What DON'T I Want from Myself as a Leader?

The reading in this course has been though provoking. While I have read many books about leaders and leadership, none of them have covered the same breadth of information as we have covered thus far. In particular, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2018) and Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* (2017) were both wonderful reads. Before reading these books, I had some preconceived notions about leadership. The leader leads the followers. The followers look to the leader for the vision and guidance. The leader helps develop the followers to be and do more than they thought possible. These two books helped me recognize what I admire most in the leaders in my life. Also, they illuminated a few aspects that I do not wish to carry into my own leadership. There were two ideas that resonated with me: leading *with* the group and teaching via discussion.

First, leading with the group would be defined just as it sounds, as opposed to apart from the group. Leading with the group makes me think of Dr. Martin Luthor King, Jr. Ghandi, and Mother Theresa. While I am sure there are others, I cannot think of a leader who led *with* the group who acted in nefarious ways. For acting selfishly or only for personal gain would remove them from the group. They would then be leading apart from the group. From my little knowledge of the Cuban revolution, both Che Guevara and Fidel Castro started by leading *with* the people to revolt against Batista, only to separate themselves with ever increasing amounts of power *over the* people. This makes me wonder about how influence and power affect leaders, and how ethics and moral grounds can keep them acting ethically. Understanding that behavior can be influenced by the situation or environment, what must leaders do (or who must they be) to avoid falling into leading for selfish gain and apart from the group. I do not want to be a leader who is removed from a group. While I believe I can act with the best interest of my team, I feel there are ways to stay grounded. Staying connected to the team and group is one way to do this. I have had leaders in the past who led from afar, and for their own personal gain. I did not respect these leaders. On the other hand, I have worked with leaders who were willing to get their hands dirty and work with the team. They had a much more positive impact than the former leader.

Second, both Freire and Palmer talk about teaching *with* students and groups, and not just relaying facts. Worse, we may just be relaying opinions masked as facts. Both write philosophically, and convincingly, that the best teaching is done *with* the group, and not *to* the group. Else, we are just teaching people to think just like us. Freire would argue this dehumanizes them. One of the best things we can do as leaders is help our followers be the best versions of their authentic selves, and only if they wish this. Teaching *with* the group allows them to discover and learn in alignment with their own authenticity. I have had both teachers and leaders alike teach from authority. When I disagreed with them, I often did not feel safe asking or challenging the topic. This led to distrust and poor communication on may part. I do not want to be this kind of leader. On the other hand, I have experienced teachers and leaders who laid out a learning environment and released me into it to learn and experiment. I learned more in these environments, and I respected the leaders more. They demonstrated trust and belief.

These books made me reflect on my past experiences in different organizations. Both positive and negative experiences have something to teach, and Freire and Palmer had a new lens for me to view these experiences.

References

Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury academic.

Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership* (8th ed.). Sage.

Palmer, P. J. (2017). *The Courage to Teach*. Jossey-Bass.

What DO I Want from Myself as a Leader?

Coming into this program, I thought I would jump right in and learn about great leaders, their actions, their philosophies, and related examples. Of course, this was an assumption and I had no idea what we would be learning about. I am so thankful that the first class has been organized as it has. The reading, the videos, and the student discussions have all stimulated thought on the question, "what is leadership?" I really appreciate being led to think about the variety of models and frameworks that exist. All of the content also has me thinking about my own actions and leadership philosophy. I continue to ask, "how am I showing up as a leader?" The question to ponder as part of this reflection involves what I want from myself as a leader. Also, does this change as I look to my leadership role at work, in my community, and as a part of my family?

When I look to my role at work and to what my goals are as a leader, there are a few key principles that reappear in my desired behaviors and skills. These include having a vision, motivating others, and being a support to others. These principles may vary in execution as they pertain to each realm of my existence (work, community, and family), but the principles remain constant.

When it comes to having a vision, my actions must be aligned with a future goal or direction. This is true in all three realms mentioned above. This might be a product goal at work or a relationship goal amongst my family. Also, I am not the one who is solely responsible for creating the vision, but I think, as a leader, it is my responsibility to hold this vision, act towards it, and remind the team that this is what we are striving for.

Motivation is an area that I really believe in. Motivation is that feeling people get when they want take action and get something done. In my experience, most people are willing to provide the minimal effort necessary to satisfy a desire. Achieving something that has not been done before will require a lot of effort. In the work or community realm, building new things is risky and hard. The leader has the opportunity to emotionally connect with each follower and motivate them to continue taking action, taking risks, and moving toward the finish line. In the familial realm, I want to be the kind of leader who can motivate family members to be authentic, take risks, try new things, and set goals of their own.

Finally, support is a requirement from leaders. As mentioned above, achieving anything meaningful takes effort. With this effort comes risk. There may be failure. There may be perceived judgment. There may be negative self-talk. I want to be a leader who can support team members, community members, and family members through this turmoil. This support can help individuals sort through their emotions and thoughts, and figure out a way forward. As a leader, I must be about moving forward. I don't think I could truly lead unless each individual willingly moved forward. To do this, they must feel supported, trusted, and understood.

Before this introductory course, I had not given much thought to my own philosophy on leadership. While it felt authentic to include vision, motivation, and support, the course content and discussions have made me question, validate, and/or invalidate each of these themes. It is probable that my philosophy will evolve as I learn more. Also, I acknowledge I have much to work in in building skills to excel in these behaviors. I want to be a leader who has a clear vision, who can motivate a team to act, and can support individuals through their challenges.

What do you plan to DO to become the leader you choose to be?

When pondering this question, the first word that jumps to mind is, "action." My mind yells, "take action! Start practicing! Be the leader you want to be!" However, when I pause to think about what exact actions I would take, I realize there is more to consider. For example, what actions are aligned with my philosophy? What outcomes do I want? How do I want my team and org to feel? What, exactly, do I want? Without clarity in these I fear I cannot take action and expect to achieve the goals I set. I still believe action is necessary, but clarity is also a requirement. To become the leader I choose to be, I will create clarity, take action, and then reflect on those actions to influence changes or progress.

Clarity is a requirement to lead. In my opinion, a leader must not only be clear about the goals they wish to achieve with the team, but also must be clear about how they wish to lead. Personally, I wish to educate and empower others to be their best selves. At least, this goal reflects my current stage of personal and career development. This statement is as clear as I can get at this point in my life. It feels like a good start. But now what? What does is mean to educate others? What does it mean to empower them? And what does "best self" mean? I feel it necessary to take time to chew on these terms, let them settle, and see how they feel. Considering my recent reading of Paulo Freire and Parker Palmer, the methods by which I educate impact the quality and effectiveness of both teaching and learning. Before I take action, I must be clear on what I want to achieve and how I want to achieve it.

Though clarity is a requirement, I cannot suggest to myself to abstain from action until clarity is created. Learning comes from successes and failures, both of which come from action. A mentor of mine advises, "ready, fire, aim," and I love the sentiment. While I do not have complete clarity on how and what I want to achieve, I know enough to do *something*. While I do not manage a group of people, I do influence people both at work and in my personal life. I will take action to implement the things I learn in this leadership program, and will do so in a way that best aligns with my authentic self. This means my coworkers will see me be curious, supportive, reliable, decisive, diligent, and focused. As I see it, these actions will help me be the best I can be as well. With these actions, I can lead by example.

As mentioned above, learning comes from action. More specifically, it comes from intentionally reflecting on actions, their results, and their impact and then letting that assessment influence what to do next. For example, I may learn that being supportive means different things to different people within my circle. As an example, I know of one person who needs verbal support and motivation. On the other hand, another individual needs tactical support and requires help executing tasks. This learning came from reflecting on a past failure, where I offered the latter individual verbal support when they really needed an extra set of hands. From another viewpoint, I will use feedback as a means for reflection. My peers know best how they feel when I act in certain ways. To effectively reflect on my actions and results, I need to understand how I affected others. In this, their feedback will be necessary.

While the above three topics cover my philosophical reflections on what I need to do, there are some tactical actions I plan on taking. As I have mentioned in past writings I love motivating and connecting with people. In the past, I have done this through a combination of education and entertainment. This is what some like to call "edutainment." While I am going through this program, I intend on sharing learnings with my team through entertaining educational videos. This will give me an opportunity to do what I love, while pointing me in the direction of leadership development. During this effort, I will also take action, take time to clarify my goals and purpose, and also reflect on the results.

How can I continue to grow as a leader?

This introductory class has really opened my eyes to the vast field of leadership. The number of perspectives, models, and frameworks is daunting. There is so much to learn. At this moment, I am doing my best with what I know. I have a personal philosophy paired with my authentic self to guide my actions. To grow as a leader, I must be willing to do new things, take risks, and learn along the way. To boil it down to a simple plan, I think that growing as a leader will depend on two things: continuing to learn, and taking risks.

When it comes to learning, it helps to have a solid foundation of research and leadership principles. Participating in this program is meant to help with this. While I have read many books about leaders and leadership, I want to have a foundation of knowledge both historical and academic. From this, I can start to stack more learning on top. The leadership program will surely have much reading and discussion to aid in learning. I am also interested in digging deeper into the "how" and "why" of leadership. Reading about ideas and implementation can serve to motivation action, but understanding the scientific research will be sure to ground my actions and ideas in data. Judging by Northouse's Leadership (2019), I can surely spend time focusing on any number of different models to continue building a depth of knowledge. As there are many flavors of leadership, so to speak, my growth will be influenced by how many I can sample and then assimilate into my own authentic leadership style.

I can also learn in ways that do not require reading. I am lucky enough to have great mentors in my life who have all succeeded in various levels of leadership. I can use them as a resource for their perspectives, teachings, and insights. Also, they can be a reliable support team for providing challenges. Avoiding their guidance would reduce the speed at which I can grow into a better and more confident leader. This also gives me an opportunity to observe their own unique leadership styles, and potentially absorb parts of their style that mesh with my own authenticity.

All of this learning will be useless without action, and the way to continue growing is to take risks. It will be scary to test a new action, approach, or skill. I won't know what the outcome will be, or how individuals will react. I won't really know if a new approach will mesh with my authenticity. All of this can create fear. But what is growing if not expanding your comfort zone, as well as your skillset? Taking risks may be as small as intentionally asking a different question in a conversation. It may be as large as taking on a new project that has a lot of ambiguity. It may even go so far to assume leadership over an unclaimed area, simply to practice and develop more skills. Luckily, my work life presents me with all three of these opportunities. I already make a point to try new communication strategies. The scariest action on the table is assuming leadership over a new project. As such, this is definitely one thing I should do.

While I feel confident in my ability to act on the above plan by reading, learning from mentors, and taking risks, I also feel my actions need to be guided by clear goals. At this moment, my goals around leadership involve me being more effective at helping educate and motivate individuals be their best selves. As I write this reflection a new opportunity has bubbled up in my mind. To grow as a leader, I should create a thing which I can lead. I could start an educational or support program for individuals to learn about their own leadership in their lives. Doing this would satisfy my own desire to help people while also pushing me to learn more and take risks.