

Philosophy of Leadership

Amy Spero

University of Kentucky

CHAPTER ONE: The History of a Leader

For hundreds of years, different views and styles of leadership have been studied in an attempt to formulate a guide to becoming an ultimate leader. Originally, it was thought that leaders were born, not made. I must admit that I too was this naïve. Upon entering class on the first day, in addition to hiding my anxiety and nervousness, I was also hoping that I had what it takes to be a great leader. I was full of doubts about my innate leadership abilities, wondering what happened to the students who were not born leaders and accidentally got admitted into the Emerging Leader Institute. Would they automatically fail me, or would I be given the chance to leave graciously?

However, just as researchers and philosophers realized that leadership is a process of influencing change among others, and that everyone can develop their own personal style of leadership, I eventually came to this conclusion as well. While I was not born into a prestigious leadership role, or even elected as an officer in any club on campus, I was still capable of developing leadership skills. Every individual embodies different strengths and weaknesses with regards to leadership, and as one grows they also learn to maximize their potential. Being a “great leader” is not a straightforward process, and there is no formula for guaranteed success. While you cannot become a leader by simply attending a class or reading a book, you can set achievable goals for yourself and apply what you learn on paper into different authentic experiences in life. Gaining a title to put after your name is not important, and should not be anyone’s leadership goal. Being a true leader involves taking risks and influencing change, sometimes without deserved recognition.

CHAPTER TWO: Getting Started

Although I originally believed that leadership started when you gain a title, the opposite is actually true. I dreamed of being elected president in my sorority because then, I incorrectly assumed, I would be a leader and everyone would automatically respect me. My reasoning was completely backwards, leadership is in fact much different than authority. One must first gain respect and credibility by exemplifying their values, setting a respectable example for others to follow in their everyday life, and living for a purpose. Attaining necessary knowledge is also a crucial step before attempting to lead a group. Others are not likely to listen to your opinions or commit to your ideas if you are not educated about your cause or a model of correct behavior. No one could ever be an effective leader that successfully influences others without initially establishing their own beliefs and values. When one develops a passion for something, and their behaviors truly correspond to their beliefs, others will soon recognize their efforts. Begin living a life worth following now, and people soon will follow.

This process of serving first and aspiring for a role as a leader later on summarizes the theory of a servant leader. As a young adult still in the process of maturing, the theory of servant leadership is a very beneficial lesson. In particular, this view of leadership is that any leader first begins as a servant, gaining knowledge and understanding while seeking to help others. As these servants develop their character, they are better able to serve as leaders and continue to influence positive change. When getting started as a leader, it is often discouraging to take on small jobs and tasks, knowing that your work may go unnoticed. However, it is important to seize every opportunity given to you, and to wholeheartedly work to make a change while modeling

your values every step of the way. Eventually small responsibilities will grow into much larger opportunities that will test your previous knowledge and experience, and when faced with these new challenges you will be adequately prepared to handle them.

CHAPTER THREE: Maximizing Potential

Through this process of servant leadership, many valuable lessons about one's self can be learned. Even though I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to take personality and leadership profiles to assess my strengths and weaknesses as a leader, experience is another way to evaluate your style and abilities. Through many different tasks and working with a variety of people, you will begin to learn more about your personality and how to maximize the strengths that you possess. Struggles will also quickly teach you what types of situations you handle best and what truly tests your abilities.

In regards to working with others, many people mistakenly confuse leadership with management. Leadership is not a competition for who has the most control or holds greatest power over others. Instead, it is learning to relate to people around you in order to create positive growth. Great leaders attempt to inspire others and share their visions and goals so that they can be achieved. Knowledge about how to motivate others can be learned through experience in a variety of situations. Commit to collaborating with others, and you can likely achieve more than you imagined. Although it can be very intimidating to let people with different strengths than your own shine in their own way, working together and encouraging each others' strengths is a must. Jealousy can easily take over and ruin potentially successful situations.

In addition to avoiding jealousy and accepting help, one must also learn to accept constructive criticism without humility. To maximize your potential, it is vital that you remain separate from any project you are working on, and realize that any critiques of your project will only help improve it. It is far more detrimental to refuse to accept negative comments and have a poor end result than to listen to feedback and learn how to improve yourself. Detach your ego from your work, and remember that your legacy and influence will last much longer than your name or reputation.

Just as recognizing your weaknesses in a product are important, acknowledging your personal strengths and drawbacks concerning different situations and interactions with people are also beneficial. Some people are more comfortable with confrontation and achievement, while others value communication and perfection. A stereotype of the typical aggressive male business leader used to come to my mind when I thought of a successful leader. However, I now realize that there are many different types of effective leaders, and this allows for leadership in various environments. Although I am not a male CEO who fits my view of a cliché leader, I have recognized that I have much strength in other areas. I set very high goals for myself and others, and strive to attain personal growth. Self-discipline and promotions are strong values in my mind, and I must realize this is not the case for others. I tend to set unrealistic expectations for others, and therefore would rather complete a task myself so that I know it is done to my standard. My style of leadership is almost directly opposite of the stereotype I previously described, but that does not mean I could never be an effective leader. By realizing my strengths and weaknesses, I can now collaborate with others and use them to balance out my flaws.

By recognizing weaknesses, it is easy to stick within ones' comfort zone and continue doing easy tasks that can be accomplished without a doubt as a sure way to avoid failure. However, taking risks and accepting challenges will serve as a rewarding experience and further maximize ones' potential. Leadership is an ongoing process that can continue to grow through new challenges.

CHAPTER FOUR: Perpetuation of Leadership

Gaining and maintaining successful leadership abilities is a continuous process. The conclusion of this learning experience is simply the beginning of my career as a leader. In order to truly gain knowledge from this information, I must test it in real life situations. Once again, this involves taking risks. The old saying, "if you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always gotten," is completely true.

Without stepping out and taking a chance, there is no chance for success. Although success is not always guaranteed, there always exists an opportunity to learn from the experience. While the more effort you put into a leadership class or a book determines the amount you will gain from it, the level of energy and experience you put into leadership correlates with the success of the outcome.

Take risks and initiatives in your leadership career, and the knowledge you will gain is insurmountable. Along the way, continue to encourage those around you that attribute to your success. Your success will often depend on the behaviors of others around you, so always show appreciation for them. Persistently give thanks and provide motivation, and the cycle of leadership will continue. As you gain influential leadership roles and continue to influence change in your sphere of influence, others around you will serve and grow and eventually develop their leadership skills as well.