

Taneshia House

ELI

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### “BEING A LEADER: SHAPING THE WORLD”

Everyone influences others in some form or fashion. For instance, an older brother can teach a younger sibling how to behave. The captain of a cheerleader team can set the example for her squad by doing community service. A manager can encourage a new worker to do better by recognizing the worker’s accomplishments. Simple actions like those just stated help make the world a better place. To continue to shape the world in a positive and significant manner, one must learn how to be a leader. A leader is a person who influences change in specific situations through a process, which is called leadership. In my own life, I recently began the journey of becoming an exemplary leader, and I still have much to learn. Being an exemplary leader means that a person is leading at his or her personal best and creates conscious change in the world, whether the change occurs in that person’s neighborhood, work, or school. Exemplary leaders usually have a philosophy of leadership that they follow. Sometimes, they follow a classic philosophy of leadership; other times they create their own personal philosophy. I have created my own personal philosophy by melting together previous philosophies of leadership that I adhere to including those of Mahatma Gandhi, Michael Angier, and teachings from the authors, Kouzes & Posner. I will share my philosophy in the following paragraphs. I will also talk about what level I have reached as a leader and what I still need to learn.

Before I explain my philosophy, let me introduce myself. My name is Taneshia House. I am a sophomore at the University of Kentucky. I am active in several organizations on campus such as Women’s Place (an organization that focuses on creating safety from violence), Students

Taking Action Globally, STAG, (an organization that focuses on solving global problems such as hunger), and the Emerging Leader Institute (a program that teaches students how to become better leaders). I have joined these organizations because of my life experiences and my background.

Born in the poor suburbs of New Orleans, I can relate to the problems of the needy and those who are discriminated against, populations in which blacks are overrepresented. As my family moved from the lower class to the middle class over the years, I found myself thinking about the problems of the people left behind. I think about hunger, violence against women & children, discrimination, and all types of inequalities. The world will never be perfect, but I feel that every person can make a change in the world, starting with myself.

On my quest to improve the world, I have developed a philosophy of leadership called, *“Being a Leader: Shaping the World.”* My philosophy encompasses several guidelines and suggestions on becoming an exemplary leader. Since leadership can be broken into three parts including the leader, the context, and the supporter, I broke my philosophy of leadership into similar sections. The first part of my book will cover the personal lessons on becoming a leader (LEADER); the following part will cover the leader’s actions for each project (CONTEXT). The last part will explain common leadership practices and interaction with supporters.

(LEADER)

Personal Lessons on becoming a leader

Mahatma Gandhi is a philosopher that I admire. His notorious saying, “Be the change you want to see in the world,” speaks to my heart every time I hear its wisdom. In researching this great man, I came across a writer called Michael Angier, who made a list of suggestions about leadership based off of Gandhi’s saying. This leadership list is called “Ten things to think about if you want to Change the World.” His instructions on leadership are suggestions that I have

heard many times in different forms and are equivalent to what I would recommend future leaders to do. So, I decided to incorporate his suggestions with my ideas and my life experiences. Together, these guidelines will help future leaders learn how to become a leader.

The first guideline in becoming a leader is to “Be You”. To become a leader, people must believe that they can be one. They must have confidence in themselves. In my Emerging Leader Institute (ELI) class, I was assigned to create a community service project on my own. Never before have I been given a more challenging task. I eventually decided to do a donation drive for a shelter called Bluegrass Domestic Violence Program. I collected toiletries and clothes from students on campus and had great success. Before the donation drive, I was insecure about my leadership skills. I have always had poor communication skills and I am shy. I would ask myself, “How could I become a leader?” After I completed my project, I learned that I could be myself and make a difference in the world. I do not have to be the most articulate or charming person in the world (even though these qualities help). People only have to be themselves.

Following the first guideline, I think if people believe in themselves and believe that they have a purpose in life, then they can make a difference. This guideline is called “Unique Purpose & Potential.” I believe my main purpose in life is to help educate people about violence against women & children and to help prevent this violence. Violence against women is not some slogan I saw on a commercial. Rape, molestation, domestic abuse has occurred to close members of my family including my mom, aunts, and cousins. This issue is important to me and I feel compelled to solve this problem. The third guideline in my philosophy of leadership is “Individuals Shape the World”. As Mahatma Gandhi said, each individual must be the change that he or she wants to see in the world. Individuals change society, one person at a time. They change society by setting the example for others and influencing others to follow their example, creating a cycle of change.

One change that I wanted to see was people helping shelters and victims of violence; so I organized a donation drive on campus. Many students helped the shelters by donating soap, toothpaste, shoes, and clothes.

The next guideline in my philosophy is “Change Yourself First”. Individuals actions must show that they support their cause or beliefs. If their actions contradict their words, then they will not be able to change how others feel about that cause. For instance, I am not a vegan or an animal lover; I do not own pets and believe in eating meat. Therefore, I would not be able to convince others around me to become vegans or vegetarians. However, I would be effective in changing people’s beliefs about violence since I am passionate about that subject.

“Responsibility” is the next rule of my philosophy. If people do believe in a cause, they must personally take responsibility to create change in their society. A mom should not just complain about underage drinking if that her main concern in life; she should join Mothers Against Drunk Driving or do something else to make a difference, even if she just helps one person. I believe when one person helps another person that the first person indirectly helps someone else. I took responsibility by becoming an educated peer mentor for Women’s Place, joining committees at Women’s Place, and by creating my “Stop the Violence Donation Drive”.

The last rule of the section is “Everything Matters”. From everything people say, do not say, do and do not do, everything matters. I think many people do not even attempt to do certain things because they feel that their actions will not matter. They feel that they will not make a difference. For example, many people do not vote for this reason. People do not understand that apathy does make a difference. When people choose not to do anything, they are sending a message that the problem can continue to persist. My project did not end up as complex as I had planned, which was a disappointment. My donation drive did not reduce violence against

women. However, what matters is that I *did* raise awareness about Women's Place, a place that strives to end violence against women and provides help for victims. I also helped many survivors of violence obtain needed items. This first section of guidelines is important in becoming an exemplary leader. If people know and practice these guidelines, people can take the first steps in becoming an exemplary leader.

(CONTEXT)

Leader's actions for each project

Leadership changes depending on each situation. For example, an executive for a non-profit organization probably uses different strategies for different audiences. If she is trying to influence a representative from a big company to help her organization, she will use business-like approaches such as giving statistics. When she is trying to influence middle class parents to help the organization, she will use other strategies such as providing free food or given tax incentives. The guidelines for this section include "Clear Vision", "Be Aware", "Flexibility", and "Be Imaginative", and there are intertwined. These guidelines explain how leaders must be prepared to adapt to every situation. These rules caused me the most problems during my project.

First, I recommend that future leaders have a clear vision for each project. I learned this lesson the hard way, for I did not have a clear vision for my project. I only knew that I wanted to help victims of violence and that I wanted connect my project to the international day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25. I had too many ideas in my head and I never fully sorted them out. I wanted to do a donation drive for a national organization at first. Then, I planned to do a fundraiser for Bluegrass Rape Crisis Center while doing an educational program for the international day.

When I did not receive permission to do my fundraiser, I failed to challenge to process. I lost confidence in my ideas and dropped the educational part of my project, which I regret. Then,

I changed my project to a donation drive. I was not as “Flexible” as I thought I would, and I wish I was more “imaginative” in my latter ideas. The next mistake I made happened when I continued to plan a donation drive for the same organization, Bluegrass Rape Crisis Center, which did not house victims of violence. My “awareness” of the program was low and I needed to educate myself more. Fortunately, I finally realized my mistake and donated the items to a local shelter called Bluegrass Domestic Violence Program.

Only when the project ended did I see what I should have done. I should have organized a donation drive throughout campus in more areas such as offices and should have organized an educational day for the International day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Looking back on the situation, I believe that education about the day was a necessary part of my project. My mistakes have taught me to be more flexible, aware, and imaginative. My mistakes also have taught me to have a clear vision. I believe that I have grown greatly due to my leadership project. Being flexible, imaginative, and aware in every situation are key practices of leadership and should be learned by future leaders immediately.

(SUPPORTERS)

Leadership practices and interaction with supporters

This last section of instructions comes from the book, *The Leadership Challenge*, which I recently read in my leadership class. The authors, Kouzes and Posner, came up with Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. These guidelines are not my own, but I think these guidelines should be incorporated into everybody’s philosophy of leadership, including mine. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership include Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. I still have much to learn

from these guidelines. I am definitely a Model the Way leader, or a leader who sets the example for supporters. I am still learning to follow the other practices of exemplary leadership.

For instance, inspiring a shared vision was difficult since I did not have a clear vision. Gaining support from others takes confidence, passion, and a clear vision. Therefore, I definitely had trouble getting people to volunteer and to help me. I also had trouble enabling others to act. Fortunately, a few volunteers from Women's Place assisted me throughout my project with decorations, dropping off boxes, and picking up boxes. Also, friends from my Social Inequalities helped me by passing out flyers, and Shane Tedder assisted me by printing 300 flyers for me. I told them all how much I appreciated their help several times, but I never made time to formally recognize their contribution such as writing a letter. Next time I definitely will encourage the heart of my supporters because I know how much recognition encourages me as a volunteer. Finally, challenging the process was something new to me. I definitely choose to change my project instead of fighting for my idea. I will have to work on my risk taking abilities. I believe that people who do not take risk as leaders are not really leaders.

### Conclusion

To summarize my philosophy of leadership, I believe that individuals must first look within themselves to make a difference. They must have confidence in themselves and their purpose in life. People must remember that they are responsible for shaping the world and that everything matters, including the actions you choose not to do. When leaders start to work on a certain project or try to influence change in a given situation, they must have a clear vision to be successful in their goal. They must adapt to every problem and take risks. Leaders also must learn how to gain support from others and enable others to act. Without unity and support, the leader's dream cannot become reality. Individual leaders shape the world, one person at a time.

