

Kyle Berry

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Personal Leadership Philosophy

To know where you are, you have to know where you have been. Throughout this past semester I have had an amazing opportunity to grow as a person and develop my own set of personal leadership skills. After listening to multiple talks and reading various articles I have developed my own personal leadership philosophy. But, to understand where I get my ideas and reasonings, it is important to understand the thoughts and ideas of others on the same subject. It is because of these people, that I have been able to pick and choose what exactly goes into my philosophy.

Leadership has been thought of differently throughout the ages. Dating back to the mid 1800's, many assumptions have been made concerning it. There is the "Great Man" approach, which assumed that leaders were born, not made; that leadership only existed in a few elite individuals. On the complete other end of the spectrum, there is the "Reciprocal" assumption, which believes that leadership is a relational, shared process which is has a particular emphasis on followership.

Even with all of the assumptions that exist or have existed, I assume that leadership is something that can be learned and isn't necessarily the result of having it in your genes. All too often people make the mistake that being a leader means that you are in the front of the line waiting to distribute tasks and, more or less, manage what needs to get accomplished. However, leadership isn't just being the person with a title. Servant

leadership is a very key role which can be overlooked very easily. In the story *Journey to the East*, the main character, Leo, is the servant who does all of the tedious chores for the party. Leo travels with them and always keeps them going with his spirit and songs. Everything goes well until Leo disappears and it is then that the party begins to fall apart and the journey becomes abandoned. Leo is a perfect example that leaders aren't always the traditional head honchos like many think, but they are the ones who keep things going and help their "party" to stay on task and reach the goals that they have set for themselves.

Leadership isn't about whether you are a servant leader or not, but what kind of leadership you use to get where you want to go. There are two basic types of leadership: transactional and transforming. Transactional leadership is usually a shorter process in which each person recognizes the other as a person. These people are only brought together by the exchange and interaction that goes on between them. After it is over, they have no enduring purpose that holds them together. On the other hand, however, there is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is what happens when one or more people engage with others so that both the leaders and followers better themselves as people. Transactional leadership can lead to transformational leadership, but the main difference is that in transformational leadership the purposes become fused together. These are both ways in which leadership can be used to attain a goal and at times they might even go hand in hand. I prefer to use the transformational leadership when I want to make a change in people's lives.

Based off of all these aspects of leadership I have come to form my own definition of leadership. Leadership is a relational process in which a person or persons

influence others to succeed in shared goal or vision by means of working together. I have learned a great deal of new ideas and perspectives on leadership that I believe will help me become a better leader.

Some of the first things I learned in my development of leadership were the five practices of exemplary leadership. When it comes down to it, leaders have to model the way. Some people think that just because they have a title, people will automatically listen and follow their instructions. However, being a leader is about earning the respect you deserve. It is important not to ask anyone to do something that you wouldn't do first. Nobody will follow someone who is preaching about their vision, if that person doesn't set the example themselves. Hypocrites might receive followers for a while, but it won't outlast the quality of people following someone who lives and believes what they are preaching. An interesting thought I found and liked is that "people first follow the person, then the plan."

"Leaders cannot command commitment, only inspire it." It is the job of the leader to inspire their followers and look into the future and imagine all of the possibilities for them. They don't see failures, but opportunities for different ways to try and change things. It isn't enough for me to get excited about a project I'm working on. It is my responsibility to share my excitement and pass it on to the others who are interested. When I am trying to inspire a shared vision, I also have to listen to those who are following me. It isn't about me just talking and saying what I want. If that happened people would eventually get tired of me and move on to something else. I need to listen to what others have to say. If they share a similar vision to mine, their ideas could be extremely valuable for the overall good of what I'm trying to accomplish.

“Not one person claimed to have achieved a personal best by keeping things the same.” This reference to “success” stories from leaders of all kinds goes to show that you have to challenge the process. They know that when you reach for success, there is always the possibility of failure, but leaders take that risk. For my original project I had these huge ideas about what I could do and how I would accomplish it. I wanted to have a volleyball tournament to act as a fundraiser for kids with Muscular Dystrophy. I was very happy with my ideas and was so excited to try and implement them. I was going to get fraternities, sororities, and other student organizations involved by going and talking at their meetings and handing out flyers. Also, I wanted to sell shirts to try and raise money along with the volleyball tournament and have nice prizes like mp3 players or free Qdoba given to the winning team. Unfortunately, I had all of these ideas and my contacts fell through with no place to have the event. I regrouped and changed my project. While trying to challenge the process and do something that hasn’t been done before, I had a failure, but it won’t keep me down and I intend to set up this fundraiser sometime next year.

“Leaders enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away.” There is no reason to crave power. If you are out there for the title or the power associated with that title then the odds of you being successful as an exemplary leader are slim. Big ideas don’t become realities through one person, rather through a team. I worked with a lady named Michele Smith. For the Muscular Dystrophy Halloween party we worked hand in hand and accomplished what we set out to do. Is it possible that I could have done it without her help? The answer would be yes. Would it have turned

out as good? Probably not. Michele and I fostered a sense of teamwork and listened to what each other had to say, which allowed our vision to become a reality.

It is key to note that leaders need to encourage the heart of their followers. Many a times the road to reach a vision is a long one. It takes endurance and a constant reminder of why you are there. If you encourage people in your team by doing genuine acts of caring, it will raise people's spirits and push them forward. These can be things as small as making sure that you give all the people who helped proper recognition. Passion coming from the heart is a powerful thing that should never be underestimated.

These five different principles encompass the wealth of knowledge that I have acquired throughout this semester. At first I was sure that I knew what a leader was and how to be one, but I was wrong. I thought of all the general things like taking charge, wanting titles, and pursuing power. I am glad to have a different perspective now what it truly means to be a leader and what kind of leader I am. I realize that I don't prefer to be a leader with a title, but am content being a servant leader. I do well when I am not in the spotlight but still help out and are important to the well-being of an organization. My leadership style leans towards being a good networker and making the connections that are necessary as opposed to being very good at managing and doing busywork. I know now that I am much more effective as a leader when I have other people to work with, especially if their leadership style is different than mine (in terms of the DISC test). Also, with the right people and a genuine passion for my vision, I know that I can finish what I want to. There will be plenty of times where things don't work out the way I plan, but as a leader I will get around those obstacles and find alternative solutions. This

whole experience has been invaluable to me and I have grown to understand and practice leadership in a more effective manner.