Philosophy of Leadership

As our class, Exploring Leadership, has explored various theories and approaches to leadership throughout this semester, there has been one distinct theme that has prevailed: leadership is an intricate art, not a science. We have had the privilege of hearing others' individual philosophies of leadership ranging from a service minded approach with the director of CCE, Mr. Larkin, to a more complicated balance, practical for extreme situations as explained by members of the ROTC program at the university. These guest speakers clearly have spent the time reflecting and practicing their personal art of leadership to the point that it has become integrated into their identity, although the most fascinating aspect of leadership discussions is that everyone's interpretation is different, and most importantly, nobody is wrong. In order to relay my own philosophy of leadership I will start with a definition and then walk through the various activities we participated in or completed during the semester.

I appreciated our textbook's (*Exploring Leadership*) loosely set definition of leadership as moving a group of people toward a common goal. The extremely vague nature of this definition is wonderful as it allows each person to transform it into something meaningful for them. In general, I see a leader's role as an agent of inspiration and an engaged presence in this journey toward the final goal. My definition parallels the text's flexibility to be augmented by the reader as I see the value in a wide range of common leadership theories as well as understand that there is not one correct approach to leadership. I believe in concepts of collaborative leadership (certainly influenced by my previous Honors Seminar of the same name that I took in the fall semester), relational leadership, and traditional leadership. In order to summarize, I would have to describe my beliefs as "situational-based" leadership. I strongly

enjoyed the golfing analogy made in the reading on leadership styles by Goleman, "Imagine the styles, then, as the array of clubs in the golf pro's bag. Over the course of the match, the pro picks and chooses from his bag based on the demands of the shot." I feel this metaphor provides an accurate visual aid for what I believe. Also, this metaphor struck a deeper cord with me as I am individual who has recently started to play golf and is rapidly learning the importance of choosing the right club! Appreciating various forms of leadership styles does not detract from your passion for any of them individually, it simply provides you a greater supply of resources for leadership scenarios. As a final note on my own base definition of leadership, I would like to emphasize my firm belief that everyone has the potential to be a leader. I came into this semester with this conviction and have only been further convinced of its accuracy after watching our classroom evolve. At the beginning of the semester, I was surprised by the number of my classmates that opted for extreme trait based leadership theories (such as you have to be charismatic or an eloquent public speaker to be a leader). I could observe how they did not feel they possessed these traits and seemed timid in the classroom discussions. However, as the semester progressed, it was quite enjoyable to watch my peers shed these self-inflicted chains that were holding their confidence back. Classroom discussions became livelier, and I would feel confident actively following any of my classmates taking charge in a situation outside the academic arena. My favorite part of the story of this semester is that I truly feel this ability to lead was already present in each of my classmates at the beginning of the semester, and they simply had to accept it and set it free.

    In order to prepare for each week's class, Professor Alanson would post chapters to read from our textbook as well as a variety of supplemental reading sources. I took away multiple

learnings from these texts all of which have provided more tools for my situation-based leadership style. From our textbook, my main takeaway was an emphasis on the need for a relational approach to leadership. The book expands on many facets of this concept but without overcomplicating the matter, it is simply stating that it takes relationships to accomplish any defined tasks of a leader. I agree that without the ability to effectively connect with members within and outside an operation, the chances of a leader's success are slim. In addition, I appreciated that our textbook dispelled common myths on leadership (leaders are made not born, being charismatic is not a prerequisite, leadership is teachable, there is no one right way, etc.) as well as highlighted the importance that words and framing can play in the real world (referring to the chapter on "followership" and how redefining the word follower can have a tangible benefit on those in a supporting role). Of the ten supplemental readings that we were asked to review, there are three that I will focus on in this paper: *Thinking Gray*, *Emotional Intelligence*, and the *Leader's Light or Shadow*. The *Thinking Gray* article can accurately be summarized by this brief excerpt, "…don't form an opinion about an important matter until you've heard all the relevant facts and arguments, or until circumstances force you to form an opinion without recourse to all the facts." In my opinion, this lesson is (as the article alludes to) extremely difficult but essential. Too often in today's world do people (myself included) draw conclusions too quickly based on limited information and then stand firmly to these ill-founded opinions. This common behavior can prove to be quite a hazard when attempting to build an effective leadership structure and style. The *Emotional Intelligence* article was a revisiting for me of concepts that I was introduced to in my Collaborative Leadership Honors Seminar in which we spent an extensive amount of time discussing

communication styles and theory. This concept of sensitivity and awareness of others'

emotions and motives is a necessary compliment to the relational leadership model discussed

in *Exploring Leadership*. It is quite difficult to form meaningful and productive relationships if

you are blind to the emotional impact you propagate. Finally, the *Leader's Light or Shadow*

article focused primarily on how leadership can have a positive or negative side based on how it

is used and for what end goal; however, I would like to focus on the portion that discussed the

need for reflection. As a leader, one may get swept up with the day to day stresses and ignore

the practice of reflection. As discussed in class, small decisions that are questionably negative

will inevitably build up until all that remains is a reprehensible product or process. In this

sense, it is important to state that I value the process of reflection (especially the University

Honors Program's emphasis on it) to aid deeper learning from any activities as well as

proactively avoid this negative build up.

   Having a well-defined philosophy of leadership is wonderful, but where does that get you?

Honestly, it does not get you anywhere unless you get out into the real world and implement

and practice it. I will use this next section of my paper to discuss possible areas where my

leadership philosophy could be applied to make a positive change or past scenarios where I

utilized similar skills successfully. Looking to the near future, there is an organization that our

Collaborative Leadership class worked closely with called Beyond Civility. They are a local

organization whose mission is essentially to gather politicians into a non-partisan setting where

they practice methods for effective governance communication. I was very interested in this

mission as it touches upon one of my greatest frustrations with our political system's lack of

communication causing gridlock. Along with a few other students, we have continued to work

with their organization on the front of attempting to bridge the gap to a younger demographic by using connections to clubs at the university. In the early going, we have experienced some difficulty in our task due to other personal commitments as well as a lack of response from our targeted clubs. In order to ensure that this valuable cause does not fall to the wayside, I see a wonderful opportunity to practice implementing the relational leadership model portion of my situation based philosophy. By taking a step out of all of our comfort zones; for instance, actually attending a club's meeting rather than simply sending an email, we may be able to generate the interest in Beyond Civility that I believe they deserve. Concerning scenarios in which I have already effectively utilized my leadership philosophy, I have two examples. First, I would like to discuss my efforts as a senior captain of my high school bowling team. I found myself in a unique position throughout the season as I was a captain and a senior although I was not a starter on the varsity squad. My duties consisted primarily of taking stats, managing lane problems, working with my teammates to help them through the emotions of a match, and always being ready as the first sub. I made a point to know all of the members on varsity and junior-varsity by name and be a relatable individual that people where comfortable talking to about anything whether bowling related or not. As I watched our team in the earlier parts of the season I saw great potential for success. I recall asking our team's other senior captain after a tournament something along the lines of, "Why don't we win states?" My comment was laughed off as there are a number of fantastic bowling teams in the state and many of them were located near us. Interestingly enough, our team did make it to the state championship last year and went further than ever before in school history. As I did not actually do a great deal of the bowling, I do not take the credit for our success, although I would

like to believe that my leadership style helped propel our team. As I look back after taking a few courses on leadership theory, it is clear that in this example that I exhibited strong traces of the relationship leadership model as well as the visionary style. As an interesting follow-up, my old teammates were excited to see me when over Christmas Break I attended the Christmas bowling party, introduced me to the new members of our team, and relayed the news that their success extended into this year where they returned to the state tournament finishing even better than last year. Upon arriving at the University of Cincinnati I knew that I was determined to make the most of the resources that I had available to me. I got involved with numerous organizations as well as participated in community service activities. I am extremely excited that earlier this semester I was accepted into the Honors Ambassadors program and have already participated in a few events with this organization. The reason that I mention my involvements is that it ties into my belief that a leader must be engaged as well as a broader point on opportunities. In order to implement your leadership philosophy effectively, you need an applicable scenario which is where getting involved was a strategic way to put myself into a position ripe with possibilities.

As a brief summary, my philosophy of leadership is a situation based approach with an appreciation for a wide variety of leadership styles while also being open to the introduction of new concepts. When asked to think of a symbol, image, or metaphor that represents my approach to leadership I spent a great deal of time searching for the right fit. In the end, it was a return to my childhood times watching the cartoon "SpongeBob SquarePants" that yielded my symbol; Patrick Star's rock house. Patrick's house is one of the most interesting features of the popular cartoon due to its simple yet unpredictable nature. The outside of his rock is

consistent: a brown semicircle rock with an antenna on top that opens via a single hatch on the back side. The inside is where things become wildly unpredictable. The interior of Patrick's house has been depicted in episodes having a single room of sand or real furniture, a single large master bedroom, or both extremes of just a flat layer of sand to a multi-room complex including a living room and kitchen. So how does any of this relate to leadership and my leadership philosophy? Starting on the outside of Patrick's rock let's consider the antenna on top. The antenna is in fact on top, symbolically Patrick's highest priority, and it points toward a direction of the best T.V. reception which may be seen as a parallel to a vision that points towards the desired goal. The shape of Patrick's rock is the top half of a sphere, the perfect symbol for representing balance in an approach. Furthermore, Patrick's rock is reliable in appearance with no attempts to disguise its basicness. I view this symbolically with the concept of being genuine and consistent in your message during your leadership. Finally (and most obviously), Patrick's house is made of rock. Sturdy and determined, Patrick's rock weathers through all forms of adversity and remains unscathed by the test of time (interestingly to note, his is the only house that may boast this as SpongeBob and Squidward's houses have both had episodes where they do not survive the events of the show). Moving to the interior, Patrick's house is to put it simply adaptable based on the required function. When sleeping at night there is a bed. When in his house alone it has a small den. When hosting others we can observe the expansion in complexity. I found this magnificent demonstration of architectural flexibility to be a phenomenal symbol for how my leadership philosophy makes the attempt to adapt based on the scenario to use the most effective leadership style. When Patrick's rock came to my mind as a symbol for my leadership philosophy I did not take it seriously due to the

light-hearted program that it comes from. However, after further reflection the parallels

became undeniable, and I realized that the symbols do not have to be serious to be effective.

"Politeness is the poison of collaboration." –Edwin Land (Inventor, Physicist, cofounder of the

Polaroid Corporation)

Have you ever been a member of the team that had the best laid plans but fell apart because

everyone seemed almost afraid to talk to one another? Ultimately, this quote is a wonderful

caveat for any style of leadership embraced. All forms of leadership are collaborative processes

as leading simply can not occur with just one person. However, all of the great intentions and

perfected ideology can be for naught if when placed in the physical situation all of the

interacting members are too polite (important to note that this quote is not going as far to

indicate rudeness). It may appear to be a paradox, although my personal experience advises

me that a lack of honest and thoughtful communication can be detrimental. As a parting note,

leadership is a dirty process that requires full involvement to succeed; so seize the day and

practice leading.

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