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Final Paper

Adam French's 10 Foundations of Leadership

It seems as if everywhere I go, I see lists or countdowns talking about the ten best or twenty worst or top five of something. It may be David Letterman's "top ten segment" on the *Late Show*. It may be ESPN's series, Sportscenter, counting down its "top ten plays" on any given night. John Maxwell even proved that such lists work outside of the world of television with his bestselling book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. In keeping with this theme of lists that our society has adopted, I decided that my final paper would discuss the leadership cornerstones I have come to adopt in my leadership style over the course of participating in the Emerging Leader Institute here at the University of Kentucky.

These cornerstones, foundations, and leadership beliefs are my own; other people may agree or disagree with them. However, I feel as if these ideas work for me and the type of leader that I want to become. Earlier on in the semester we were told to work on becoming the type of leaders that we would want to follow. While many leadership lessons have been presented to our class, this one kind of stuck with me and has changed my viewpoint on optimizing my leadership potential. No two people's definitions of 'leadership' are alike and different people's opinions on what makes a great leader so great differ. That said, these cornerstones are what I see as the best leadership characteristics and the characteristics of a) the type of leaders that I admire and want to follow, and b) the type of leader that I continuously strive to become. I feel as if these characteristics are the building block qualities of a great leader, so without further adieu, I would like to present to you Adam French's 10 Foundations of Leadership, starting with my most important leadership foundations and working my way down the list:

Foundation #1: A good leader knows the value of a hard day's work. In undertaking and completing my individual project this semester, I have come to amend the old adage, "You can do anything you set your mind to", changing it to "You can do anything you set your mind to and are willing to put in the time and commitment to see it through." My father taught me at a young age the value of a hard day's work and that there is absolutely no substitute for hard work.

While he is not here in person with me today, that lesson is something I will never forget; I truly feel as if anything in this world is possible if we, as leaders, are not afraid to roll up our sleeves and get dirty (both literally and figuratively). We can expect neither success nor good things to happen if we put in a halfhearted effort to something, but if we work as hard as we can, great things can be accomplished. Above all things in life, I value most the ability to work hard and put in a concentrated, serious, maximized effort in all of life's endeavors. If leaders strive for success and put in the effort to work towards success, I feel as if success will surely follow.

Foundation #2: A good leader makes every experience a learning one. Nothing in life is perfect; there will be bumps in the road regardless which road you take in life. What – in my opinion – sets the best leaders apart is the ability to make every experience – both good and bad – a learning experience. I worked hard during my project to learn from my mistakes and constantly looked at ways to better myself and my project. Sometimes making a mistake can be the best learning tool of all because it teaches us perseverance, the ability to adapt to changes, what not to do in the future, and how to readjust our goals to produce a more practical or beneficial result. In leadership, a lot can be learned by taking the bad, mixing it with the good, examining how to make the better, and eventually producing the best. Not every success story starts out successfully; we must remember that as leaders and work to never "waste our time", even in our failures.

Foundation #3: A good leader builds good working relationships. Good leaders foster good working relationships with the people they will be working with, for, or around. The value of these good working relationships is priceless; they can make the difference in something being good and something being great. A good working relationship equates into a positive working environment, which in turn makes the processes of leadership more effective, efficient, and positive. It is vital to most all successes in life to have friends and confidants working around and with you because it makes being a leader so much easier. A good leader makes these friends and fosters these relationships and is able to succeed 100% better than the leader that tries to do it on his own. It is also vital to good leadership that these relationships remain give and take.

Foundation #4: A good leader is not afraid to collaborate or delegate. In keeping with the same idea as foundation #3, a good leader is not afraid to step aside and let the people around him step up to the plate. Good leaders know both their strengths and more importantly, their weaknesses, and by knowing so, are not afraid to empower other people who have strengths that compensate for their weaknesses. A good leader also knows that the process of leadership does by no means need to be a one-man show. A good leader delegates responsibility for three reasons: a) to allow people who are good at certain things to use their specialized skills to produce the most favorable output, b) to spread the responsibility around and give the process a “team” feeling, and c) to empower others to become good leaders, as well. A good leader collaborates for the same reasons, basically to cover for what the leader lacks in leadership ability. A good leader is NEVER too proud to delegate or collaborate, for pride cometh before the fall.

Foundation #5: A good leader sets clear-cut, realistic goals and keeps the group’s “eyes on the prize”. A good leader sets goals for the group he is leading and stays focused on those

goals; the only catch is that these goals must be attainable and realistic. More importantly, a good leader gets his followers to adopt these goals (“buy-in, as John Maxwell calls it) and work hard to also stay focused on these goals. While it is sometimes quite easy to set good goals, it is not always so easy to get other people to want to achieve them, too. However, great leaders simply find a way to get people on board with their objectives; one of the biggest leadership challenges is getting an entire group on the same page and connecting with each and every one of them to inspire them to commit to achieving said goals.

Foundation #6: A good leader maintains a positive attitude. Simply stated, a good leader keeps a smile on his face and a positive attitude. The type of leader that I want to be has the ability to take the lemons life throws at him and turn them into lemonade without ever losing his positive attitude. My philosophy is “if you think you can’t, you won’t; if you think you can, you will”, and this allowed me throughout the course of my project to keep focused on my goals (foundation #5) and maintain a positive outlook that allowed me to stay motivated to keep on trucking. A positive outlook makes any project seem more do-able and allow a good leader to never question what or why they do what they do.

Foundation #7: A good leader is also a good communicator. Although this point has been argued both ways, I feel as if good leaders are also, in turn, good communicators. They are good at communicating their goals and visions, they are good at communicating with both the people following and working with them, and they are good at – more than anything – communicating praise on their followers and coworkers when things go right. They are straightforward and honest in their communication, which makes the people around them comfortable in communicating back to them. Communication is a two-way street and good leaders (since I have deemed them good communicators, as well) are simultaneously good speakers and good

listeners. Along with a positive attitude, good communication skills make the workplace a much more productive, comfortable, enjoyable place.

Foundation #8: A good leader has the ability to influence others. John Maxwell defines leadership as (above all else) influence. I feel as if he is right in many ways and that good leaders are able to exert legitimate influence on the people around them. Quite simply, as an old quote hints at, good leaders get people to do something they want them to do because they want to do it. Even more simply, as Robert Greenleaf puts it, “The only test of leadership is that somebody follows.” I feel as if great leaders – the very ones I want to follow – have the ability to influence other people’s thoughts and actions.

Foundation #9: A good leader is confident. One of the keys in getting me to buy in to a leader is whether or not I feel as if that leader is competent. Part of a leader conveying himself as competent (whether he truly is or not) and therefore getting people to follow him is that leader having confidence in his ability. Good leaders have the ability to walk the fine line between confident and cocky, and good leaders make other people confident in them because first and foremost they are confident in themselves. I feel confident in knowing that I can be a great leader, and by letting this confidence show (in just the right proportion) I can persuade other people to be confident in me, as well. One of the best features of the Emerging Leader Institute is that it gives its participants confidence in their leadership ability. Good leaders never stop growing as leaders and never truly quit developing as leaders; however, throughout every phase of their leadership growth they must be confident in their abilities. Confidence makes the leader.

Foundation #10: A good leader demands respect and is a respectable person. I have learned this foundation more so through my fraternity than anywhere else. In order for a leader to be successful and have a gaggle of faithful followers, he must a) demand respect, and b) be the

type of person people can respect and want to respect. My fraternity harps on respect quite a bit, especially through pledgship, and only now am I starting to see how important it truly is. Good leaders have to walk another fine line, this one being the one between friend and leader. A good leader is friends with his entire group, but at the same time, is not too good of a friend that criticism or punishment cannot be issued. The key to allowing a leader to walk this line of being a friend who can still be a leader is respect. Getting people to respect one another (which of course starts with people respecting themselves) and getting them to respect me as a leader will allow me to listen to their ideas and criticisms wholeheartedly, avoid serious conflicts, get behind my goals, and most importantly, allow people to agree and disagree with issues without it affecting the leader/follower/friend relationship. Respect is one of the most important qualities in life; similarly, it holds a very high role in leadership, as well. Part of this, however, requires the leader to be a respectable person; at times, this can be a challenge for all leaders: living up to the standards that being a leader entails. Good leaders, however, find a way to make it work.

Quite simply, those are my ten foundations of leadership. I feel as if they serve as a set of prerequisites to becoming a great leader. There are many more characteristics that help shape great leaders, but I think that becoming such boils down to these ten more so than any other. Leaders who exemplify these ten foundations are the types that attract loyal followers and build great leaders around them. These are the types of leaders who I have most admired in my followership roles; in turn, these qualities are the ones I most try to exhibit when I am in a leadership role, which leads me to one more point: good leaders do not have to have titles to be good leaders. Every moment of my life has the potential to be a leadership role, and I – as well as all emerging leaders – must remember that.

In summation, being in the Emerging Leader Institute (as well as FarmHouse, FFA, and all of the other organizations that have helped shape me as a leader) has opened my eyes to what I consider the most important leadership characteristics, and these ten fit that bill. I never really thought about what makes a good leader until this class, and now I see more so than ever the type of leader I want to be. I hope that I have developed in all ten of these areas and am committed to continue to develop in these areas. I want to never stop growing as a leader, and I want to be someone who people look back on and say, "He truly was a good leader and good person."

Additionally, I want people to remember me as excelling in all ten areas of leadership, and while I feel as if I have never been as good of a leader as I am now (thanks to coming to college and ELI), I have a long way to go in becoming the type of leader that I want to be. Basically, I have grown as a leader tenfold this semester, and feel as if while I may be an emerging leader, I still have a lot to learn and a long way up the leadership mountain to go – especially considering that, in my opinion, the leadership mountain never peaks, it always climbs, symbolizing that there is always room for personal growth and leadership development. I have enjoyed sharing my leadership philosophy with you and hope that you feel as if I have indeed grown somewhat as a leader over the past semester.