

# Leadership: Humble, Honest, Influential Transformers Who Learn as They Lead

by

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I can think of no aspect of our society where leadership does not have a direct expressive impact. Sometimes the leadership is inspirational and transformative, while at other times it can be downright discouraging. Nevertheless, when the term leadership is traced to its source there is usually a person who stands accountable for success or failure. So, I agree with Kouzes and Posner (2017) that leadership is an experience which involves the interaction of individuals. As an educator, I am specifically interested in educational leadership. However, I do recognize that the unique qualities involved in effective leadership transcend academic disciplines.

It is my belief that leadership involves influential transformative individuals who are honest, humble, and obedient to the word of God; even those who work in secular organizations. In essence, true leaders are God's change agents who He place in positions of authority to do good—to do His will. In this paper, I will share my personal philosophy of educational leadership, which includes ideas about leadership practice, relationships and diversity from a Christian worldview.

## **Philosophy of Education Leadership**

My philosophy of educational leadership has changed significantly over time. Though the core of my belief system is still founded on servant leadership. Robert K. Greenleaf's idea of servant-leadership emphasized service to others, an inclusive approach to work, valuing community, and sharing of power in decision making (Parris & Peachey, 2013). However, I now think more about the needed transformation that leaders must bring to their organizations. As an educational leader, I can remember desperately sitting on the side of my bed one morning with

my head in my hands, praying. Asking God to give me something that would unify a school district and allow me, the newly appointed interim superintendent, to successfully lead them.

Later that day, I walked into a staff meeting with central office administrators and school principals who all looked to me for directions. I told them that I had been given a mantra, around which, we were going to develop a culture of success for our students, engage parents and the community feel a part of our team. I told them that from now on we would speak with, One Vision, One Voice, One Victory. This became our slogan. The schools embraced it. People from the community called and asked me if they could use it. Eagerly I said, “Yes”. Someone even told me that we should get it license so that no one could use it without our permission. I shared with that person that it was given to me for everyone to use.

However, I quickly learned that belief alone does not make an individual an educational leader. It takes strength of character that includes honesty, humility and guidance from God to affect the appropriate actions. James 2:18 (KJV), demonstrated the importance of putting one’s thoughts into actions. So, with the belief that we would all speak with one vision, with one voice and we all share in one victory, it was time to get things accomplished; and we did. We took that slogan and used it rally the community to pass a property tax. Six months later I was named the superintendent for the school district. We built a new high school, students academic and behavioral performance improved as did staff morale. In retrospect, next I will share some of the leadership practice that I learned from my tenure as an educator thus far.

### **Leadership Practice**

John Dickson (2011) in the book *Humilitas* referred humility as the moral decision to abandon status and utilize resources and influence for the good of others. I now deem humility an essential quality for all leaders. Kouzes and Posner (2017) affirmed that credibility is the

foundation of leadership, along with honesty, competency, inspiration, and forward-looking. Therefore, I expect that effective leaders will practice humility. They will have credibility, act with honesty, be competent, have the ability to inspire others and have a vision that is future focused. Furthermore, all leadership practices take place within relationships.

### **Relationships**

As an educational leader, I value the time and energy that is spent building relationships. I also, think that without constructive relationships it is almost impossible to be an effective leader. The reason that I value humility so much is because it automatically keeps the right perspective for anyone who aspires for a leadership position. I have observed individuals who overlooked individuals that they outranked in the organization. Only to discover that the individuals which were overlooked are now in charged. Every individual that I meet, I deliberately treat them as if I will be in a long-term relationship with them.

A leader must understand the distinct abilities, concerns and hopes of the individuals they are leading. A leader must also, allow those that they lead to understand those same qualities in about their leader. An effective leader therefore must be able to build relationships and create communities around shared values and visions (Courtney, McGinity & Gunter, 2018). Leaders must not lead with their title alone, as if that is all that was required to cause others to follow them. Leaders must lead with honor and integrity that reflect the vision they have for themselves and others in the light of day as well as in the darkness of night.

It does not matter an individual's title or position, I intentionally engaged staff in conversations from all levels of the school system. It was important to me that I was accessible and that individuals felt comfortable interacting with me. This made a difference. Since I was

accessible to them, my staff made themselves available to me. For the four years that I was superintendent, we fostered a school district that was a part of the community.

### **Diversity**

I am no longer a school district superintendent, but as a multi-tiered system of supports coordinator at a state agency of education. I recognize that this is an issue that leaders grapple with in our culturally diverse society every day. However, it is important for leaders to integrate diversity into all aspects of their organization and not make it a separate issue (Adserias, Charleston & Jackson, 2017). Realizing that diversity issues are complex, historical and systemically imbedded, I return to biblical principles to help guide my thoughts and actions. With the understanding that I desire to treat others as I would have them treat me.

### **Christian Worldview**

When I lived in Alabama, I led in a secular organization with a Christian worldview without seriously considering the actions that sprang forth from this perspective. For example, it never occurred to me that I should not use God in my conversation with my staff concerning our motto One Vision, One Voice, One Victory. It seemed perfectly normal to me to do that, since its inspiration came from God. However, since I have been in Vermont, I am acutely aware of my Christian worldview at the office. Nevertheless, I am encouraged because as a leader I realized that my beliefs as a Christian supports integrity, honor, humility and all those other traits that scholars and experts deem important for a leader.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus provided our greatest example of effective leadership through His teachings and actions. A transformative leader is placed in authority to do good and make positive changes in the organization and in the world. These leaders display characteristics that inspire others to

follow. In Matthew 20:26 (KJV) it is affirmed that those who want to lead must learn to serve, this sums up my personal leadership philosophy.

## References

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