

EAD 867: Individual Educational Leadership Philosophy

Throughout ones' journey in discovering what they value within the realm of leadership, many different opportunities for learning and development present themselves. As I have encountered readings, small/large group on-line discussions, and case reflections, I have been able to decipher the growth I have made from the beginning of the course in relation to new ideals learned as well as how my previous leadership principles and understandings have been altered. Through this reflection one will find my original leadership thinking prior to the offerings of this course and how that thinking has been furthered with an underlying understanding that leaders "are not necessarily those who merely hold formal 'leadership' positions", one can develop qualities of a "successful" leader and "on the contrary, all people are potential leaders". (Astin & Astin, p. 8)

My Thinking at the Beginning of the Course

Looking back at my initial thoughts in regards to leadership, I seemingly had a "surface" understanding of the concepts that leadership consisted of. Originally we were asked to give our definition of leadership. The definition I spoke of had many ideas that we encountered in this course such as being able to "demonstrate a clear vision", "build trust", "influence and motivate others", "operate with integrity", "be well communicated", "display passion", and lastly, "be flexible and determined". Although all of these concepts are leadership skills that I wholly value, during the establishment of this course these thoughts "sounded" good in nature, but my

understanding of how these perceptions might be demonstrated by any given leader were unclear. The concepts presented showed that I still held a vague knowledge base of each and the “realization” that leadership is a “process of connections” was not eminent. (Drafft, 2003)

Secondly, we were asked to give our personal explanation of what a follower included. For this aspect of the course, I had a very difficult time keeping this definition positive. My understanding of the follower role took on a passive connotation in which a follower is someone who “does not speak or act upon their thoughts or feelings” and may just “go with the flow” in turn when faced with a problem or situation “not feeling strongly about the product”. With the start of this course in action, “in the deepest sense”, I lacked the “distinction” that being “leaders and followers” are sometimes “insignificant”, meaning that “in every moment of life, we are simultaneously leading and following” and “there is never a time when our knowledge, judgment and wisdom are not more useful and applicable than that of another”. (Drafft, 2003, p. 5)

These preliminary leadership thoughts both in regards to leadership and followers hold a great basis for a wealth of learning to take place and as one will see within the following reflection of newly gained leadership philosophies, deep learning has taken place and has been embedded.

Where My Leadership Philosophies Are Now

As the previous discussions throughout this philosophy reflection have demonstrated, the ability for growth in my leadership thinking was present. Within the next accounts, one will find concepts that I either held as important previously and have gained a new understanding of or completely new ideas that were presented within this course that have affected my view of leadership. Although these accounts speak from a general leader’s point of view, these are all

aspects that I hope to imitate within my own leadership skills. One should note that there are many other characteristics that I consider flourishing leaders to demonstrate, however this reflection is used to exhibit my changed thinking.

AUTHENTICITY

One all-encompassing idea that came about toward the end of my learning for this course (yet has left the most impression) is the idea that anyone can be a leader, but any leader that “attempts to emulate all the characteristics of a leader is doomed to fail”. (George, 2004, p. 1) Therein lies the conceptual idea that leaders need to be “authentic” in “every regard, being their own person” and more over “what counts is the authenticity of the leader, not the style”. (George, 2004, p. 1) *First and foremost, a leader must display a solid sense of authenticity.*

Authentic leaders exhibit five distinct qualities in order to meet the needs of the organization, all concepts I value as a current and future leader. Authentic leaders “understand their purpose” with an unwavering amount of passion, “practice solid values” including integrity, “lead with heart” in order to “share themselves fully”, “establish enduring relationships” with focus on more personal connections, and “demonstrate self-discipline” to “demonstrate their values through their actions”. (George, 2004, p. 2-7) Seeing that this concept of allowing one to be themselves, yet still having the ability to become an “essential leader” is something I will strive for and although authenticity “involves many years of hard work, some pain and suffering, and the wisdom that comes from experiencing life at its fullest” it has shown that authenticity is worth the passage. (George, 2004, p. 8)

SHARED VISION

Although in the launch of this course I discussed the idea of a leader holding a vision and its significance, the clear understanding of how truly important this concept was did not exist in my thinking. Agreed, a “vision is a descriptive picture of a desired future of the organization” and “where you personally want to go and where you want to take the organization”, but nowhere in my reflections did I mention that it was the leader’s responsibility “to recruit others to a shared vision”. (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998 p. 81) As I have come to believe, “vision by itself is not enough. It must be a *shared* vision” and *a leader must always display and connect this shared vision with the staff to promote “awareness”*. (Pielstick, p. 7)

This ideal came about clearly through my first case study in which the vision of the leader was emitted and misunderstood by the faculty. A shared vision should be one of the first steps that a new leader takes within any given organization. Not only does it reveal your passions, “it provides meaning for the employees and other stakeholders”, this shared concept “is inspiring and often exciting, motivating individuals” and “unifying, creating a sense of community”. (Pielstick, p. 7) Therefore a shared vision must be developed with the staff in mind as well as go beyond just the shell of a traditional singular vision.

COLLABORATIVE TEAMWORK/GROUPS

Not mentioned within my preliminary ideas of what leadership consists of, teamwork was something I valued, yet obviously engaged in very little at the start of this course. Coming from my previous role as a pre-kindergarten teacher, I had little opportunity to develop a “true” team concept due to the fact that I was solo within my school. With this lack of ability to engage in groupings with similar staff members, I consequently negated this aspect from my definition of leadership. Through this course, I have come to realize how important collaborative teaming is

and the “relational” qualities it expresses. *A leader must utilize the relational concept of collective groups within an organization as well as have an exceptional consideration of how to effectively engage his/her staff within this process.*

As I have learned, a leader must be willing to use teamwork as a “strategic choice” and although “the fact is, building a leadership team is hard”, this is a choice any constructive leader must make. (Lencioni, 2003, p. 2) With this understanding held firmly, one must consider the essential elements to assembling these successful teams within an organization. First, building a “cohesive” and “functional” team requires establishing “trust based in vulnerability”. This means that all group members must be willing to admit to their “mistakes” and “weaknesses”, but also recognize where their “strengths” lie as well. (Lencioni, 2003) Secondly, an efficient team must have a “healthy” dose of “conflict. Most people stray from conflict; however as stated, conflict can be “productive”, leaving unresolved issues at a minimum. (Lencioni, 2003) Next, a team must show an “unwavering commitment” to each other. Team members must commit to “decisions” as well as “available information” in order to be a cohesive unit. (Lencioni, 2003) Fourthly, great teams show each other and “unapologetic” amount of “accountability”. Great teams remind each other of their individual accountability as well as “remind” other members of “when they are not pulling their weight”. (Lencioni, 2003) Lastly, collaborative teams use “tangible collective outcomes” to measure their “results”. Not in an individual fashion, the team must be accountable for the outcomes together with no single person taking credit for the results. (Lencioni, 2003) With these concepts in mind, a leader can acquire the benefits that with bringing people “together” from a “variety of different backgrounds”, “allied in common purpose” teams “are far more productive than any other form of organizing”. (Bennis, 1997) (Wheatley, 1997)

EMPOWERMENT

Left out from my primary leadership thoughts and responsibilities completely, empowerment was something that I never had thought of in regards to roles of a leader. When initially addressed within the course, I had difficulty understanding how this concept might work within an organization. Seeing how imperative this aspect was through the readings, I agreed with the ideas of empowerment, but it took the last section to really understand how one might go about empowering their staff (a direct correlation to the previous discussion of collaborative teamwork). *A leader must offer and demonstrate the ability to provide their staff with a true sense of empowerment.*

When discussing the notion of empowerment, it is important for one to see that “we are talking about ways of acting by leaders that result in more initiative and responsibility-taking by subordinates or followers”. (Vaill, 1997, p. 4) This belief “essentially” takes the leader’s responsibility and ultimately deals with “passing” this responsibility to the “followers” of an organization. (Offerman, 1997) With my previous negative connotations of what a “follower” encompasses, this provides completely different outlook on the term. Leaders not only need to provide this type of “power” to their staff they need to consider what “empowerment” means to the “learners” in specific contexts. (Offerman, 1997)

Not only have I had the opportunity to see how “followers” are a crucial aspect to an organization and do not come with negative definitions, I have been able to see what a leader should expect when trying to implement this. A leader needs to take into account and “overcome resistance” with the knowledge that followers will need an ample amount of “time, trust, and training”. (Offerman, 1997) A completely new level of thinking has emerged and I now believe

that leaders need to encourage “environments that promote the development of the human spirit on a local scale, this creating a fundamental shift of the mind, in which individuals come to see themselves as capable of creating the world they truly want rather than merely reacting to circumstances beyond their control”. (Komives, Lucas, McMahon, 1998, p. 95)

DIVERSITY IN RELATION TO WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Another key leadership aspect that I had never considered previously to the offering of this course, diversity is something leaders are additionally responsible for more than ever within their organization. *Leaders must operate with sensitivity to diversity (on many different levels of understanding) and use diversity as strength within the organization.*

The first realization takes place on the broader scale in which “diversity will not go away or disappear, especially in an emergent global environment”. (Aguirre & Martinez, 2000, p. 54) Leaders will need to see that diversity is prevalent and this diversity will only provide richness for cultural development in regards to the community. As discussed within my on-line group forums, diversity entitles so much more than just gender or race. If a leader cannot realize this larger concept there is a true detriment to the “sustainability” or his/her organization in which “standardized templates” will not work for “everyone”. (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004) Therefore it is the leader’s role to demonstrate “increasingly complex environments by learning from one another’s diverse practices”. (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004)

The second aspect to this discussion of leadership and diversity directly relates to what we have learned through the comprehension of women in leadership roles. As stated, minorities as well as women “continue to be underrepresented in positions of leadership”. (Ritt, 2004, p. 3) With women in such a position, “leaders may need to make concerted efforts to overcome

tendencies to work more effectively with demographically-similar subordinates and to learn to utilize the talents of individuals from dissimilar backgrounds more effectively”. (Offerman, 1997, p. 3) This said, being a current and future leader, I can only strive to take into account that with representing these diverse groups of individuals, “innovative solutions” can be “created all the time” due to the fact that “different people” are doing things differently. (Wheatley, 2001)

Where This Philosophy Will Lead Me/Conclusion

Although this philosophy represents as small portion of what I hope to stand for as a leader, this philosophy offers the specific, different understanding gained throughout the continuation of this course. One can wonder what will come of the knowledge gained throughout this inquiry, reflection, and demonstration of my personal leadership ideals. Although I am still in the beginning stages of my development as a teacher I plan to use these aspects thoroughly throughout my new adventures of this coming year. Having been assigned to a new grade with a new set of individuals to work with, I plan on using these leadership concepts to the fullest to help my grade level grow as an “effective team”, help to consider the “empowerment” of each other, and remember to develop a “shared vision” specifically for our group.

Furthermore in the future, it is in my plans to take on more leadership roles slowly, eventually reaching the position of an administrator (possibly the role of principal). As I make my way to this position, I will keep these ideals close at hand and in heart. As I continue to grow and broaden my thoughts on what leadership entails, I can always remember that no matter the suggestions encountered, one should keep “authentic” to their “true” selves, but still remember that “leadership is not something that only a few gifted, outstanding, charismatic people

possess”, “everybody has a reasonable, if untapped, reservoir of leadership ability”. (Lipman-Blumen, 1999, p. 2)

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