

One must earn the right to be a leader in work, life by Joe Bauman who is managing editor for the Eccentric Newspapers.

It's not everyday you get a chance to meet a remarkable person. On May 13, I and about 180 other people attending a leadership conference came face to face with not one, but two remarkable people.

The conference was sponsored by Leadership Oakland, of which I am a graduate and a member of the group's board of directors. Leadership Oakland, and its leadership conference, is all about identifying potential leaders in Oakland and grooming them to reach their full potential both in their career and their community.

The day long conference was highlighted by two keynote speakers; two completely different people but whose message was strikingly similar. And even though the thrust of the conference was geared toward business leadership, I left with the understanding that one cannot be a leader in their career if not a leader in their life.

Blaine Lee is a founder of the Franklin Covey organization, best known for his partner, Stephen Covey's "7 Habits" series of effective management books. Lee travels the world working with corporations on implementing more effective leadership models for their organizations. Himself being a best selling author, his latest book to hit The New York Times list is a title that articulates his philosophy: The Power Principle - Influence With Honor.

Lee spent the better part of four hours leading the conference in an interactive discussion on what makes a person a leader, and what makes a leader a greater person. Lee's message was similar to many others I have heard before, which loosely are based on the "Do unto others" philosophy.

What impressed me about his twist, however, was that people should spend more time focused on how they view themselves than how others view them. And he reminds us that some of the greatest leaders of our time gained their power not from position, political power or wealth, but from living principle- based lives filled with honor.

He used the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who he described as one of his heroes. Gandhi was not large in stature, had no wealth and held no political position, and yet was able to gain independence for his native land from the British largely by speaking the truth and living honor.

Lee, a father of 12, said people are identified as leaders by others; it is not a label one can give himself or herself. "If you live your life with honor, and if you try to be a sustained positive influence on others, then others will follow," Lee told the group. "There are a whole lot of companies that are filled with good managers and have no leaders. That's because leadership is about focusing on the future, and management is about focusing on the now."

Paul Templer is a person firmly focused on the future. His message to the group gave new meaning to the old saying, "when handed lemons, make lemonade."

Templer was leading an idyllic life as a safari operator in his native Zimbabwe until what he described as a "really bad day at the office."

While guiding an African river safari, Templer was attacked by an enraged hippopotamus that threw him from his canoe and swallowed him headfirst up to his waist. In the ensuing five minute battle for his life, Templer was gored by the savage beast, impaling him on his giant tusks and trying to drown him by pinning him on the bottom of the river.

Templer survived the attack, but he lost an arm and endured months of rehabilitation. Unable to work, he grew deeply depressed which drove his girlfriend away, and he found himself financially ruined, and full of self-pity and despair.

And just when he was about to give up on life, Templer had an epiphany, and decided that he needed to start living again. He decided that life was about choices, and he would choose to gather himself and try to make something of his life.

Templer found a Make-A-Difference Foundation and became a motivational speaker. He moved to the U.S., settled in Michigan, fell in love and married and now has two children.

Templer's message was that even in times of great adversity, making the right choices can lead to great opportunities, both in the corporate world and in real life.

Its not easy living an honorable life, or seeing opportunity in adversity, but neither is being a leader. And that was the real message of the conference.