

Leadership Philosophy for a Changing World

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Leadership Philosophy for a Changing World

I never wanted to be a leader. I grew up wanting to dedicate my life to travel, be outside, and spend time with the people I love. In fact, I rejected the idea that work would ever become my identity. Reflecting on this makes my path to leadership that much more surprising. Somewhere along the way, I realized that developing people, solving complex challenges, and building better systems energizes me in a way that I would have never expected.

Early in my career, it was only a matter of circumstance that I began volunteering at a nonprofit counseling center. I remember being in awe, observing my supervisor respond to organizational challenges with a simple question- not a solution, an answer, or an action item to fall on my to-do list, but, “What do you think?”. This one simple question had made the assumption that I had something worth contributing before I had even believed it myself. Through this supervisor’s leadership, I noticed becoming more creative because I felt true ownership, more invested because I understood the “why”, and most importantly, more confident- not because she handed me validation, but because she built the conditions in which confidence has room to grow. Burns (2003) describes this as transformational leadership. It isn’t task management, but instead the expansion of what people believe they can do. I lived this before I even had the language for it, and it unknowingly became the foundation of everything I have come to believe about leading people.

What I Believe and How I Lead

What I have come to realize, is that the core of my leadership philosophy is rooted in curiosity- not as a trait, but a responsibility. I require myself to be curious about people, systems, risks, consequences, and the hidden assumptions beneath decisions. Senge (2006) argued that learning organizations thrive when knowledge flows throughout the system and leaders are open

to learning from those who are closest to the work. In practice, this looks like asking before telling- rather than assuming I understand a person's role or workload because I supervise it, I must ask: What are you running into? What am I missing? What do you think? There must be a reciprocal understanding so that decisions are made reflecting both organizational goals and the people who are actually responsible for achieving them.

I am steady in my belief that clarity creates agency, not compliance. When individuals truly understand where things are headed and why, they have room to engage creatively and confidently. Without this clarity, confusion turns into hesitation, which then causes dependence, and eventually escalates to disengagement. I base my one-on-ones around growth rather than tasks and outcomes. I want to know what they find confusing, what they are curious about, and how they want to develop. I believe the environment a leader creates may either expand or diminish human potential. Palmer (2004) describes this as leading from an undivided life- I do not separate my belief in human development from the decisions I make day-to-day. They are the same thing.

I chose the additional concentration in change leadership within this program because I became convinced that uncertainty is one of the greatest limits to human potential. People don't often struggle from a lack of capability, but a lack of clarity about where they fit into what is being built. Deszca et al. (2019) offers frameworks for maintaining trust and engagement throughout the process of change. For me, change leadership is the same as servant leadership, only it is expressed through systems. We serve people by reducing unnecessary uncertainty, and instead focus on leaving room for meaningful engagement throughout the process.

Strengths, Growth, and Goals

I believe my strongest qualities as a leader are curiosity, humility, systems thinking, and a genuine interest in human potential. I do not make assumptions about a situation because I have authority over it. In fact, the only thing I do assume is that there is always a perspective I haven't heard. This attitude has consistently led me to make better decisions and foster stronger relationships than any false certainty would have.

At the same time, I am equally as aware and honest about the areas where I need to grow. I am working to advocate more effectively, to slow down enough to develop my team rather than simply surviving my own work, and to be braver in difficult conversations. My goals are to deepen my knowledge and expertise in organizational transformation, explore ethical technology and artificial intelligence implementation, be capable of facilitating difficult conversations when faced with difference and resistance, and to ultimately help build organizations where people not only feel understood, but also challenged- and above all else, connected something larger than their job description.

Conclusion

The leader I had learned from the most has unknowingly transformed my life- not by giving answers or providing me with a "high-value to-do list", but by asking simple questions. I have come to realize that leadership is not at all about authority or 'having all the information'. Instead, it is about creating the kinds of environments where people can contribute in a meaningful way, develop themselves, and grow within their own confidence. The truth is, I never became passionate about work- I became passionate about human growth and potential. I believe that as organizations are faced with the rise of technology and shifting workforce expectations, the leaders who will make the largest impact are those who are curious enough to ask what

becomes possible when they spend time developing the people doing the work - and understand how they themselves can grow in that curiosity.

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