

## Educational Leadership Philosophy

Each year I run a workshop on building leadership skills within my high school students. The workshop starts with an activity where I post famous quotes on leadership around the classroom. The students take a gallery walk around the room reading each quote and processing what it means to them. At the end of their walk they choose which quote they can most identify with. I would say half the class ends up by the Wayne Gretzky quote about not making the shots you don't take. Others are scattered around the room defending their values against others comments of why they chose such a silly quote. I say all this to reference a quote that I continually choose every year. Nelson Mandela (1995) in his autobiography says "he stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind." This leadership quote is how I see myself as a leader. I lead together with my followers, my title may be one of leader, but really we are working as a collaborative team. It's not until the followers look back at an event or an activity when they realize that the leader was not out in front of everyone, but just pushing from behind.

This has not always been the way I have approached leadership in the past. My experiences, both personal and professional, have shaped me into this type of leader. I have made it a point to develop my own leadership style and showcase that in an authentic way (George, 2004). In doing this I have had to come to terms with the mistakes that I may make along the way, but accept the failures just as I do my strengths (George, 2004). As I take a look back at my journey into leadership and

throughout the entirety of this course, I notice that I have categorized new initiatives that I want to take on in my next steps towards becoming an authentic leader. Those steps include handling transition through change in a more constructive way. Also working with external stakeholders to provide new ideas and dimensions. Making sure to continue my own learning in the leadership process. Lastly building relationships with my staff not just in a platonic way, but more personal. This will then help me develop my staff into the leaders they would like to be in the future. As I look further into my future I want to add one more quote to my leadership philosophy. Ralph Waldo Emerson states that “what you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say” (Komives & Dugan, 2011). In other words, my actions after writing down this educational leadership philosophy, will be the evaluation tool for me to understand how far I can succeed in leadership.

### **External Stakeholders**

As a leader you are constantly under the microscope of many individuals not only followers, but community members who have vested interests in your programming (George, 2004). Having this information allows you the opportunity to understand their perspectives when it comes to how you are seen in the community. Their viewpoints can contribute to the knowledge of both yourself and the staff that follow you (Komives & Dugan, 2011). These viewpoints add new dimensions to your programming and may actually aid in making the programming better. That’s why I believe as a new leader I can make more of an impact with a collective perspective. It makes me think back to the Mountain High committee and the importance of bringing together diverse voices. While

that committee may have not been effective, it was still useful to have many different community members at the table. My educational philosophy includes having collective conversations with external stakeholders in order to provide more diverse dimensions for my programs.

### **Transition/Change**

When I think back to how I dealt with change as a follower, and as a leader, it can best be described as not good. In true colors, a personality test, my most dominant color is gold which means I value structure and timeliness. I also am rigid on deadlines and not great at being flexible. This is why as a leader I can understand why it is so important for me to understand why my staff may not embrace a new change that I have put in place (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000).

If I don't like the idea of changing, then others will surely feel uncomfortable in the process as well. To be a successful leader in times of change I need to recognize the important time period of transition. Realizing that transition tends to happen a lot slower than the change itself (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). I also need to make sure I have a plan during the transition period which focuses on detailing step by step directions and who is to execute each step (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). Even with the outlined plan, I need to be aware that staff will be initially skeptical about stepping into a new change arena (Offerman, 1997). They might even have a grieving period because of the loss they feel in giving up their new ways. My personal habit is to just push people forward in the process and not recognize the signs of possible distress from change. I need to make sure I am moving back and forth from the balcony (Chapman & Randall, 2007).

Observing how I am feeling and how others are feeling in the process. It's okay to ask questions and get personal with staff. It is even okay if they decide to resist the change. Often the people who resist the most have something important for us to hear (Fullan & Scott, 2009). In order to better synthesis how I will make this change in my own leadership ability I will take a note from Bridges and Mitchell (2000) and follow the 4 P's. Providing a purpose for the staff change, letting them know what the picture will look like, planning step by step and telling them specifically what their part will be in the transition (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). While I may have started this process as someone who would resist change no matter what the end result would be, I realize the importance of what change can do for the leader and the followers.

### **Continued learning**

One of the key factors in me becoming a better leader was my passion for learning. I believe in the importance of admitting to not knowing an answer or not being able to provide a solution (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). I also believe in going back to the problem and finding out the solution through whatever means possible. It's important to be authentic, but I also think it's important to learn things you may have not known before. To me I feel that if a leader is stagnant and doesn't continually learn they are not helpful to the development of their followers. You do not learn how to be a leader, you continually keep learning and that propels you forward to leadership (Vaill, 1997). When others that follow you can see your passion for learning it will promote learning in your followers (Komives & Dugan, 2011).

Leadership is important in the work that I do. Students and staff look up to me to be the person that provides mission and alignment to goals. Without my love for learning I wouldn't be able to be the leadership figure that people look up to. That's why in my educational philosophy I add this section of continued learning. We are only what we know and that means I need to continue reading and evaluating and help mentor others to do the same.

### **Build leadership**

What is essential to continuing strong leadership patterns is the ability of leaders to develop their followers as the next generation of leaders. We need to focus on putting power back in the hands of the staff that engage in the work (Seifter, 2001). Leadership needs to be shared and then rotated around to different individuals (Seifter, 2001). This way leadership hats are worn by all followers and they can start to understand what steps it takes to be a leader. In shared leadership they also are able to see themselves in a position of power. I have to remember that this does not mean enforcing your idea of leadership onto your followers. This means being able to understand who you are as a leader and inspiring your followers to find their leadership voice (Smith, 2005).

Another piece of information I need to remember is stepping away from individual ideas of leadership. I tend to be an individualistic leader meaning that I take on many of the leadership tasks because I am afraid of the results of delegation. I know there is an importance in bringing staff into the leadership process (Lipman-Blumen, 1999). I am just not always confident in making that decision. As I look forward, what I would like to see myself develop into is a leader that provides opportunities for their staff to engage in

taking risks at leadership. If I can demonstrate to my followers that taking a risk, whatever the outcome, is desirable (Smith, 2005) then maybe they will take the risk of sharing in our leadership process. Sharing in this process will help me address the need to be more of a collective leader and grow my staff into the leaders they want to be.

### **What's next?**

As I step forward into pursuing my educational leadership philosophy in real life I can't help but think about how this process will not be easy. I have set forth hefty goals that will take time for me to truly pursue, but in doing so I will reap the benefits in numerous ways. My followers will become stronger leaders that will continue on to new adventures and help others pursue their goals of attaining leadership. I will be able to become more flexible and open to new ideas from not just my followers but external stakeholders. I also will continue to keep learning and sharing that passion with the staff that I readily engage with. Lastly I think transition will become easier because the 4P's will help staff slowly move through the process, but with purpose. I have no doubt that I will make some mistakes and falter at times. The thing I will always go back to is the idea of my actions being more important than what I say. As long as I take the risks and remain authentic my educational leadership goals will remain in sight.

## References

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