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# Personal Philosophy of Leadership



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## Abstract

The following analysis will thoughtfully consider the accumulation of experiences and teachings which have shaped my understanding of what leadership is. It will define the philosophies that have shaped the definition and provide examples of experiences that have influenced the shape of the definition in my own life. Throughout my life, I have been molded from past leaders and have drawn from some of the strongest examples that I have seen in my personal and professional life. The principles will center on: values, vision, beliefs, behaviors, diversity, team building, dealing with change, and ethics. The principles will be tied back to the core values which drive me as an individual leader and ground my basis for leading others.

## Introduction

Most of us, as individuals, yearn to perform and do well in the assignments we are given. We gain a sense of accomplishment in finishing tasks. When we receive accolades for a job well done, we are fueled with a desire to perform again and to do better the next time. The majority of our daily tasks are sourced from our professional careers. While work can be satisfying, there are other dimensions of life that must be experienced to enjoy all aspects. Life is about living and so we must find a balance between work and life. Studies have shown that productivity in the workplace increases when work demands are kept in check. “They discovered that the ‘sweet spot’ is 40 hours a week—and that, while adding another 20 hours provides a minor increase in productivity, that increase only lasts for three to four weeks, and then turns negative.” (James, 2012)

Since a substantial percentage of our aggregate lives are spent working in order to finance our later years, where we aren't working, most invest themselves early before entering the workforce to educating themselves in pursuit of advanced degrees to become the most effective at what they do so they can maximize their earning potential. We don't always enjoy all that we are assigned, but we are expected to do it anyway. We therefore work to become efficient at whatever it is that we are assigned to do. David Allen in his acclaimed best seller, *Getting Things Done* put it best in its opening premise for the book in saying, "first...you want to get as much return as you can on your investment of time and energy....second, you want to get on to other things as fast as you can, without any nagging loose ends. And *whatever* you're doing, you'd probably like to be more relaxed, confident that whatever you're doing at the moment is just what you need to be doing—that having a beer with your staff after hours, gazing at your sleeping child in his or her crib at midnight, answering the e-mail in front of you, or spending a few informal minutes with the potential new client after the meeting is exactly what you *ought* to be doing as you're doing it." (Allen, 2002) While his book's main premise is centered on time and task management, David Allen is himself a great leader and teaches professionals how to master their daily tasks and empowers them with the freedom to focus on the things that have the highest potential to make the greatest impacts for their organizations. Self-mastery is required of us as individuals to achieve balance to efficiently manage ourselves so that we are both happy and productive.

So realizing that our professional lives exist to provide a means for us to enjoy the other aspects to life, how do we do this the most effectively while accomplish the most we can while

at work? The answer is found through effective leadership. Leaders that are invested in our personal success often recognize that we do want to perform well and to work toward accomplishing the collective goals that are outlined for us. They possess an innate ability by personality or through developed learning to see and recognize the combined abilities to accomplish a common goal. Leaders can navigate through obstacles and bring resources available to them together to achieve an established purpose. A great leader is “a visionary; he motivates people by making clear to them how their work fits into a larger vision for the organization. People who work for such leaders understand what they do matters and why...By framing the individual tasks within a grand vision, the leader defines standards that revolve around that vision. When he gives performance feedback – whether positive or negative—the singular criterion is whether or not that performance furthers the vision. The standards for success are clear to all, as are the rewards.”

Through example, a great leader demonstrates mastery in managing tasks and achieves balance. Those that follow a great leader do so out of respect and genuine interest to perform. The followers of great leaders can identify with their motives and find alignment with them as they can see the end goal is the same.

In my own observation, most of the successful leaders that I have been inspired by have been great at what they do in the workplace but even better individuals outside the office walls. They take active roles in their families, are involved in their communities, give to charitable causes, are passionate in their hobbies, invest in continuing their education and enjoy life to its fullest. Their passion for life, work, God, humanity, etc. is infectious! You cannot

help but do whatever you can to support them in their pursuits with the hope that in raising the bar with them, you will be also lifted in the process.

To this end, when I consider my personal philosophy of leadership, it encompasses all that I have seen and experienced myself as a follower. It also incorporates the knowledge I have obtained through study through books or in the classroom. I consider leadership a journey and as I continue to learn and develop, it is my goal to pull together the resources I have been provided through life's lessons to more effectively produce outcomes that better the individuals and organizations that I serve

### **Leadership Core Values**

Core values are the principles and beliefs that lay the foundation for us to function. Our moral compass is guided on the spiritual makeup of our better human nature. When our core values and principles are compromised, so is the foundation for which we are built. Stephen R. Covey said, "to value oneself and, at the same time subordinate oneself to higher purposes and principles is the paradoxical essence of highest humanity and the foundation of effective leadership. Correct principles are like compasses: they are always pointing the way. And if we know how to read them, we won't get lost, confused, or fooled by conflicting voices and values. They apply at all time and in all places. They surface in the form of values, ideas, norms, and teachings that uplift, ennoble, fulfill, empower, and inspire people" (Covey, 1992). The value system that we are built on will help guide us as leaders. Since values tie closely to character, these are virtue-based theories and fall under ethical theories of leadership. "In any decision-making situation, ethical issues are either implicitly or explicitly involved. The choices leaders make and how they

respond in a given circumstance are informed and directed by their ethics.” (Northouse, 2010)

The core values that a leader is grounded on will help them respond consistently when confronted with difficult decisions. As core values relates to ethical leadership behavior, they have relate closely “with what leaders do and who leaders are”. (Northouse, 2010) As leaders have natural influence, their core values will shape the culture of the organizations they serve.

The core values that I feel I have and operate with from day to day were mostly developed from childhood. It would seem reasonable to expect the same of most individuals. From early ages, we learn the difference between right and wrong, to be courteous and respectful, how to be a good friend, to be honest in dealing with our fellow man, how to serve others, to be loyal, to work hard, to play hard and to share. Although it seems simple, these important lessons can too often be taken for granted. Each one, in some way, serves as building blocks and contributes in laying the foundation of who we are and what we do as leaders. All of these virtues learned as a child make up the model for which I function every day. The Leadership: Theory and Practice text sums up the model for which I identify the most strongly with. All of the principles, beliefs and values which I developed from my youth to adulthood, are categorized nicely under five principle areas that are summarized in the model below. They are respect, service, justice, honesty and community.



Peter G. Northouse. Leadership: Theory and Practice (Kindle Location 4430). Kindle Edition.

In assessing my own leadership characteristics through the leadership measure instrument (LMI) surveys from the Northouse, I found consistency in my desire for leading through relationships and through consensus. These attributes are personified through my core values. At heart, I want to treat everyone fairly and be just in my actions and respectful in my dealings. Honesty, for me, is hugely important. My relationship with others if founded on a relationship of equal trust and without honesty, trust cannot exist. In building up relationships, a higher interest must be served above my own and so I serve with the attitude that the needs of those I am in service of come before my own. My success is measured by how successful those I lead feel. Even though I favor leadership through relationship and consensus, my core values help guide my actions when leadership has been done in a way contrary to my comfortable norm. In speaking further about ethical leaders the Northouse text refers to them as Authentic Leaders. It is said that “authentic leaders understand their own values and behave toward others based on these values. Stated another way, George suggests that authentic

leaders know their "True North" They have a clear idea of who they are, where they are going, and what the right thing is to do. When tested in difficult situations, authentic leaders do not compromise their values, but rather use those situations to strengthen their values.

(Northouse, 2010)

## Leadership Assumptions

Although I have credited my parents to a large extent with helping me develop my core values, beliefs and principles through raising me as a child, the world provides the framework for which we test our values. In addition to parental influence, I think the community I was raised in contributed in a significant way in testing my core values.

I grew up in a very small Idaho community with a population that is under 4,000 even today. My graduating class had 69 students. It is safe to say then that I was sheltered. School teachers, scout teachers, church leaders, sport coaches, employers, co-workers, parents of friends and others all helped shaped my view of leadership through good and bad examples demonstrated in the interactions I had with them.

I recall an experience of negative leadership as early as 15 years old which I still reflect on from time to time. It was my second job in the workforce. My parents had tried to teach me the importance of working very young. I was the oldest of five kids. While they provided me the essentials, I was encouraged to work and to save to in order to buy the non-essentials that I wanted. I appreciate that approach to this very day because I appreciate the value of money and do not squander it. In my second job, I worked for a cookie shop located in a mall. It was owned by someone that was a spouse of a teacher at my high school and she partnered with another woman we went to church with. We weren't overly friendly with the owners, but they knew my family and thought well of us. As teenagers go, I was

no different than most and made some poor choices in the friends I associated with. My responsibilities at the store primarily had me working the counter attending to customers. After a couple months into my job, an incident occurred in which money was missing from the register. This happened sporadically over the course of a couple of weeks. I of course had no knowledge of it and because of the associations I made in friends was confronted first. I was pretty shocked and admittedly didn't handle it well as I first resorted to anger. They assumed it had to be me and ended up firing me at the same time I was confronted. I was devastated to be wrongly accused like that. It had shaken my parents trust as well, as initially they believed my employers and assumed they had proof. In a small community like that, word spreads fast and I would be lucky to get a job anywhere. This all turned out to be a blessing. It didn't take but one more week and the money was still coming up short and they knew it couldn't have been me. The truth eventually unfolded and the culprit was caught and criminal action taken.

For me, after leaving, I ended up getting one of the best jobs I could have gotten working at a country club. I worked many odd jobs after until I went to college that included working on farms, doing construction work, running a my own lawn mowing business, DJ'ing , etc and was known (and still am) to be an honest and very hard worker. Through all my employment, I worked at that country club in parallel until I left for college. Of all my proudest accomplishments, I take personal pride in hearing from anyone what a strong work ethic I maintain. As the oldest of all my siblings, I established a reputation so that each of them was able to find work at that country club. Each of my siblings did such a good job that they would eventually recruit them as soon as they were an eligible working age. To date, I have never received an apology from either store owner and neither has admitted that they were wrong in accusing or firing me. Those types of things in small communities spread fast as well and after a couple of years they went out of business. They always had a hard time recruiting or retaining staff.

In contrast, after finishing my freshman year at college I decided to volunteer two years of service as a missionary for my church. The potential existed to be sent anywhere across the globe as the destination is left up to my church leaders. Part of me wanted to go somewhere far so that I could see the world and learn another language. When the call came, I was called to serve in Philadelphia as an English speaking missionary. My family and I were all excited and knew this would be an experience which would really help me grow and mature as I served a higher purpose other than my own.

At the time, other friends were enlisting to serve their country through military service. I had a couple months to prepare and no time could have been sufficient to prepare a small community kid like me for a big city culture like that. It was as foreign of an adventure as it would have been if I would have been sent to some distant land. I felt inadequate and alone. I was humbled immediately and found out how small my perception was of the world from my small community view. Six months into my two year mission, I found myself wanting to quit. It was at that time that my mission leader (also a volunteer) started to help coach me and see that I was as equipped for success as any of the other 200 missionaries that I was serving with. He helped me see that failure was not an option and that I could do hard things. It wasn't easy but because I knew that he cared for me as an individual and that he took the time to help lift me up there where I was, I was willing to try. I committed to forget myself and work and in so doing was able to be very successful in helping other missionaries and individuals as I taught them about the principles I believed in. Many of my closest friends were made during those two years I volunteered. The donation of my time served me more than it probably did anyone else as I got to test my value system against the world. At one point, I was asked to serve in a leadership capacity over all the missionaries. That was a great experience and served in small measure to help me be confident that I could do the same if asked in my later career.

Comparing these two experiences it is clear to see which had a more profound experience on me. There was nothing at all about the cookie shop owners that I can reference as being effective except for what not to do as a leader. Contrary to this, the leader that I do reflect on positively did many things right. To name a few: he established a relationship with me so that I could connect with him at a personal level; he let me know that he cared for me as an individual; he wanted me to be successful in our missions purpose and helped me to see how individually I contributed to that; and, we established trust with each other. When I was in the same position as a leader I saw how effective his style was and emulated the same. Because of the success I experienced as well in leading through relationships and consensus, I continue to do it the same today.

Through learning leadership theories, my eyes are opening and I am seeking to learn and incorporate other styles into my leadership style but seek to stay constant in holding on to the same values that I have always known.

### **Personal Leadership Beliefs**

I maintain an open glass that is being filled as I learn by study under the advanced degree I am pursuing in Medical Informatics. I also am filling my cup through direct application in a new role in which I am serving to lead a small team of software developers and architects for my current employer. I am learning that leadership theories are prevalent and the only constant within them, is change. Theoretical views are evolving. Leadership seems to me, more to do with leader than the group of individuals that follow them. Effective leaders are those that possess a high degree of emotional intelligence. They are able to navigate the obstacles in the workplace by controlling their own emotions, understanding how they are viewed of others, identifying with others and emotionally charging others toward a shared goal. The very purpose of leadership is to combine effort and strategy to a means that brings satisfaction to a group while accomplishing a common goal. Management and leadership are not

the same and the following helps distinguish and further define what leadership is in my mind. “The overriding function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations, whereas the primary function of leadership is to produce change and movement. Management is about seeking order and stability; leadership is about seeking adaptive and constructive change.” (Northouse, 2010)

Leadership is not for everyone. There are qualities, behaviors, talents and traits that are needed of leaders. Some come naturally and others have to be developed. I believe all can be learned if the desire exists. Some individuals might effortlessly be good leaders like some are good athletes because of their genetic disposition. With desire and effort, those lacking can develop the skills and abilities necessary to lead. All good leadership comes through experience in applying it. Self-mastery and improvement comes in understanding the educational philosophies as they are applied in practice.

As shared in my contrasting examples of effective and negative leadership, it is not good to have individuals leading who do harm to others. Experiencing good and bad leadership both have lasting stigma, but the negative experiences leave profoundly negative impacts. Individuals who leave lasting negative impact through power assignment wield even worse influences through their influence. History is plagued and wars are numbered with leaders who seek to negatively use their power over others.

Personal experience has demonstrated that the most effective leaders impact others through authoritative leadership. They define success and back it up with rewards and then empower their followers to accomplish the goal. Success feeds success and as leaders build from this they become credible and their followers confidently follow in purpose.

## Summary

Leadership to me is defined by the level of empowerment my followers believe they have. Success is defined through celebrating the victories of those that have achieved the goals that have been set.

Progress is measured by the level of directive leadership that is needed in contrast to delegated leadership. Achievement is defined in staying true to what makes my personal philosophies of leadership from the list below.

- Honesty is the most important trait of a good leader. Trustful relationships are built on this foundational trait.
- I believe good leaders must balance work and personal life and encourage the same for those they lead.
- Self-mastery is necessary. Leadership theory is constantly changing and self-study and application will help us sharpen our saws.
- Good leadership is rare.
- Emotional intelligence must be developed.
- Core values lay the foundation to help us navigate difficult situations and anchor us to what we believe.

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