, the authors had many formal and informal conversations and dialogues with various Hmong community members about the effects his death and legacy would have on the Hmong community. Also, prior to his death, the authors had been conversing with various Hmong community members about the general topic of Hmong leadership. The majority of these conversations and dialogues occurred informally and unstructured in community settings including cultural and social Hmong gatherings, while

other conversations and dialogues occurred at professional or work-related conferences and meetings. Our roles during these conversations consisted of listening, questioning, following up with questions, as well as clarifying and sharing our own perspectives. The Hmong community members we spoke to represented a fairly representative sample of the demographic landscape of the Hmong community. They included Hmong elders, clan leaders, professionals, community leaders, Hmong college students, high school students, and everyday persons. One large community group that was left out of many our conversations and dialogues, especially at social and cultural gatherings, were Hmong women. In adherence to the values and practices of the patriarchal Hmong society, Hmong men and women are often socially and culturally segregated at cultural and other social gatherings.

After the death of General Vang Pao, the authors took some time to reflect on the conversations and dialogues we had before and after his passing. At this time, we arrived at several critical observations: 1) General Vang Pao's death invoked sensitive feelings in Hmong communities across the United States and abroad, stirring up emotional restlessness among many diverse social, cultural, generational, and geopolitical subgroups. The media also captured and reported these unsettling emotions; 2) General Vang Pao's death also serves as an impetus for change, new opportunities, and new possibilities, especially pertaining to Hmong leadership; and 3) there are many challenges, as well as exciting opportunities for the transition of Hmong leadership.

Driven by these critical observations, the authors are compelled to share their views in this commentary article on a leadership framework that could serve as a guide, reference, or compass for current Hmong leaders and those who are interested in leading the Hmong into the twenty-first century. Our purpose for conceptualizing a leadership framework isn't politically or philosophically driven; rather, our purpose is to be succinct, informative and educational. Thus,

we hope the leadership framework proposed adds another dimension to the understanding of past, present and future Hmong leadership. The leadership framework posited consists of three major components: 1) understanding and appreciating the Hmong leadership historical continuum, 2) infusing a culturally embedded leadership structure into one's leadership style, and 3) the embracing of important attributes associated with leadership. The leadership framework utilized is drawn from several key sources: the academic literature, ethnographic observations, and professional experiences. Its conceptual design is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of Hmong leadership, but is instead intended to frame its essence, purpose and evolution over time.

Understanding and Appreciating the Hmong Leadership Continuum

The first component we propose that should be associated with twenty-first century Hmong leaders is an understanding and appreciation of the Hmong leadership historical continuum. What we mean by this is that present and future leaders and organizations must have a sound understanding and appreciation of the general history of Hmong leadership, including knowledge of key historical Hmong events and leadership figures, along with changes in Hmong leadership styles and purposes over time. We believe there are two major ways to gain this understanding and appreciation. One involves looking at the existing academic resources on Hmong leadership, and the other requires taking an ethnographic approach. One has to live, lead and experience many aspects of the Hmong culture to have a better understanding of the cultural nuances and subtleties of Hmong leadership as Hmong leadership seamlessly blends with the Hmong culture itself. Keep in mind that both approaches have limitations. Limitations associated with the academic approach include the limited research literature which examines Hmong leadership, and the limitations associated with the ethnographic approach include a lack of time, commitment and opportunities.

After an exhaustive database search, utilizing the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay's library resources, the Hmong Studies Center at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and the Hmong Resource Center at the Appleton Public Library, it was discerned there aren't any specific books by recognized scholars or peer reviewed articles dealing specifically with the Hmong leadership continuum. As such, a decision was made to analyze the available literature on Hmong history and culture and abstract relevant information pertaining to Hmong leadership issues.

Drawing from the literature, related analyses of the Hmong leadership continuum are fairly expansive, ranging from how the clan system has operated in China and Thailand (Bernatzik, 1970) to discussions of the reconstruction of the Hmong community and Hmong leadership in America (Vang, 2010 and Hillmer, 2010). More specifically, Lo, (2001), Tapp (2001), Quincy (1995 and 2000), and Bertntazik provide a historical window into the roles and purposes of the older Hmong clan leadership system in the lives of Hmong community members in China, Laos, Thailand and America. This older leadership system has many advantages; it is effective in resolving personal and societal problems and political issues within the cultural dynamics of a clan and preliterate society including family, intra-clan, inter-clan, community and regional conflicts, disputes, and cultural issues. More specifically, it is effective in solving cultural conflicts that sometimes emerge from weddings, funerals, divorces, disagreements over land and property as well as crime, disputes, and other aspects of Hmong life.

Lee (2000) argues that colonialism in Laos brought about a centralization of the diffused Hmong clan leadership system. From 1893-1955, the French imposed a much more rigid, hierarchical political structure upon the Hmong. The result was a breakdown of egalitarian relations between clans, and between Hmong leaders and Hmong followers. Lee observes that according to Hmong oral sources and Chinese historical records, the Hmong had a much more

developed political system in China. When the Hmong migrated into Southeast Asia, their extraordinarily contentious political style prevented the powerful rise of any one leader, hindering the development of rigid, centralized systems. Over time, however, as Hmong leaders interacted with the colonial authorities and re-employed their competitive struggles for control, the Hmong leadership structure in Laos was transformed. Lee also notes that during the colonial period in Laos, the Hmong experienced the emergence of much more authoritarian leaders.

Lee (2005) notes that the Hmong in Laos during the 1983-1955 time period rallied to competing patrons, French and ethnic Lao, sometimes using one to gain influence with or manipulate the other. She argues that this explains their collaboration with as well as resistance to the authorities who dominated them. It also meant that the Hmong were at times caught on opposite sides of a political divide as they attempted to win concessions and maneuver in a way that would help their own clan dominate. The very nature of this tug and pull created instability in the Hmong leadership system at the time. Hmong leaders rose and fall with the emergence of new and competing patrons and clan leaders. Lee also argues that with the defeats of Hmong messianic leaders Pa Chay and Mi Chang, the use of the political broker took preeminence in French colonial society as the primary means of advancing Hmong aspirations for sovereignty in Laos. Importantly, however, as the client of a colonial patron, Hmong political brokers had the complex if not impossible task of balancing the Hmong desire for independence against a colonial patron's desire for domination which mandated the continuing subjection of the Hmong.

Works by Yang Dao (1993), Lee (1995), Hillmer (2010) and Vang (2010) also provide more details into Hmong leadership from the early 1900s to the present; specifically, their works capture several fundamental shifts in the infrastructure and landscape of Hmong leadership: the transitioning of Hmong leadership out of the clan system from the 1900s into the 1950s, Hmong leadership moving into the mainstream of the Laotian government in the 1950s to the 1970s, and

Hmong leadership after their diaspora out of Laos and resettlement in other countries including the United States, France, Canada, and Australia as well as the emergence of Hmong non-profit organizations in the early 1980s that began to play a leadership role in Hmong refugees' cultural assimilation and resettlement.

Other contemporary research adds further analytical dimensions to understanding changes in Hmong leadership. Moua (1994) discusses the results of a survey of 120 Hmong community members in California related to qualities they desire in Hmong leaders. Among the preferred leadership characteristics this researcher's informants valued were a civilian as opposed to a military style of leadership, leadership promoting clan harmony as opposed to clan conflict, the continued usage of the traditional Hmong social structure, including the clan system to resolve disputes and other matters in the community, leadership that does not favor one religion over another as well as the increased inclusion of younger and female voices in the leadership hierarchy.

Cha (1994) discusses the important roles that Hmong women played in the leadership infrastructure of refugee camp life in Thailand; Duchon (1997) assesses the influences Hmong leadership has had on assimilation; Alfred (2001) shares the important functions leadership plays for new immigrants; Kurtlanzick (2007) sheds light into the heated turmoil and conflicts of Hmong politics within Hmong communities, and Lor (2009) provides glimpses into trends associated with Hmong leadership in mainstream America, especially in the field of education. These recent fundamental shifts described in the scholarly literature provide indications that Hmong leadership is transitioning from solely serving Hmong community interests to also interacting with mainstream America and from a clan system to a globalized leadership style.

Drawing from the limited amount of academic resources contributed by the aforementioned scholars, we also arrive at several emerging historical themes:

- Eras of Hmong leadership
- Typologies of Hmong leadership
- Key historical transformative changes in Hmong leadership
- Essential leadership qualities associated with effective Hmong leaders

Four distinctive, yet, overlapping historical Hmong leadership eras may be identified as the China Era (prior to late 1800s), the Laos Era (late 1800s to 1980s), the Thailand Era (1975-2011) and the America Era (1975-2012). These eras were characterized by dramatic and revolutionary changes in society, including:

- Oppression of a People (domination, coercion, cruelty, tyranny, repression and subjugation)
- Discrimination against a People (bias, bigotry, intolerance, inequity)
- Prejudice against a People (injustices, narrow-mindedness & cultural chauvinism)
- Dehumanization of a People (violation of basic human rights and needs)
- Suppression of a People (censorship, control and destruction)
- Violation of the integrity of a people (the honor, dignity and spirit of a people)

Second, associated with these societal inequities and injustices and blatant violations of human dignity, there have emerged leadership trends of ordinary individuals stepping forward to lead and eventually becoming dominant leaders or chieftains. These individuals have possessed essential leadership qualities including communication and oratory skills as well as a capacity to unite and lead people through examples and results along with visionary and symbolic achievements over time. More specifically, these leaders have been able to speak to the heart and soul of a people and show and point to them a future that allows ordinary citizens to believe in and take actions that they would not ordinarily engage in. Well-known Hmong leaders including PaChay, LoBliayao, Touby Lyfoung, General Vang Pao, and Yang Dao have possessed many of these qualities. The types of individuals who emerge to be paramount leaders depend heavily on specific societal circumstances. For example, in times of war, military leaders may emerge such as General Vang Pao during The Secret War. In more peaceful times,

educated individuals such as Yang Dao and Touby Lyfoung may move to the forefront. In addition to war and educational influences, clan influences have also played a key role in Hmong leadership history; as was the case with Lo Bliayao and his family successor. The availability of resources is another critical factor associated with the emergence of dominant leaders. For example, during war time, important resources may include: training, personnel for military purposes, and raw materials including weapons and food. During peaceful and transitional times, resources including education, wealth, and diplomatic skills were associated with the emergence of the Lyfoung family (Hillmer, 2010). A point to keep in mind is that times of peace and war aren't always distinctive; they are at times, seamlessly intertwined, and they are at times, transitional.

The third emerging theme encompasses key historical and transformative events in Hmong leadership history. The list of events provided here is not meant to be inclusive but rather as a general framework. The first transformative event involved the Hmong rebellion against the Chinese in the late 18th and early 19th century. This was followed by the emergence of LoBliayao in the 1900s and the emergence of the LyFoungs in the 1930s, which gave birth to the infusion of modernized leadership into the Hmong historical leadership continuum. Certain societal challenges may be solved through the clan system while others are better solved with modernized leadership, which may involve the utilization of the Western legal system. Another key historical event was the emergence of General Vang Pao during the French Indochina War and The Secret Wars in Laos. General Vang Pao's emergence became the impetus for what Hmong leadership is today, eclectic, dynamic and still-evolving. An indication of this new leadership occurred in the 1990s and 2000s with the emergence of Hmong American individuals running and getting elected to public office in the United States.

A final emerging leadership theme is that there are essential qualities that allow an individual to become an effective leader, whether it is within the clan system or as an elected official in the United States. For example, effective Hmong leaders tend to have natural leadership traits, including charisma, symbolic leadership and natural dispositions. Bernatzik's *Akha and Miao* written in Thailand in the 1930s discusses a case-study of a headman and local leader, named Tsin Tsai, who is praised by the author as a 'natural leader' with 'innate authority' and 'heightened rhetorical gifts'. Bernatzik's study (1970) sheds light into the theory that leadership may involve "innate" ability; in fact, this is how most Hmong leaders emerge and are selected in the clan system. Cooper (1984), in his ethnographic case study conducted in a Hmong village in Northern Thailand provides an entire chapter describing 'Law, Authority and Ideology' among his research informants, while providing additional insights into a traditional form of Hmong clan leadership infrastructure. Today's clan leaders and clan leadership still maintain many of these past traditions. This natural ability to lead may also be observed to some extent among more contemporary Hmong leaders including former Minnesota Senator Mee Moua, former Minnesota Representative Cy Thao, Touby LyFoung, Yang Dao, and among other emerging Hmong leaders.

In addition to assessing academic sources to understand Hmong leadership, one may also utilize an ethnographic approach. This approach calls for an individual to become engaged in a variety of Hmong leadership and cultural experiences including traditional customs and rituals, clan leadership, weddings, funerals, soul callings, shamanic ceremonies and so forth. This approach is based on the premise that Hmong leadership is seamlessly intertwined with other aspects of the Hmong culture. By engaging in these cultural and traditional activities, an individual, hopefully, will have a deeper understanding of the nuances of Hmong leadership and its styles and purposes, especially as it pertains to clan leadership styles.

Using the researcher as a model, the lead author of his article has been privileged to utilize this ethnographic approach as a Hmong-origin scholar. The lead author has been a part of the Hmong American experience over the last three decades as well as an observer of Hmong leadership. Over this time, three critical points and nuances related to Hmong leadership have been observed: 1) there are several key and well-known historical events that have shaped and changed the landscape of Hmong leadership: these include the Hmong rebellions in China, the Japanese invasion of Laos during World War II, the French occupation of Laos that led to the Indochina War, the Vietnam War and the related Secret War, refugee camp life in Thailand, as well as life in America; 2) there have been some transformative leadership figures that have emerged out of these revolutionary events, including Lo Bliayao, Lo Fang Dang, Touby LyFoung, Yang Dao, Vang Pao, and Senator Mee Moua and 3) there have been fundamental shifts in the landscape of Hmong leadership as Hmong leadership has slowly evolved from involving clan leaders to the governance of non-profit organizations. Hmong leadership figures have also shifted from being clan leaders to formally educated leaders, and the Hmong community's leadership vision has shifted from encompassing an ethnocentric perspective to that of a more global perspective. These key points have been derived mostly from informal conversations with Hmong elders and community leaders but have also been validated by the research literature.

Another important leadership characteristic that has been discerned from speaking to local Hmong leaders is that leadership involves a cumulative life process. As many have shared, from an early age on, future leaders tend to display certain unique and essential traits. These individuals tend to be particularly adept at resolving issues and physical altercations among friends, are highly involved in the community, partake in social and community endeavors that

have a visionary impact at various community levels, but also continue to grow and change as they accumulate leadership opportunities and experiences.

Infusing a Culturally Embedded Leadership Structure into One's Leadership Style

The second component of the framework we posit for a twenty-first century Hmong leadership involves the appreciation and understanding of the leadership essences, values and nuances of a 5,000 year old traditional leadership structure and how best to infuse these characteristics into one's leadership style and ideology. This is important given that the next twenty-five or so years will involve a transitional leadership phase in Hmong communities, with the dualism of clan and Western leadership models both still playing important roles.

Lo, Bernatzik, Yang Dao and others characterize the Hmong leadership hierarchy as involving an ancient leadership structure: self, nucleus family, extended family, clan, clan chief, village chief, region chief and a king or paramount leader, each with important roles and purposes for serving the Hmong community. In the clan system of leadership, successors to leaders typically are the sons of the chieftain, paramount leader, or king. The community typically chooses who becomes the next king or paramount leader.

As summarized below: Dr. Pao Saykao (1997) provides additional details that may be associated with the traditional Hmong leadership structure:

"Point one — Hmong traditional Hmong leaders. They could emerge from all different social and clan structures. These are some descriptions of who these leaders are:

- "Noj tau, hais tau" – He is a man of his words and actions; he is accountable; he leads by example;*
- "Siab loj, siab dav" - Kind and considerate;*
- "Coj lus taug" – calm, composed and diplomatic in what he says;*
- "Coj ncaj" - just and fair play in all dealings;*
- "Nyiam kwv tij neej ntsa, nyiam phooj nyiam ywg" - sociable and mixes well with all;*
- "Paub kev cai" - knows the rules/customs/norms;*

Point Two: Understand & Embrace the Hmong social structure. According to

Saykao, there are six identifiable levels in the Hmong social structure.

- (i) *The highest level of the social structure is the Hmong community*
- (ii) *The next level is the clan.*
- (iii) *The sub clan is a sub unit of the clan. The sub clan is subdivided into smaller groups of families who share the same ancestor - "ib tsev neeg" or "ib tus pog tus yawg"*
- (iv) *The "family" is further divided into individual extended family units.*
- (v) *The Nuclear family unit. There is a good reason why this level is called the nuclear family. This is the most important structure. According to an African proverb, "Every great nation begins within the home of each nuclear family"*

Point Three: Understand and Embrace the Traditional Leadership structure.

- (i) *The First level: Leadership at the nuclear family level:*
- (ii) *Second level: the "family" level*
- (iii) *Third level: the sub clan level*
- (iv) *Fourth level: the clan and inter-subclan level.*
- (v) *Fifth level: the Inter-Clan Leader:*
- (vi) *Sixth level: The Hmong Nation (ib haiv Hmoob).*

Point Four: Understanding of the non-traditional model.

- (a) *French introduction of a new leadership style in Laos*
- (b) *Leaders in the Armed Forces*
- (c) *A new breed of Leaders*
- (d) *Professional vs. Traditional leaders*

Point Five: Consult, consult and consult ...you cannot do it alone. Utilize the non-traditional model, the traditional model and the Hmong social structure.

Point Six: Know acceptable norms in Hmong Culture.

Source: Saykao, P. (1997). "Hmong leadership: the traditional model."
<http://www.hmongnet.org/hmong-au/leader.htm> (abstracted May 18, 2011)

Embracing the Attributes of Leadership

The third component of the framework we posit for twenty-first century Hmong leadership involves current and future Hmong leaders becoming grounded in key attributes associated with leadership. Much of the attributes that will be shared here are drawn from three perspectives: 1) what has been learned from studying various educational leadership theories and

from the lead researcher's years as a school administrator, 2) general leadership principles proposed by Hock (2000), and 3) observations Hmong community members have shared related to the most important attributes they associate with leadership.

First, based on his own academic and professional experiences, the lead author has found the following attributes to be critical in maintaining, developing, and advancing one's leadership integrity and dignity: language, success and achievements, trust, confidence, renewal, talent brokers, and timing. Here is a clarification of each item:

- *Language.* Language is a powerful tool. The ability to communicate the vision, mission and objectives of an organization is critical in moving all stakeholders forward. Without this ability, a leader can have many great leadership qualities but still fail to have a positive influence.
- *Success and achievements.* These are meant to be shared. Give credit where credit is due; often, credit is due to many participants who are involved in the decision process as well as the end products.
- *Trust.* Once this is lost, it is often difficult, if not, impossible to restore. Trust is essential, yet very fragile.
- *Confidence.* Not only confidence in oneself matters. Most leaders are self-confident, sometimes to a fault; the real gift is the ability to extend faith in oneself to others. That means actually believing in the gifts of others.
- *Renewal.* This comes from many sources. Leaders must know themselves and find their own sources of strength.
- *Talent brokers.* Leaders must be talent brokers. The ability to identify, recruit and effectively manage the best and brightest people -- including people unlike oneself -- is itself a key talent.
- *Timing.* Timing is (almost) everything. Knowing when to introduce an initiative, when to go before one's constituents -- and when to hold off -- is a crucial skill.

Additionally, we have found Hock's work on the power of relationships between leadership words and actions to be valuable for leaders to stay grounded in the integrity and dignity of leadership (Hock, 2000). Specifically, these leadership words and actions include power, human relations, criticism, compensation, the "four beasts" (ego, envy, avarice, and ambition), mistakes, accomplishments, creativity, listening, judgment, and leadership. In his words below, Hock clarifies the power of relationships between leadership words and actions:

- *Power: True power is never used. If you use power, you never really had it.*
- *Human Relations: The first, last, and only principle -- when dealing with subordinates, repeat silently to yourself, "You are as great to you as I am to me, therefore, we are equal." When dealing with superiors, repeat silently to yourself, "I am as great to me as you are to you, therefore we are equal." Without their respect, your authority is destructive.*
- *Criticism: Active critics are a great asset. Without the slightest expenditure of time or effort, our weakness and error are made apparent and alternatives proposed. One need only listen carefully, dismiss that which arises from ignorance, ignore that which arises from envy or malice, and embrace that which has merit.*
- *Compensation: Money motivates neither the best people, nor the best in people. It can rent the body with nourishment and influence the mind but it cannot touch the heart or move the spirit; that is reserved for beliefs, principles, and ethics.*
- *Four Beasts—Ego (self-image), Envy (Greed), Avarice (materialistic), and Ambition (desires): The four beasts that inevitably devour their keeper. Harbor them at your peril, for while you expect to ride on their back, you will end up in their belly.*
- *Mistakes: Toothless little things, providing you can recognize them, admit them, correct them, learn from them, and rise above them. If not, they grow fangs and strike.*
- *Accomplishment: Never confuse activity with productivity. It is not what goes in your end of the pipe that matters, but what comes out the other end. Everything but intense thought, judgment, and action is infected to some degree with meaningless activity. Think! Judge! Act! Free others to do the same!*
- *Creativity: This is the little secret to effective leadership. The problem is never how to get new, innovative thoughts into your mind, but how to get old ones out. Every mind is a building filled with old furniture. Clean out a corner of your mind and creativity will instantly fill it. Now I know why I arranged our furniture almost every chance I get. My wife thinks I'm nuts.*
- *Listening: While you can learn much by listening carefully to what people say, a great deal more is revealed by what they do not say. Listen as carefully to silence as to sound. Words don't always reveal the intentions. Navigation through words is key.*
- *Judgment: Judgment is a muscle of the mind developed by use. You lose nothing by trusting it. If you trust it and it is bad, you will know quickly and can improve it. If you trust it and it is consistently good, you will succeed, and the sooner the better. If it is consistently good and you don't trust it, you will become the saddest of all creatures; one who could have succeeded but followed the poor judgment of others to failure.*
- *Leadership: Lead yourself, lead your superiors, lead your peers and free your people to do the same. All else is trivia.*

Source: Hock, D. (2000). "The Art of Chaordic Leadership." *Leader to leader*, 15 (Winter), p. 26.

Perhaps most important, it may be observed that valuable leadership qualities and insights can be gathered, achieved, and attained simply by listening to the diverse array of Hmong community voices. We have found many Hmong individuals who speak both fondly and

seriously about what essential leadership qualities are needed for contemporary and future Hmong leaders to be successful in leading the community. A summary of these essential leadership qualities and abilities that have been suggested to us in our discussions with Hmong community members include:

- An embrace of embedded Hmong cultural values
- An ability to engage in mainstream networking—personal and professional relationships with mainstream political figures, business people and organizations, community and national leaders, global partnerships and leaders
- An intellectual capacity and discipline to deal with a multitude of challenges while moving people forward
- A need for charisma and politically savvy—not just in the United States but globally—to navigate gracefully with dignity in addressing Hmong achievements and challenges
- Excellent communication skills (verbal, written, and the ability to communicate across social divisions in the community including those of generation, gender, politics, religion, socioeconomic status, education, profession and country of residence)
- Vision—the ability to communicate a vision that includes the general community’s well-being
- A highly regarded background with respected personal and professional achievements
- The ability to effectively use symbolic leadership to give hopes to a wide spectrum of the community
- Effective uses of
 - 1) Traditional forms of leadership
 - 2) People, this no longer involves military soldiers, it now involves politicians, business people, grass roots, coalitions, organizations, etc.
 - 3) Resources, these no longer involve food and weapons, resources refer to money and people power
 - 4) Leadership integrity

Additionally, community members have shared with us some of the challenges that current and future Hmong leaders and organizations will have to address:

- Cultural identity and transition—the preservation of cultural identities—through education, community institutions and the arts and sciences
- Social movements—from isolation to mainstreaming
- Education, specifically parental involvement, higher education, leadership positions, and the reduction of achievement gaps
- Religions—a delicate balance of different religious factions and influences in the Hmong community
- Political parties—the ability to work with mainstream American political parties and political parties and systems in Hmong diaspora countries

- Socioeconomic status— an incorporation of the concerns and needs of different socioeconomic classes in the Hmong community
- Leadership roles- changes in attitudes to better incorporate Hmong women and other ethnic groups in decision making and leadership processes

In addition to practicing these attributes, it would be fortuitous for future Hmong leaders to explore and examine how these attributes may be successfully integrated with leadership theories and best practices originating in different fields including education, political science, economics, sociology, military science, and philosophy.

A grounding in these leadership attributes will help future and present Hmong leaders and organizations to be more transparent and credible to the public they serve. For, as many Hmong community members have concluded, contemporary and future Hmong leaders and organizations will be moving into uncharted leadership waters. In this new era of Hmong leadership, Hmong leaders and organizations will face opposition, criticism and their actions and words will be more keenly observed and open for public debate. They must have the leadership dispositions and qualities required to handle these new challenges, ethically and morally.

Conclusion

General Vang Pao's death poses many unanswered leadership questions. One of the simplest and most difficult ones is "what's next for Hmong leadership?" Other questions include:

- Do we still need a Hmong individual, group of individuals or Hmong organization(s) to be the voice of symbolic and visionary leadership for Hmong communities? Do contemporary Hmong leaders need to instill the same level of reverence that General Vang Pao did among Hmong communities?
- Or should Hmong communities rely on mainstream local, community, state, and national leaders (city council members, business leaders, Hmong and non-Hmong organizations, mayors, school administrators, state representatives, senators and representatives, etc) to represent their voices?
- If Hmong leadership is needed, what types of individuals or organizations will emerge? What types of qualities will this new Hmong leader or organization possess?
- How urgent is it that we have to have this individual or organization in place as quickly as possible? What's the timeline? Or perhaps we already have the individuals, organizations, or systems in place to move forward in advancing the Hmong communities in addressing societal and political challenges?

- How will these individuals, organizations or systems achieve public recognition and support to advocate, support, and advance Hmong related societal challenges? How will we know when an individual or organization has attained this symbolic and visionary leadership status?
- What types of challenges, old and new, will Hmong leadership face in the twenty-first century?

There are some indications that emerging Hmong organizations and individuals are well-prepared, ready, and set to move forward with transitional forms of leadership. As with any such transition, it is inevitable, however, that there will be competing political ideologies and visions suggested for Hmong Americans. It is our hope that our suggested framework will serve as a blueprint, reference, compass, or guide for current and future Hmong leaders to find solutions to the many questions posed as they attempt to advance the socioeconomic, educational and political statuses and social conditions of Hmong communities and individuals.

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