

# Leadership in Cinema



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

(Partnership with Drexel University's [LeBow College of Business](#) students)

## BRAVEHEART

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Phone: 571-439-0034

Studio: Paramount ..... Released: 1995

Genre: Biography/ Drama/ Action ..... Audience Rating: R

Runtime: 177 minutes

## Materials

The Braveheart DVD or online movie access, appropriate projection system, participant note-taking tools, and access to the following readings on leadership theories and ideas.

1. Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles  
<https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp>
2. Goleman's Leadership Styles  
<https://hbr.org/2000/03/leadership-that-gets-results>
3. Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership  
<http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/About-section-Our-Approach.aspx>
4. Three Types of Authority, Max Weber  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Three\\_Types\\_of\\_Legitimate\\_Rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Three_Types_of_Legitimate_Rule)

## General Objective

Participants will review various leadership theory illustrated within the film and discuss leadership lessons learned with group members or mentors, as well as complete activities and assignments.

## Basic Plot

The film is a loose biopic of William Wallace during the 13th century war for Scottish Independence. Young William Wallace witnesses the death of his father at the hands of English troops. When the same happens to his wife, he vows to overthrow English rule at all costs. The film follows him, with the help of Princess Isabella, Robert the Bruce, and other allies, as he struggles to throw off the yoke of the English crown.

## Cast of Main Characters

Mel Gibson .....	William Wallace
Patrick McGoohan .....	King Edward Longshanks
Angus McFayden.....	Robert the Bruce
Brendan Gleeson.....	Hamish
Sophie Marceau.....	Princess Isabella
Peter Hanly.....	Prince Edward
Brian Cox.....	Uncle Argyle

## Facilitation Options

Braveheart is a film largely focused on a single leader, his accomplishments and the ways in which he leads. However, there are also a number of other characters who display leadership to whom the main character, William Wallace, can be compared (including King Edward, Robert the Bruce and Princess Isabella). Special attention should be paid to comparing and contrasting the leadership of these different characters. Participants should become familiar with the leadership theories listed above, and be able to cite specific examples from the film that display those characteristics. Students should also be able to put the film in a historical context, being able to relate the social theories to the social expectations of the time.

(Disclaimer: YouTube clips may become unavailable without notice.)

### General full-film facilitation guidelines

1. Assign readings before the class. Have students reflect and take notes beforehand.
2. Have a class discussion on the articles. Have students make predictions about the film.
3. Pause at relevant points to draw attention to important moments in the film.
4. Have students take notes throughout the film to discuss later.
5. After the film, have students break into small groups with a handful of discussion questions.
6. Have the entire class come together to discuss the leadership principles in the film.
7. Have students cite specific examples from the film to support their assertions.
8. Assign a personal reflection on the film and leadership afterwards.

## Part One: Wildland Fire Values and Principles in Braveheart

### Objective

Participants will watch the film and take note of examples of Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles, and then examine and discuss how William Wallace and other main characters display these values and principles.

## Duty Examples and Clip Usage

- **Develop Subordinates for the Future:** When William Wallace is still a young boy, his uncle comes to take him to live with him so he can train William. Before he trains William how to fight, however, he trains him how to think like a leader by thinking for himself and making good decisions.
- **Make Sound and Timely Decisions:** William Wallace is able to convince Sir Robert the Bruce to unite the clans of Scotland in their mission of winning freedom from the English. This decision had to have been made quickly or else the English would have been able to defeat them easily in their next battle and it was a very good decision because it unified the people of Scotland and made them learn to work together.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BYx3Y8d4JQ>
- **Make Sound and Timely Decisions:** Once Wallace had learned of the strong power that were the English horsemen, he decided that before they met in battle again, the Scots should make spears twice as long as a person in order to combat these horsemen. When they were put to use in battle, it took extremely good judgment, timing, and courage on Wallace's part to be able to render to long spears effective against the horsemen. As the horses were running full speed at them, if he had told the men to put up their spears too early, the horsemen would have slowed and avoided the attack, but if he had given the order too late, the Scots would've been trampled and slaughtered by the English.
- **Make Sure Tasks are Understood, Supervised, and Accomplished:** At the beginning of one of the battles against the English, William Wallace develops a plan to defeat the English archers. His plan is to lure the English horsemen toward the Scots and then have the Scottish horsemen ride around the battlefield and kill the archers from the rear while they are unprotected. He ensures that the Scottish horsemen know what to do by personally giving them the order.
- **Be Technically and Tactically Proficient:** When William Wallace is inside the tent of Princess Isabella and she was trying to tell him that the English King Edward I ("Longshanks") wanted peace, her protector begins speaking to her in Latin. He says that Wallace is a savage and a liar, to which Wallace responds in Latin, "I never lie, but I am a savage. Or in French if you prefer (spoken in French)." By doing this, Wallace proved that he was not a fool, and that he was in fact intelligent enough to deal with the responsibility that he had accepted in leading the Scots. This also gained him the respect of the princess and made her more willing to listen to him about how the English king was lying and wanted to kill the Scots. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmnP0MM\\_Ah4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmnP0MM_Ah4)

## Respect Examples and Clip Usage

- **Keep Subordinates Informed:** While the Scots had established a temporary camp in the forest, Wallace had gotten the idea to craft long spears from the tall forest trees. As soon as the idea struck him, he told the other men that he was planning with so that they would in turn tell the smaller factions of men that they each commanded.
- **Build the Team:** Perhaps one of the greatest and most famous scenes from the movie, *Braveheart*, occurred at the start of the first battle between the Scots and the English. Before this point, the clans of Scotland had not been united and were very disjointed as

well as fearful of the English. Before William Wallace arrived to the battle field, the Scots were not very motivated to fight as a result of poor leadership, and were therefore planning to leave and surrender. Wallace arrived and delivered a very motivating speech which gave the men of Scotland pride, courage, and something to fight for: freedom.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEOOZDbMrgE> (view from 1:34-3:09)

## Integrity Examples and Clip Usage

- **Set the Example:** In this scene, the former Scottish king, who is stricken with leprosy, is talking to his son who will soon take the throne. His son says something to the effect that they will have to fight the English to win their nobility. The King replies, "It's the ability to compromise that makes a man noble." This is an important line because it shows how, although he has evil intentions, the Scottish king still tries to make attempts to attain peace. By doing this, he is also training his son, who will become king, how to lead others by example.
- **Set the Example:** By this time in the movie, the Scots had taken the offensive and their plan was to attack the English castle where King Edward I ("Longshanks") resided. To put this plan into effect, the Scots rig a battering ram and begin smashing it into the castle doors. The English castle soldiers pour hot oil down on the Scots and their ram, and then light it on fire. This begins to deeply frighten the other Scots from attacking, but William Wallace races to the battering ram and immediately helps to push it. They end up breaking through the castle doors and invade as planned. This was an incredibly dangerous situation because of the flaming oil everywhere, including on the battering ram, but Wallace recognized that he could not ask something of his men that he was not willing to do, so he helped push the flaming battering ram.
- **Set the Example:** In one short, but powerful scene, Wallace is at the castle of Sir Robert the Bruce. Wallace mentions that every man present should fight. Sir Robert the Bruce argues that they needed the nobles, and so they should risk their lives. To this, Wallace responds, "...Your title gives you claim to the throne of our country, but men don't follow titles, they follow courage." This statement shows that Wallace intends to lead his men from the front and set an example for them to follow. He knows that as a result, they will respect him more than any king.
- **Set the Example:** During his death sentence, William Wallace remains true to his values and beliefs. He is hung, put on a rack and stretched, and finally disemboweled; and yet never does he beg for mercy. He did not even accept a pain-numbing potion that Princess Isabella had offered him the night before. His final word, shouted at the top of his lungs, was "FREEDOM." The reason he did all of this was to provide one last example of his leadership in the hopes that his friends and men would continue to fight for Scotland's freedom after he died. (view from 1:00-2:00).
- **Know Yourself and Seek Improvement:** At the end of the second battle, at Falkirk, Wallace is gravely wounded, yet he attempts to kill the fleeing King Edward I. One of King Edward's knights turns back and knocks Wallace off his horse. This knight turned out to be Sir Robert the Bruce, who had betrayed the Scots in this battle. Later, while Sir Robert is talking with his father, he is angry at himself because of what he had done and because he can't get the image of Wallace's look of confusion and disgust when he

realized Sir Robert's betrayal. Sir Robert tells his father, "I don't want to lose heart! I want to believe as he does. I will never be on the wrong side again." By saying this, Sir Robert recognized his mistake and resolves to improve himself.

- **Seek Responsibility and Take Responsibility for Your Actions:** Near the end of the movie, Wallace comes before the English magistrate, who accuses him of high treason against King Edward I, whom they refer to as Wallace's king. They offer Wallace a more humane death sentence if he swears allegiance to King Edward I. He does not, however, and assumes responsibility for the actions that he had taken to gain Scotland its freedom. As a result, he dies a painful death by disembowelment.

## Part Two: Goleman's Leadership Styles in Braveheart

### Objective

Participants will examine and discuss Goleman's Leadership Styles as they appear in the film Braveheart.

### Style Examples and Clip Usage

- **Pacesetter** – William Wallace earns respect as a leader by first leading by example. His acts of bravery set a standard for which his followers praise. This is demonstrated when his actions to save and later to avenge his lover, Murron, incite the town to overthrow the English garrison in town. Wallace's initial act that inspires his followers is his rescue of Murron from the English soldier who tries to rape her (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKEwvDFqMGw>).
- **Authoritative** – William Wallace's most often-exercised style of leadership is authoritative leadership. Wallace does not command his troops into battle coercively, or from behind; rather, he mobilizes them forward and leads them there, always at the front of his line, opting for a "come with me" style that still makes it clear that he is the leader. This is the style of leadership that is best portrayed in the landmark scene of Braveheart, just before the Battle of Stirling, when he inspires his men with a speech before leading them into combat ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr\\_OpFxCx-A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr_OpFxCx-A)).
- **Coercive** – Wallace does not exercise coercive leadership except when absolutely necessary. This should be duly noted, as he is best able to achieve his goals when he leads his followers instead of commanding them. Furthermore, Wallace's coercion is not so direct and immediate as it is indirect and applied by example. For instance, Wallace does not coerce the noblemen Lochlan and Mornay into following him, but kills them after they betray him on the battlefield so that he can make an example of them and of his strength ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KdjUNlcP8k&list=PL26BF9109756D29DA&index=6&feature=plpp\\_video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KdjUNlcP8k&list=PL26BF9109756D29DA&index=6&feature=plpp_video)).

### Style Discussion Questions

- Is Wallace's leadership adaptive? In other words, does he really change his leadership style from situation to situation? Does he use other styles of leadership (coaching, affiliative, democratic, supportive, charismatic, etc.)?

- What are the styles of other leaders in the film? For instance, what is the leadership style of Wallace's father and uncle? Of the Scottish noblemen? Of Princess Isabella? Of other leaders in the film?
- Given the overarching situation (rebellion of the Scottish against the more-powerful English), what would you say is the most effective style of leadership? Why?
- Forgetting Goleman's research for now, how would you categorize the styles of Wallace's leadership?
- Of the Goleman styles that Wallace utilizes, which would you say is the most effective? Why?

## Part Three: Kouzes' and Posner's Leadership Behaviors in Braveheart

### Objective

Participants will examine Kouzes' and Posner's Leadership Behaviors as displayed in Braveheart. Using critical thinking, they may evaluate the characters and their actions that display these behaviors.

### Behavior Examples and Clip Usage

- Model the Way (<http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/braveheart/test-of-manhood>) – In this clip, Wallace engages in a throwing contest with an old friend. He clarifies his values of aspects important for battle which is to be recognized by the surrounding audience of future soldiers.
- Inspire a Shared Vision ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr\\_OpFxCx-A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr_OpFxCx-A)) – This most famous Wallace speech exemplifies how to appeal to others through shared aspirations.
- Challenge the Process (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKEwvDFqMGw>) – In this clip, both Wallace and his wife show this behavior by challenging the authority of the English noblemen. Wallace risks killing all the English men for revenge of killing his wife and actually inspires his village to fight for their freedom.
  - Show the scene and discuss the negative aspects of Wallace's leadership shown in this clip (which should be about his habit of revenge). To intensify this point, watch following clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KdjUNlcP8k>
    - Is this revenge justified? Does this revengeful side make him a bad leader?
- Challenge the Process ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD5lmb7vWSc&list=PLAB279B04907EFBF1&index=6&feature=plpp\\_video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD5lmb7vWSc&list=PLAB279B04907EFBF1&index=6&feature=plpp_video); warning: fairly graphic content) – Another huge risk taken by Wallace was the ingenious idea of constructing the wooden spikes to combat the English cavalry. This expresses how great an impact his ideas have and the success he possesses.
- Enable Others to Act (<http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/braveheart/political-bickering?play=1>) – In this clip, the true support of his fellow soldiers is shown. In addition, Wallace's small speech attempts collaboration by expressing the faults of all present bickering parties and then stating his plan of action to invade England.

- Encourage the Heart (<http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/braveheart/lead-them?play=1>) – In this clip, Wallace urges Robert the Bruce to become the leader the people need. He creates a spirit of community by expressing his support for him if follows his instruction

## Part Four: Max Weber's Three Leaders, Three Types of Leadership

### Objective

Sociologist Max Weber listed three kinds of legitimate authority. That is, authority that is accepted by its constituents. It is important that authority have legitimacy so that a leader can consistently lead, without constantly having to convince follower's that the particular action is legitimate. Their judgment is accepted as a whole. In modern society, there are three main sorts of legitimate leadership, each exemplified by a different character in Braveheart.

- Charismatic Leadership – William Wallace is a prime example of a charismatic authority. The authority of charismatic leaders is centered largely around their personalities. That is, people want to follow them because they like their personalities. Charismatic leaders are powerful because they do not need to obtain their authority from a hereditary or elected source. In the film, people followed Wallace simply because he proved himself in battle and roused their passion with words. However, he also had to work harder to maintain his authority since there was nothing keeping him a leader besides the fact that people wanted to be led by him. If he were to do something to lose that trust, he would lose all legitimacy.
- Traditional Authority – Robert the Bruce displayed traditional authority. Though he did act in their interests, the Scottish people respected Robert more because of who he was than what he did. Traditional authority is highly tied to the things that the society sees as sacred. To the Scots, the Scottish lineage was an important part of their heritage, and a symbol of their resistance against the English. Robert the Bruce was, for the Scots, tied to their heritage making him a traditional leader in the most literal sense of the word. This way of gaining authority can lead to rather dictatorial tendencies, which Robert the Bruce occasionally displayed, but it ultimately depends on the individual.
- Rational-Legal Authority – Rational-legal authority is based, fittingly, on legally held or elected positions. The individual's authority stems entirely from that; if they were to lose that position they would lose their authority. King Edward Longshanks is in this position. He is not well respected, particularly in Scotland, because of the brutality with which he treats his people. There, he lacks traditional power as well because he is not their traditional leader. All of his authority comes from the fact that he has the means of enforcement (a legal leg to stand on, armies, etc.).

## Part Five: Cummings' and Worley's Theory of Organized Development

### Objective

Thomas Cummings and Christopher Worley developed a theory on organized development which they defined as a system wide application of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development and reinforcement of organizational strategies, structure, and processes

for improving an organization's effectiveness. This theory is sub-divided into two categories of strategic intervention and leading and managing change. Participants will examine William Wallace and how he exemplifies this theory.

### **Strategic Intervention**

- Acquisition: Land acquisition is a huge part of Braveheart. Throughout the movie, the King of England struggles to keep Scotland under his control. At one point, he even tries to take over France.
- Alliance: Alliances are the driving point of this movie as they are made, broken, and reformed constantly. The two most important alliances to take notice of are the alliance between the Scottish and the Irish, and Robert the Bruce and the King of England.
- Culture Change: This directly shown through the change of the village culture from helplessness to an attitude of hope as Wallace endures his rebellion. This transformation alone shows how great an impact Wallace has on people.

### **Leading and Managing Change**

- Motivate Change: Wallace inspires others through his various speeches throughout the movie which give followers hope and inspiration to fight for their freedom.
- Create Vision: By first believing in himself, he can then transcribe his belief into others. This also ties into honest and integrity being essential qualities for a leader. He also has an incredible amount of confidence and optimism in his goals. He contained the tenacity to never give up which was essential in inspiring his fellow soldiers.
- Manage Transition: Wallace, unlike many true war leaders, fights on the front line along with his fellow soldiers. He outwardly expresses his willingness to fight for his freedom. He was even able to instill this willingness to fight into others to carry on the fight even in his absence. When improvisation was needed, Wallace adjusted accordingly in order to succeed.

### **Additional Questions for Discussion:**

- Do you believe that William Wallace wanted to be a leader? Does this change over the course of the movie?
- Was Wallace born a leader or made one by his circumstances?

Contributions to this document were made by the following students in the Pennoni Honors College of Drexel University enrolled in a course titled Leadership in the Movies in the fall of 2012 facilitated by the author, Dana D'Angelo: Victoria Durand, Danielle Schroeder, David Georgianni and Chris Hamilton.