

# Leadership in Cinema



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

(Partnership with Drexel University's LeBow College of Business students

<http://www.lebow.drexel.edu/index.php>)

## MULAN

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Studio: Walt Disney Pictures ..... Released: 1998

Genre: Animation/Adventure/Family/Musical.....Audience Rating: G

Runtime: 88 minutes

### Materials:

DVD or online movie access, appropriate projection system, participant note-taking tools, and online readings access to the following concepts and theories (and related online links; see citations):

- Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles
- Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership
- Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Traits and Characteristics
- Servant Leadership

### About *Mulan*

*Mulan* is a Disney musical movie centered about a Chinese girl named Mulan who disguises as a man to serve in the army in order to protect her frail father from dying in war. As a male soldier named "Ping," she goes through army training and learns to fight for her country against the opposing Huns. Through various dangerous situations, Mulan proves to be a powerful and determined warrior, becoming a heroine for her country.

## Main Characters

- Fa Mulan/Ping
- Mulan's father
- Fa Zhou
- Captain Li Shang
- Mulan's mother, Fa Li
- Mushu
- Grandmother Fa
- Yao
- Cricket
- Ling
- Mulan's horse, Khan
- Chien-Po
- The Emperor of China
- Shan Yu
- Chi-Fu

*\*Disclaimer: YouTube clips may not always be available. Sometimes they are removed.*

## Part 1: Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles

### Objective

Students will identify the characters and situations in which the Wildland Fire Values and Principles are exemplified. Make three groups and assign one value to each team. Each team should list examples of the situations in which their principle was represented and write them down. Once the examples have been identified, mix the groups so that each new group has least one member of each initial group. Examples for each value should then be exposed by the corresponding members while the rest of the group takes notes. By the end of the discussion, everyone should have a list of all the examples in the movie.

### Duty Examples

#### ***Be proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader***

- Mulan is a good example of this principle because throughout the movie, she does not only train to become a good soldier, but also to become a leader. She develops technical skills in combat, as well as leadership skills. Ever since she brings the arrow down, she demonstrates that she is a proficient soldier by performing every physical exercise skill and wit. Later in the movie, she demonstrates her leadership skills when she defeats the Huns in the mountain and when she guides her team to save the Emperor. She knows her duty is to both fight and lead, not one or the other.
- Shang, just as Mulan, is proficient in his job as a captain. He exemplifies the ideals of the Chinese Army; he has physical strength, discipline, self-control and, as his father says, an impressive military lineage. He demonstrates his technical skills as he sets the example for every exercise. He does not ask his men to do something that he is not capable of doing. This earns him the respect and admiration of his men. He also has an extensive knowledge of training and leadership techniques. Throughout the movie, Shang leads his men in battle towards victory. He is a great soldier, and a great leader.

### ***Make sound and timely decisions***

- Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZeW3tip49w>

Mulan's decision of shooting the cannon towards the top of the mountain was one of the most admirable acts of courage and self-confidence of all Disney movies. She disobeys the orders of her superiors (Shang); she had to make the decision in a matter of seconds; she had to act quickly and in front of Huns. She demonstrated her wit and self-management since remained calm and focused on her goal.

Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNBgXE9y4pA>

Shang's decision of not killing Mulan is honorable. Chi-Fu tells the other soldiers "You know the law". Shang had to decide whether to obey the law and take Mulan's life, or to follow his own moral principles and save her life just as she had saved his. Shang could have hidden behind the law and kill Mulan without thinking twice. However, he decides to take the responsibility of the decision and have a moral argument taking into account different values. He decides to let her live. Even though he was disobeying the law, he was living in accordance to his life principles.

- Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised and accomplished
- As it was mentioned before, Shang does not merely shout out orders to his men and expect results. Instead, he executes the physical exercises and sets the example for his men. He is constantly asking "Is that clear?" to emphasize his orders. He supervises his soldiers and makes sure that his orders are accomplished.

### ***Develop your subordinates for the future***

- Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSS5dEeMX64>
- This principle is very clearly exemplified by Shang. He develops his soldiers for the future: he makes men out of them. He trains their discipline and self-control as well as their technical skills. The song "Make a Man Out of You" perfectly explains what Shang wants from his men, and what he achieves in the end: He makes them "tranquil as a forest, but on fire within", he helps them "find their center" so that they are "swift as a coursing river, with all the strength of a great typhoon, with all the strength of a raging fire and mysterious as the dark side of the moon". He is preparing them to survive the war and defeat the Huns.

## **Respect Examples**

### ***Know your subordinates and watch out for their well being***

- Shang does not really understand Mulan because he does not know that she is a woman, and therefore has never had any type of physical training that boys go through. In school, Mulan is being prepared to get married, not to join the army. Shang has no way of knowing this, and this is why he and Mulan have a lot of conflicts at the beginning. However, he knows that the rest of the soldiers and knows how to encourage them to keep fighting. This encouragement also motivates Mulan. Shang watches out for her well-being, despite his lack of knowledge of her strengths and limitations. He tells her that she is not fit for war and that she should go back home. Mulan does not give up so easily, but

Shang was doing it for her and the army's good. After Shang discovers Mulan's secret, he lets her live, but leaves her behind. This was also for Mulan's own good, because the fact that Shang had decided not to kill her did not mean that the rest of the army would agree. Mulan could be in grave danger if her secret got to higher authorities.

### ***Keep your subordinates informed***

- When Shang discovers his father and his men had been defeated by the Huns he addresses his soldiers and tells them that the Huns are moving quickly and that they had to cross through the Tung Shao Pass in order to get to the Imperial City and save the Emperor on time. He also tells them that they are the only hope of the Emperor. He explains his decision on taking a different, more dangerous path and he communicates their current situation to all the soldiers.

### ***Build the team***

- Shang knows that one of the most important skills in the army is teamwork. He begins to force his men to act as a team since the first day. He makes all of his men clean the rice that was spilled during the fight Mulan got into. This makes his men very angry, but teaches them a lesson on teamwork.

### ***Employ your subordinates in accordance to their capabilities***

- General Li employs his son Shang as the Captain of Mulan's section because he knows that his son is ready for such a responsibility. He trusts him and knows that Shang is "number one in his class, with extensive knowledge on training techniques, and an impressive military lineage."

## **Integrity Examples**

### ***Know yourself and seek improvement***

- Mulan understands that she has different strengths and limitations than the rest of the soldiers. However, she also understands that this does not make her weaker. She trains hard to improve her technical skills in survival and combat. She soon realizes that she even though she has less muscular strength than others, she can use her intelligence and wit to overcome obstacles. She uses this strength to her favor when she retrieves the arrow and when she defeats the Huns.

### ***Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions***

- Mulan is aware that disguising as a man and entering the army could have lethal consequences. She could have been discovered and killed, or she could die in battle. The consequences are not only for her, but for her family as well. If her secret was revealed, it would bring great dishonor to her family. However, she takes the risk and leaves, knowing that she was going to be on her own out there, but that it was worth it.

### ***Set the example***

- As mentioned before, Shang leads with his example. He demonstrates all the ideals that the army is looking for in a soldier. He executes the exercises with skill and discipline. He

asks from his men what his superiors have asked from him before. He earns the respect and admiration of his men by being the man that he is training them to be.

## Part 2: Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

### Objective:

Students will watch the film *Mulan* and evaluate which characters and/or behaviors demonstrate Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

### Suggested Guidelines:

1. Introduce the leadership theory prior to watching the film. Briefly discuss each of the Five Practices as a class.
2. Assign readings which further explain the theory.
3. If time is allowed, watch the film in parts. After each part, create a brief discussion about what has happened. A minimum of two breaks throughout the film is recommended.
4. After the film has finished, break into small groups where further discussion can commence.
5. Bring the class back together for a class discussion, in which students are encouraged to bring up specific characters/behaviors/scenes that relate to one of the Five Practices. Ask for agreements or disagreements and ask why.
6. End the discussion with real-world applications. Ask the students how they can use the Five Practices in real-life.

## The Five Behaviors

### *Model the Way*

- Review Captain Shang's first practice with his soldiers. Pay close attention to the training. Is Shang just standing and watching? How is he leading the soldiers during training? Discuss these questions.
- <http://www.fpx.de/fp/Disney/Lyrics/Mulan.html>: Use "I'll Make a Man Out of You" lyrics section, specifically the first four lines of the second verse and the chorus. Discuss what these lines mean and how they relate to the movie and the theory.

### *Inspire a Shared Vision*

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xlgdl88X7XQ>: This clip shows the scene on the mountain with the Huns. The vision is to save China. Shang has forged a unity amongst his troops therefore, they all draw their swords in order to protect their country. Examine the actions of Shang and the soldiers. What does drawing their swords after Shang speaks represent? Is there unity present? What are the soldiers fighting for and why? Discuss these questions.

### **Challenge the Process**

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvdBZzjEwg0>: This clip shows when Mulan decided to take her father's place to fight in the war. Here, Mulan challenges the traditions and culture of the Chinese society in order to protect her father. Examine the actions of Mulan. What is the first indication of her decision? How did Mulan's decision eventually benefit China? Discuss these questions
- <http://www.fpx.de/fp/Disney/Lyrics/Mulan.html>: Use "A Girl Worth Fighting For" lyrics section to compare the women described to Mulan. How is she different from them? How do these differences play a role in her leadership? Discuss these questions.

### **Enable Others to Act**

- No clip available, but use scene from 69:30-72:52 in the full movie. This scene shows how Mulan fostered collaboration with Shang, Chien-Po, Ling and Yao. Although she was leading the group, she gave each individual personal power to carry out his part. How did each character play a part in saving the emperor?

### **Encourage the Heart**

- Re-watch Captain Shang's first practice with the soldiers. This clip also shows how Mushu acts as Mulan's guardian and how his genuine acts of care encourage Mulan to keep going in training. Pay close attention to Mushu. What is he doing to help Mulan? How are his actions influencing Mulan? Discuss these questions.
- No clip available, but use scene from 62:40-64:15 in the full movie. How do Mushu's actions here relate to the theory? Discuss this question.

### **Potential Answers to the Discussion Questions**

- a. Shang is being active during training. He is not just standing there giving commands. Instead, Shang demonstrates the level of strength, agility and mastery of weapons that he expects from his soldiers. For instance, he stands in front of the men and performs the drills with the wooden poles and then practices alongside of the men. He also runs through the mountains with the men.
- b. The first four lines of the second verse explain how the men need to be in order to win. The lines "Tranquil as a forest, but on fire within" show that the men need to be externally calm and relaxed, but passionate and energetic internally. The chorus for this song shows the men's newly gained understanding of the kind of men they need to be for the army. They realize that they need to be "...as swift as the coursing river...with all the force of a great typhoon..." from Shang's modeling. Shang demonstrates these qualities for his men and trains his men to embrace those qualities. As a result, the men want to mirror Shang and his traits.
- c. After seeing the thousands of Huns on the mountain, the men become fearful. Even Shang is taken back at first. However, his expression changes to one that is strong and unafraid and says, "Prepare to fight. If we die, we die with honor." Although the men still show fearful expressions, one by one, they draw their swords. This action shows that the men are united and committed to the vision of saving China and fighting for China that Shang inspired. Because of this shared vision, the men are fighting for their country.

- d. The first indication of Mulan leaving was when she placed her hair comb down and took the scroll her father received. She then cut her hair and took her father's army suit. These actions showed that she did not embrace the stereotypes for women set by Chinese society. Mulan's decision eventually benefited China because she saved the emperor and defeated Shan Yu.
- e. The women described in "A Girl Worth Fighting For" depict typical stereotypical Chinese women. They are feminine and soft. Yao wants a girl who will admire his strength. Chien-Po wants a woman to cook for him. Then Mulan brings up a girl who always speaks her mind and has a brain, but Yao, Ling and Chien-Po disregard this and say, "Nah!" Mulan is the opposite of the women described. She does not embrace her femininity as she is supposed to, which is shown through her decision to fight in the war and impersonate a man. She becomes strong and fights even after her true identity was revealed. This helps Mulan become an effective leader because she has the confidence to lead others. She has mental, emotional and physical strength so the other men could not say that she is weak.
- f. In the scene where Mulan and the others are trying to save the emperor, each individual has a job to carry out. Mulan, Chien-Po, Yao and Ling fight Shan Yu's henchmen while Shang goes to fight Shan Yu. After defeating the henchmen, Mulan retrieves the emperor and hands him off to Chien-Po, Yao and Ling. These three take the emperor away from the palace. Shang and Mulan fight Shan Yu. Although Mulan leads the group, each individual has personal power to use in order to fulfill their duties to save the emperor.
- g. Mushu tries to help Mulan through her training. For instance, during the bow and arrow drill, Mushu puts the tomatoes on Mulan's arrow before she shoots to try to make her look good. He also catches a fish for her and splashes water on her when Shang punches her. He pushes her back up to go back to training. Mushu's actions help motivate Mulan to push through her harsh training. Mulan is crestfallen and feels useless after her true identity was discovered. She picks up her father's helmet and feels that she is worthless and that she could not prove everyone wrong. Then she throws the helmet aside, which represents that she is giving up on herself. Mushu picks up the helmet and cleans it and holds it in front of Mulan so she could once again see her reflection. He calls her pretty and hugs her. Mushu's genuine act of care allows Mulan to believe in herself once and she picks herself back up and heads to the emperor when she discovers that the Huns are alive.

### Part 3: Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Traits and Characteristics

#### Objective:

Students will watch Mulan and find and explain examples of characters exhibiting different characteristics and traits.

#### Mulan

For the following traits and characteristics, play the scene of Mulan leaving home:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAR11cMxS9w>.

Loyalty – Mulan’s loyalty to her family and her country drive her to join the army in place of her father.

Q: Was Mulan truly loyal to her family, despite betraying tradition and leaving without notice?

A: Although Mulan had to lie to save her aging father from the army, her intentions were loyal.

Caring – Mulan’s love for her family is clear when she goes to the draft in place of her father in order to prevent his death.

Q: How does Mulan’s caring personality contribute to her ability as a leader?

A: Mulan’s caring nature causes her to become more driven and determined because she wants to bring honor to her family.

Drive <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHR9wOv3hJ4>

Ambition – Mulan shows ambition when, during the dead of night, she scales the post with weights tied to her hands to retrieve the arrow from the top. While every man has failed in completing this task, her ambition drives her to try again until she succeeds at the crack of dawn.

Energy – Mulan’s energy extends past physical energy to encompass her undying mental and emotional stamina. Though the Chinese army is grueling, she does not fall behind or give up.

Tenacity – Mulan’s persistence is displayed when she undergoes harsh physical training and proves herself to be just as competent, if not more so, than the men in her ranks.

Initiative – Mulan shows initiative when she sneaks out in the middle of the night to join the army.

Self-confidence – Mulan would not have joined the army in disguise if she had not known she was equally as capable as the men around her. Throughout her quest, she works hard because she is certain she has the ability to achieve.

Q: Examine the scene in which Mulan retrieves the arrow from the post. How does she reach the top when no man has done so? What gives her the motivation? Discuss.

A: Mulan keeps training until she is strong enough to scale the post, and her determination comes from her desire to prove herself to be as able as the other men. Additionally, her motivation stems from her wish to honor her family.

Q: How does Mulan’s self-confidence develop? How does it help her as a leader?

A: Mulan’s self-confidence is boosted by Mushu when he continues to encourage her. In addition, her achievements, such as retrieving the arrow and running with the pails of water, help her to believe in herself more. Self-confidence aids Mulan as a leader because she believes she can achieve what she sets out to do.

### **Shang**

Competence – During the movie, Shang is promoted to a captain in the Chinese army, and the “I’ll Make a Man Out of You” sequence exemplifies his capabilities. He is physically strong in addition to being emotionally able to handle a leadership position in the military.

Determination – Shang's determination becomes clear when he whips and shapes his men to become true soldiers. He is driven to defeat the Huns and to defend his country, and he ensures that his men are ready for war by making them undergo brutal training.

Subject knowledge – Once again, Shang's rise in ranks shows that he possesses subject knowledge. During the same song sequence, he displays his tactical skills in hand-to-hand combat in addition to the wooden poles and bow and arrow.

Q: Play the "I'll Make a Man Out of You" sequence:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSS5dEeMX64>. How do Shang's actions distinguish him from the other men? Do his competence and subject knowledge make him superior to the others? Discuss.

A: The song sequence displays Shang's physical abilities. Though they do not necessarily make him superior to the other men, they distinguish him by highlighting him as an apt leader.

Q: What motivation does Shang have to improve his men? How does he shape them both as soldiers and as people?

A: Shang is motivated because he does not want to let down his father, who is his superior, and because he wants to honor his country. He teaches his men physical and practical skills as well as life skills. He drills discipline, honor, and determination into their heads. He does not allow them to give up; he only allows them to improve.

## Part 4: Servant Leadership

### Objective:

Students will watch *Mulan* and engage in discussion about the different aspects of servant leadership expressed by various characters from select scenes in the movie.

### Suggested Guidelines:

1. Learn about servant leadership in class and give some real life examples.
2. Watch *Mulan* and take notes during the movie on how servant leadership is portrayed by certain characters.
3. Discuss concepts and questions within small groups.
4. Bring the class together and share discussions. Using everyone's opinions, come up with a few concepts repeatedly used to describe how servant leadership was expressed.
5. Think and discuss ways servant leadership may be beneficial or harmful in real life situations.
6. Encourage students to apply this type of leadership in a useful way in their educational career.

## Discussion Concepts and Questions

Servant leadership can be basically characterized by a person who wants to serve first rather than lead first.

- Mulan, as the lead protagonist, can be seen as a classic example of a servant leader.
  - Using specific events, her actions and behaviors, during the plot, provide evidence to support this statement.
    - For example, re-watch the scene when the army recruiters come to Mulan's house to take her father as a soldier to when she decides to take his place instead. Mulan goes against tradition, deceiving those around her, to save her father. She selflessly gave up her gender, identity, and even sacrificed her life to serve her father and thus her country. Considering Mulan's character and values, why do you think she decided to do this? What kind of traits is Mulan showing by making this decision, and how does it relate to servant leadership?
- Re-watch the scene of Mulan with the Matchmaker. The matchmaker tests Mulan to determine if she is truly a traditional Chinese woman. The culture of Chinese women was for them to be elegant, pour tea in certain way, dress beautifully, and wear make-up. The matchmaker had a goal to preserve this culture, and she would go through all means to have all the women in the village to follow the culture as well. She had very high standards. Because of this, she got extremely frustrated when Mulan messed up and poured all of the tea on her face in order to extinguish the fire she caused. She went as far as to state that Mulan would never be the traditional Chinese woman.
  - How does the matchmaker's devotion for culture and tradition display characteristics of being a servant leader?
  - How does this differ from serving as a leader in more structured religious beliefs?
- Notice in the movie how Mulan prays to her ancestors to protect her and give her courage in all her endeavors. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AARI1cMxS9w> In this scene, she accepts the fact that she is going against tradition by disguising as a male in the army, but she believes it is for a good reason. Also, she keeps her faith and tradition of ancestry by doing this.
  - How is this approach a different aspect of servant leadership (potentially going against acceptable behavior for a better outcome)?
  - Does servant leadership always result in actions that all others see as doing the right thing? Can you think of an example when this has happened (perhaps in history)? What could be the possible consequences of doing this?
- Apart from Mulan, the other males in the army expressed extraordinary servant leadership. They were all chosen by default because they were the males of their family. Like Mulan, they too were not very experienced and needed a lot of training to fight and defend. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSS5dEeMX64> In the scene when they were all doing quick exercises such as carrying heavy equipment, they could barely move. Even worse, they could not climb the mountain while carrying a

weight on their backs. Despite their inexperience, they were determined to learn and eager to fight. They went through the rigorous, back-breaking training just to be considered worthy as a team. Their drive to learn and become better fighters is what makes them good examples of servant leadership. They sacrificed, used their strength and will, to serve the army and ultimately their country.

- Discuss this idea, and use specific male characters to support it.

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