Essay Three:
Why Soldiers Should Read Shakespeare
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From 2007 to 2014, as a professor in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, I taught strategy and leadership to cadets at West Point. My class on strategic leadership would always end by showing a list of books that had enlightened me on aspects of leadership. For example, during a month-long deployment to Grafenwoehr in the 1970s, I read a newly published paperback novel on the Battle of Gettysburg and heard about Joshua Chamberlain for the first time- so *The Killer Angels* went on my list. I wasn't trying to make the point that the cadets should read the books on my list. I was trying to make the point that they should set themselves the task of building their own list if they were interested in leadership. What follows is an in-depth look at one of the entries from my list that I used to gain a greater understanding of the principles of leadership.

Leadership is an elusive quality and there are other, related concepts that are far easier to understand. In contrast to leadership, the concept of *authority* is easy to grasp as an inseparable element of a position or office. In the political world, authority can be bestowed by the electorate; in the corporate world, it can be given to a CEO by a board of directors. The concept of *power* is equally obvious- the ability to achieve goals by means of the possession of resources. A person might be powerful if they command an army or enjoy great wealth. But leadership? It is a quality that cannot be given, it cannot be bought, it must be earned. It is a quality of influence that only exists in the willing minds of leaders and led. One interesting aspect of leadership is that it may be learned, it may be nurtured, it can be the end result of a deliberate process of self-development.

The process by which leaders are developed has fascinated and puzzled people throughout history. Some leaders are shaped through individual effort and some are nurtured to greatness within the framework of organizations that recognize and value great leadership. There is one aspect of leader development, however, that has always been considered to be valuable and that is the act of reading about great leaders. So, for example, *Education of a General* provides insights into George Marshall's leadership journey and *The Smartest Guys in the Room* provides insights into dysfunctional leadership by examining the rise and fall of Enron. This is not to say, however, that the simple act of reading can create a leader. Just as one cannot become an effective curveball hitter by reading a book on baseball, one cannot become an effective leader by reading a book on leadership. But reading can be a powerful and easily accessible component of a leader's development journey because reading opens up a world of leaders and it promotes the habit of reflecting on great leadership.

William Shakespeare has captivated global audiences for centuries because he combines brilliant insights into the human experience with language of surpassing beauty and inventiveness. He has been called "*the voice of humanity*" and, centuries after his death, there is no sign that interest in his work is abating. The World Shakespeare Bibliography adds more than three thousand entries to its database every year. Type the word "Shakespeare" into the Amazon book search box and more than fifty thousand entries pop up. "*Hamlet*" has been translated into seventy-five languages but, according to *Star Trek VI*, it is best to read it in the original Klingon. Based on this enduring interest, there is also a vast ocean of Shakespearean analysis and commentary which scholars began to create long before American became a country.

One aspect of the human experience that fascinated Shakespeare was leadership. A substantial number of his plays, including all of his histories, are named for leaders and he was as interested in unsuccessful leaders (e.g. *Richard II*) as he was in successful ones (e.g. *Henry V*). Based on this interest, it is reasonable to ask if modern readers can learn anything from Shakespeare's perspective on leadership. After all, there are substantial barriers to be overcome by anyone who seeks to understand Shakespeare. One of the most substantial is the barrier of time. Shakespeare wrote four centuries ago for Elizabethan audiences and their concept of leadership was very different than ours because leadership is greatly influenced by the time and the culture in which leaders exist. Shakespeare and his audience lived in an era of powerful monarchs who ruled when half the globe was virtually unknown to the other half. They lived in a world not far removed from the plague and war and chaos of the Middle Ages. But almost uniquely, Shakespeare has been able to transcend the barrier of time. Most literary figures who enjoyed enormous popularity in their lifetime usually have their popularity diminish over the centuries. In contrast, Shakespeare's powerful appeal is easily seen in movies (*West Side Story, Lion King, Ran*), literature (it is estimated that one percent of the words in the English language were first used by Shakespeare), music (from Verdi's *Otello* to Taylor Swift's *Love Story*) and popular culture (is there any doubt about the nature of a young man described as a Romeo?).

This essay will explore two of Shakespeare's history plays, *Henry IV (Part 1)* and *Henry V* to make the argument that they provide valuable and timely insights into leadership. I have bundled these two plays together because they are linked by a common character. In *Henry IV (Part 1),* we are introduced to Prince Hal, the heir to the throne. In a sequel to this play, we then get to see Hal as King Henry V. The first play provides us with insights into leader development and the second play focuses on leadership in action.

Henry IV (Part 1) has long been regarded as one of Shakespeare's most popular works. It was a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, who saw it sometime in the winter of 1596-7. In the

18th century, it was one of the first Shakespeare plays ever produced in the American colonies and in the 20th century, it attracted such actors as Richard Burton, Laurence Olivier, Sean Connery, Patrick Stewart and Orson Wells to perform in stage or screen versions.

The play is famous for several reasons. First, the events, personalities and themes of *Henry IV (Part 1)* have proved eternally irresistible to global audiences. The embattled usurper king Henry IV, the moody paladin Hotspur and the roisterous Sir John Falstaff all come to vivid life. A delighted world especially took the character of Jack Falstaff to heart and he has been the favorite of audiences and critics (especially the besotted Shakespearean scholar Harold Bloom) for centuries.

Another compelling reason for its popularity is that the core of the play is the fascinating and complex leadership journey of the young Prince Hal, the heir to the throne. Hal, (the son of Henry IV who eventually becomes King Henry V), was clearly one of Shakespeare's favorites. In fact, Shakespeare wrote more lines for Hal than he did for any other character in any other play (more than Hamlet, more than Lear, more than Rosalind). The arc of his leadership journey in this play is extraordinary. At the beginning of the play, Hal is with his wicked and witty companion Falstaff planning a highway robbery. He is the despair of his father, the King. By the end of the play, Hal is well on his way to becoming the admired warrior-king who eventually achieves a glorious victory on the field of Agincourt. Of the four main characters in this play, (Henry IV, Hal, Hotspur and Falstaff), Hal is the only one with a development story. All of the others remain unchanged throughout the course of the play.

Hal's journey in *Henry IV (Part 1)* has proved powerfully attractive to global audiences because, as Joseph Campbell reminds us, the "Hero's Journey" is an archetype that has resonated around the world for thousands of years. Mythology on almost every continent contains stories about heroes who, for a variety of reasons, leave their ordinary life and embark on a road filled with risks and dangers. During their journey, heroes frequently encounter guides and mentors who safeguard and instruct them. They also encounter those who would tempt them from the true path and keep them from fulfilling their destiny. As they gradually continue onward and overcome their trials, the heroes find that they experience personal growth. Successful heroes return home with their true character revealed and their transformation proves beneficial to both the hero and the hero's people. Campbell points out that Greek mythology, Sumerian legends, parables from India and Inca folklore all contain variants of the hero's journey. And if Campbell had written his book on heroes several decades later than he did, he would undoubtedly have included the Star Wars saga as an example of his theme. For Shakespearean audiences, the hero's journey of Prince Hal proved immensely satisfying in the same way that modern audiences found the

hero's journey of Luke Skywalker to be satisfying. Given that they are separated by more than three hundred years, the similarity between Shakespeare's hero and Campbell's archetypal hero are uncanny.

The five acts of *Henry IV (Part 1)* are composed of nineteen scenes that contain about three thousand lines of prose and poetry. This essay will take a close look at four of these scenes because they illustrate fundamental truths about leadership.

The introductory scenes of the play provide readers with a great deal of insight into basic truths about leadership and the first of these is that great leaders are often hard to identify. Before one hundred lines of the play have gone by, we learn that the King greatly admires the young Northern warlord Hotspur (*a son who is the theme of honor's tongue*) and is in absolute despair over the antics of his own son, Prince Hal (*riot and dishonor stain the brow of my young Harry*). This attitude is richly ironic because, over the course of the play, Hotspur (who is initially seen as admirable) will have his weak qualities revealed while Hal (who is initially seen as weak) will have his admirable qualities revealed.

In a play that is full of contrasts, the contrast between Hal and Hotspur is one of the most powerful because it is based on Shakespeare's realization that there are progressively different models of leadership. Hotspur is an outstanding example of a tactical leader. He is capable of winning battles because he is a charismatic warlord who is brave and inspiring on the battlefield. But Hotspur, while completely at home on the battlefield, does not possess the requisite strategic ability to win a war. As we see in his interactions with a potential ally (the Welsh chieftain Glendower) Hotspur lacks the patience and understanding that are necessary for creating and sustaining an effective wartime alliance. Hal, on the other hand eventually displays a full range of leadership. He is a skilled and deadly warrior who eventually vanquishes Hotspur on the battlefield but he also displays a sense of understanding and empathy that mark a budding strategic leader.

Shakespeare's point about the difficulty in evaluating leadership talent is just as valid in the modern age as it was in the Elizabethan age. Individuals and organizations often find it very difficult to identify great leaders. In the years leading up to World War II, Winston Churchill's gifts as a leader went unrecognized and he was widely despised by much of the British political establishment. One of the reasons why General George Marshall is considered a great general was his uncanny ability to identify and nurture leadership talent. During his career, he developed the judgment and the self-discipline needed to accurately evaluate the leadership potential of others. Unlike Marshall, Shakespeare portrays King Henry IV as a poor judge of leadership potential. He greatly overestimates the ability of Hotspur while failing to see the enormous potential of his son Prince Hal.

Later in the play, Act 2, Scene 4 is fascinating for several reasons. First of all, it is by far the longest scene in the entire play. Containing more than five hundred lines, this scene is twice as long as any other scene in the play- so it must have been very important to Shakespeare. It begins with a scene-within-a-scene that has baffled Shakespearean scholars for centuries because they haven't looked at it from a leadership perspective. The rest of Act 2, scene 4 is a hugely entertaining and deeply insightful glimpse into one of the most difficult challenges that leaders routinely face.

The scene begins with an odd little game. Prince Hal is in a tavern waiting for Falstaff with one of his dissolute companions named Poins. Hal proposes that they pass the time by harassing one of the tavern workers named Francis. Hal will stay in one room and engage Francis with questions and inane conversation while Poins (in another room) will continuously shout for Francis to bring him drinks. The "joke" is to watch Francis become increasingly flustered as he tries to satisfy both customers simultaneously. This little vignette has bothered Shakespearean scholars because they can't see the point; they mistakenly think that Shakespeare is, for some reason, portraying Hal as a malicious, snobbish bully. Their mistake is that they are taking the scene literally. Shakespeare actually meant this scene to be figurative in nature in order to provide one of his most powerful insights into leadership.

Shakespeare wrote this little scene because he wants us to realize that *Prince Hal is actually in the same situation as Francis*. Life has put Hal into the same circumstances that Hal has put Francis. During the play, Hal is torn because he figuratively keeps hearing competing voices from different rooms. Falstaff's joyful bellow from the tavern is one of those voices. This voice tempts Hal to relinquish the cares and worries of being a prince and enjoy life in the tavern. During this scene, we are given a sense of how seductive this life can be as Falstaff engages Hal in a very entertaining battle of wits. It is clear that life with Falstaff is a lot of fun.

But there is a competing voice that Hal keeps hearing, which is the voice of his father from the palace. Before this tavern scene is over, a messenger arrives from the king announcing that war is imminent and that Hal is needed back at the palace. Hal is confronted with a choice. When Hal was born, he was not the heir to the throne because his father didn't become king until Hal was eleven years old. Hal never expected to be royalty and now he is being asked to "*pay a debt he never promised*." As we will see, despite the strong temptation provided by the jovial Falstaff, Hal eventually listens to the voice from the palace.

Once again, Shakespeare has identified and developed a challenge frequently faced by leaders in the 21st century. Military leaders, for example, frequently hear conflicting voices

from different rooms. From one room, they hear the voice of duty emphasizing the importance of their combat mission (dangerous missions that might require the lives of their soldiers). At the same time, they hear the voice of servant leadership from another room that requires them to constantly protect the well-being of the soldiers they command. One of the burdens of leadership is the challenge of reconciling these violently competing voices. Corporate leaders also hear conflicting voices from different rooms. From one room comes the voice of employees who want job security and a living wage. From another room comes the voice of investors who want a profitable return on their investment. Frequently throughout history these two sets of voices have created conflicting goals. So, for example, CEOs who listen to the voice of their investors might lay off hundreds of workers in order to improve profitability and strengthen the value of their company stock.

Act 3, scene 2 is a far cry from previous scene in the noisy tavern. Unfortunately for Hal, he spends the entire scene being scolded by his father, the king, who has been deeply hurt by Hal's irresponsibility. The scene primarily consists of King Henry IV telling his son just how much he disapproves of Hal and he is given seventy-two per cent of all the lines in this scene to express his displeasure. During the course of this scolding, we learn another fundamental truth about leadership.

Henry IV might be an embattled leader, but he possesses keen insight into one aspect of leadership because he knows that leadership is a social contract. The truth of leadership is that people will react in certain useful ways if leaders meet their expectations. People have specific expectations about the character traits, competencies and behaviors that they require of their leaders. If these expectations are met, people will react by showing trust, motivation and positive emotional energy (all of which are valuable by-products of great leadership). One of the primary mysteries of leadership is that people's expectations of their leaders will vary from organization to organization, from culture to culture and from era to era. For example, soldiers in combat expect their platoon leaders to know how to read a map while no one ever expects Fortune 500 CEOs to display expertise at land navigation. Different organizations, different expectations.

In his talk to Hal, Henry IV compares himself to the previous king (Richard II). Henry explains to his truculent son the reasons why he is king and why Richard is deposed and dead. One of the primary reasons was that Henry consistently met people's expectations of a royal leader. He behaved as people thought a king should. In public, he showed himself "*seldom but sumptuous*" and as a result, he "*did pluck allegiance from men's hearts*." Richard II, on the other hand acted irresponsibly and frivolously (*mingled his royalty with cap'ring fools*). In so doing, he violated his leadership contract with the people of England and thereby lost his crown. The king goes on to ominously say that Hal's behavior resembles

that of the late king (*thou hast lost thy princely privilege with vile participation*). If he does not change his ways, he might suffer the same fate as Richard II.

In the final acts of the play, Shakespeare clearly shows that Hal has taken his father's warning to heart. He immediately changes in ways that signal his intention to uphold his social contract with the people of England. In the last two acts of the play, we see Hal display the competencies, character and behavior expected of a great king. During the climactic Battle of Shrewsbury, he is wounded but refuses to leave the battlefield, he saves his father's life, he kills Hotspur, he refuses to accept credit for his deeds and he is magnanimous to his defeated enemies. Far from being a tavern wastrel, he is now portrayed as a wise, generous, self-sacrificing and chivalrous warrior who takes his responsibility as heir to the throne seriously.

The idea of leadership as a social contract is not well understood in the corporate world and one of the most obvious pieces of evidence is the manner in which most companies choose a new CEO. When large corporations are looking for a new CEO, boards of directors are always faced with a choice- should they promote someone from inside the firm or hire an outsider? Researchers have found that a substantial number (forty to fifty per cent) of new CEOs come from outside the firm. Academic and management debates have raged for decades on the relative merits of insider versus outsider CEOs. Adopting Shakespeare's observations on leadership provides valuable insight into this debate. Thinking about leadership as a social contract would lead us to conclude that outsiders who parachute into a firm, unaware of company culture and values, will take longer to be accepted as a leader than will an insider. As we saw in the previous essay, several years ago, the staid retailer JCPenney decided to hire the CEO of Apple Stores as their new CEO. After several months, it was clear that the new CEO did not meet the leadership expectations of JCPenney employees and, in fact, had absolutely no interest in meeting those expectations. This set of circumstances contributed to the explosive and tragic conclusion- JCPenney suffered an unprecedented loss in sales and the CEO was fired after less than two years on the job. As Prince Hal eventually realized, leadership works best within the confines of a social contract.

Henry V presents a very different perspective of leadership than its prequel. While *Henry IV (Part 1)* focuses on the developmental path of a leader, *Henry V* looks further down the road and provides us a vivid picture of a mature leader in action. The restless and reckless Prince Hal has now grown into his role as King Henry V. As a result, this play is consumed by some of the most haunting questions of leadership. What exactly is the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers? Why do societies throughout history value and reward great leaders? Can some of the most fundamental results of history be traced to good (or bad) leadership? What happens when good leaders want their followers to do bad

things? With its penetrating insights into human nature, *Henry V* helps us understand these existentially important questions.

From a purely artistic point of view, *Henry V* is not one of Shakespeare's best plays. Critics do not place it on the same level as *Hamlet* or *King Lear*. In fact, many critics would not even describe it as Shakespeare's best history play. That honor is more often bestowed on *Henry IV (Part 1).* One of the reasons for this less than impressive artistic judgment is the structure that Shakespeare used to build the play. Its predecessor, *Henry IV (Part 1)* consists of five acts, all of which have between three to five scenes. The internal structure of Henry V is wildly different. Acts 1 and 5 have only two scenes each while the heart of the play (Acts 3 and 4) have seventeen scenes between them. The settings in these two acts change so rapidly that they seem the equivalent of a Shakespearean slide show (here is the siege of Harfleur, *click*, here is the French court in Paris, *click*).

But *Henry V* is not being judged in this essay on its artistic merits, but rather for its powerful and valuable insights into leadership. And aside from these insights, there are other delightful aspects to this play. For one thing, it is full of passion, poetry and patriotism (*we few, we happy few, we band of brothers).* One critic has noted that speeches from *Henry V* have been so treasured for so long that they have gradually become part of the "*litany of the nation (of Great Britain)."*

Henry V provides a compelling picture of a charismatic and influential leader in action. The first topic of interest when considering this type of leader is- how did he achieve this status? What was it about him that people found compelling? The second aspect of this picture is related to the first. What is the unique value of a charismatic and influential leader? In this regard, Shakespeare provides a very deliberate contrast between English and French leadership in an attempt to help us understand the unique value of great leadership.

Shakespeare wastes no time showing how Henry V built his legend as a leader. In the very first scene of the play, we listen in on a conversation between two prelates who are discussing their king in terms of astonishment. What is interesting is that they are astonished at the king for two separate reasons. First of all, they are surprised to see that the king is highly competent in areas they would expect of a king. Whether Henry is talking of theology, politics or war, it seems that he can easily loosen the knottiest problem. The most complex issues are as familiar to him as his everyday clothes. And he is so eloquent that he creates "*a mute wonder… in men's ears*."

Based on this description, it is clear that Henry V is upholding his part of the leadership social contract because he has developed a formidable level of competence. Moreover, his

intellect is made to seem even more mysterious (and therefore more powerful) because his subjects can't figure out how he acquired these gifts. Wasn't this the man who wasted his time in taverns when he was young? As one of the bishops notes, "*the Prince obscured his contemplation under the veil of wildness*" and, of course, intelligence achieved effortlessly is always more impressive than intelligence achieved through hard years of difficult study.

As scene 1 gives way to scene 2, we see that another foundational element of Henry V's charismatic leadership is his character- which is greatly admired by his subjects. Richard II lost his throne because of his frivolous nature. His successor Henry IV was taken more seriously than King Richard but he still had to put up with the mockery and open rebellion of the powerful Percy family. Shakespeare shows that young Henry V (at this point only in his mid-twenties) is taken very, very seriously by his subjects. He is referred to as "*dread sovereign*" and "*dread lord*" and Shakespeare reinforces this serious aspect of Henry's character during a little episode in scene 2 that contains equal amounts of whimsy and foreboding.

As King Henry and his council are discussing the upcoming war with France, the French Ambassador is announced. The ambassador has a message from the French Dauphin and he is clearly apprehensive about being the bearer of this message. The Dauphin has heard of Henry's claim on French territory. He sends Henry a chest of treasure and tells the English king to be satisfied with this gift and not bother the French any more. Upon opening the chest, everyone sees that it is actually filled with tennis balls and they all realize that the Dauphin is openly mocking King Henry in front of his entire court. Henry's reaction is revealing. Instead of losing his temper, he makes a short, calm speech that clearly reveals the stupidity of the Dauphin's ill-considered jest. In words that powerfully convey the subliminal message of "just you wait," he tells the French ambassador, "*some are yet ungotten and unborn/that shall have cause to curse the Dauphin's scorn*." Henry V has shown his court that he has the self-confidence, self-discipline and determination that they expect of their monarch.

The military historian John Keegan spends an entire chapter in his book *The Face of Battle* discussing the nature of the actual Battle of Agincourt. According to Keegan, Henry V and his English army invaded France in August 1415 and immediately besieged the French city of Harfleur. Unfortunately for Henry's plan, Harfleur held out until the end of September. As winter loomed, Henry began a forced march through hostile French territory in hopes of reaching the port of Calais before the French army confronted him. Despite a desperate march of 200 miles in twelve days, the hungry, tired and outnumbered English army was eventually cornered by the French at Agincourt. On 25 October 1415, they met in battle. The result was a disaster for the French who lost thousands killed and captured (including a significant swath of the French nobility). In his analysis of the battle, Keegan states that

one of the primary reasons for the English victory was King Henry's actions during the battle and the fact that he was "visible to all and ostentatiously risking his life." William Shakespeare wrote about Agincourt more than three hundred years before Keegan but he came to the same conclusion. In Act 4 of *Henry V*, he details King Henry's decisive leadership before the battle.

On the night before the battle, Shakespeare notes that the "*confident and over-lusty French*" confronted the "*poor condemned English*" who spent the night sitting "*like sacrifices, by their watchful fires*." He tells us that King Henry V spent the night "*walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent*." His most important aspect was his demeanor ("*Upon his royal face there is no note/How dread an army hath enrounded him*"). Because the king looked confident and because the soldiers trusted their king, every English soldier who saw the king "*plucks comfort from his looks*" and entered the battle in better spirits. The behavior of the French commanders is a stark contrast to Henry's solicitude. We glimpse the Dauphin and his cronies crudely discussing horses and women while boasting of what they will do to the English once the sun rises and the battle begins. Shakespeare is clearly sending the message that the behavior of leaders can have historical consequences.

The emotional state of the English army was comparable to any organization that finds itself in a crisis situation full of danger and risk. Military history is full of such crises and the role that leaders played in them. For example, the most audacious campaign of the American Civil War was Grant's campaign to capture the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg in the summer of 1863. After months of fruitless maneuvering, Grant boldly abandoned his supply lines, crossed the Mississippi River with his entire army, plunged deep into enemy territory and approached Vicksburg from a completely unexpected direction. There were many who thought that Grant's action was reckless in the extreme. General Sherman and others thought that the plan was dangerously risky and worried that Grant would be caught between two Confederate armies, far from any Union reinforcements. So, why was Grant allowed to proceed?

The short answer is that Grant made it easy for people to trust him. During the Civil War, there were aspects of his competence and character that people remembered for the rest of their lives. Sherman always remembered meeting with Grant after the first day of fighting at Shiloh. Sherman was understandably shaken after going through what had been the bloodiest day of combat ever seen on the North American continent. He found Grant standing under an oak tree in the pouring night-time rain and he remarked that it had been a pretty bad day. Grant, completely imperturbable, just looked at him and briefly said that they would defeat the Confederates when the battle resumed after dawn. This is, of course, exactly what happened. Grant's behavior made it easier for Sherman to trust him the following year at Vicksburg.

There is an unexpected aspect of leadership that Shakespeare presents in *Henry V*. It is not enough to focus on the unique value of great leaders. Shakespeare also focuses on the unique danger of great leaders. He writes of two powerful episodes when King Henry V waded into ethically murky waters and we are led to a painful consideration of the dark side of leadership.

The first ethical challenge posed by King Henry V occurs during the protracted siege of the French town of Harfleur (*Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more/Or close the wall up with our English dead*). Henry is furious at the stubborn and prolonged resistance from the town's brave defenders because it wrecked his campaign plan and decimated his army. He tells the governor of the town to surrender and he accompanies this demand with a dreadful threat. If the town fails to surrender immediately, Henry promises that he will eventually breach the walls of the town. At that point, he will send his bloody-handed soldiers into the town- "*With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass/your fresh fair virgins and your flowering infants*." This unmistakable threat of physical and sexual violence hanging over the head of every inhabitant is too menacing to ignore. Faced with this grim prospect and lacking all hope of reinforcement, the town gives up, "*Therefore, dread king, we yield our town and lives to thy soft mercy*."

The second ethical challenge posed by King Henry V is very different in nature and it occurred when he suffered what must have been a moment of blind panic during the battle of Agincourt. By the end of the day, the small English army was exhausted and disorganized, having repelled two massive assaults by armored French forces. At the battle's tipping point, Henry saw the French preparing a third frontal assault. At the same time, he received word that a French force (which later turned out to be a large band of armed peasants) was attacking his base camp. Henry was also aware that he had at least a thousand French prisoners behind his lines who might pose a serious threat if either French attack were successful. In what Keegan describes as a moment of "harsh tactical logic" Henry ordered his men to kill all the French prisoners (*The French have reinforced their scattered men./Then every soldier kill his prisoners!)* In the play, almost as soon as Henry issued this shocking order, the French herald rode up to tell him that the French had ceded the battlefield and the English had won at Agincourt. In the actual battle, history tells us that most of the English soldiers ignored Henry's order. For a common English soldier to capture a French noble was the 15th century equivalent of willing the lottery as captured knights had to pay a ransom for their freedom. In any event, Keegan tells us that "between one and two thousand prisoners accompanied Henry to England after the battle."

It is unlikely that corporate managers or military officers in the 21st century will be asked to behead stubborn defenders of besieged towns. Nevertheless, ethical challenges of other

sorts abound in today's world. People who work in banks have been told to create thousands of fraudulent accounts. People who manufacture cars have been told to develop stealth technology in order to defeat government anti-pollution tests. People in a wide variety of firms have been told to engage in widespread accounting fraud in order to misrepresent the size and financial health of their firms. Senior executives of companies such as Enron, WorldCom and Tyco have been convicted and imprisoned for their actions. All of these are ethical challenges and many of them come from strategic leaders who exhibit the same ethical blind spots as King Henry V. Luckily for most of us, being confronted with ethical challenges is not a routine part of our work day. As a result, there is a value to reading about ethical challenges such as those presented by Shakespeare in *Henry V*. It helps us realize that ethical challenges are a part of our modern world and it helps us consider the courses of action we would take to resolve and survive such challenges.

Conclusion

Reading and understanding Shakespeare requires a conscious investment of time and effort. His worldview is centuries old and his language can sometimes range from obscure to impenetrable. At one point in Act 1, Falstaff exclaims that he is melancholy, and in fact "*as melancholy as a gib cat*." Prince Hal responds, "*What sayest thou to a hare, or the melancholy of Moorditch*?" Now, even with the erudite assistance of the Arden edition and the Norton critical edition of *Henry IV (Part 1),* most readers would find it difficult to tease out the full range of verbal nuance that Shakespeare packed into that simple exchange.

Shakespeare is, nevertheless, worth the effort. His incomparable insights into the full spectrum of human experience enriches even the most casual reader or theatergoer. One dimension of Shakespeare's timeless genius is made clear from our discussion of leadership in *Henry IV (Part 1)* and *Henry V*. We repeatedly see that Shakespeare's perspectives on leadership are not only dramatic and interesting, but they are so firmly rooted in human nature that they are still relevant to the modern world. During most of the play, Prince Hal's leadership potential went unrecognized by most of the nobles of England. Similarly, great corporations today spend millions of dollars on executive search firms because they realize that identifying great leaders (and being held accountable for that decision) is a terrifying challenge. Prince Hal repeatedly heard competing voices attempting to lure him to conflicting lifestyles and even today we see that leaders struggle to balance the competing demands of different stakeholders. And finally, what was true four hundred years ago is still true today- leaders like Henry V understand that effective leadership is part of a social contract. When leaders understand how to contribute to the social contract known as leadership, they, like King Henry, increase their chances of becoming great.