

Personal Leadership Philosophy Reflection

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Leadership is the ability to align various individuals towards success in achieving a common goal. How one approaches leadership is a personal matter, which is crafted and refined throughout life and forged by experiences both in success and failure. Developing a leadership philosophy has no one correct approach, so it allows for insight into one's core beliefs, values, and inspirations to be central. A leadership philosophy is not a static notion but instead evolves and grows as we as people do as well. Personally, my philosophy on leadership has been constructed throughout my educational journey, professional experience, and the world of basketball.

The game of basketball has often provided me with role models from an early age, and it was not until preparing for this assignment that I realized how much these role models had influenced my approach toward leadership, or at the least the leader that I strive to be. One of my earliest introductions to the game was watching the UVA men's basketball team with my family growing up. Led by head coach Tony Bennett the national championship-winning program was built upon his philosophy of the five pillars of humility, passion, unity, servanthood, and thankfulness (Burton, 2019).

When I first started outlining for this paper, I started by listing qualities I believed a leader should have, and I realized that many of what I had listed were derived from Tony Bennett's five pillars. Humility means putting the well-being of the team first over chasing glory for yourself as the leader. As a leader, one of your many jobs is to keep the team motivated, because when people passionately believe in what they are doing then they will produce the best outcomes. The pillar of unity represents the need for a leader to be able to handle conflict within the team through communication and diplomacy. Servanthood here means to elevate others by

putting them in a position to maximize their potential. The final pillar is to emphasize gratitude towards your team and to appreciate the lessons learned along the way.

Not only do I heavily identify with Tony Bennett's philosophy towards leadership in general, but I think perhaps the most important leadership trait to be derived from him is to stay true to yourself and your philosophy as a leader at all times. UVA teams under Bennett played a style that stood out from modern college basketball that emphasized fundamental play and defense over high scoring and flashiness.

They were often criticized for not being able to win when it mattered most, culminating in his team's historic upset loss to UMBC in the opening round of the 2018 March Madness tournament. Despite this embarrassing defeat, Tony Bennett stood by his principles and handled the loss with dignity, with his post-game interview being full of praise for his opponents, discussing all that his team had accomplished that year already, and how he wanted to use this moment to teach his players how to handle adversity and come out better on the other side. He would use the loss as a lesson to propel the team to win the national championship the following season. You can learn a lot about yourself as a leader when things do not go as planned. You can claim to believe in the principles of your leadership philosophy, but if you discard these principles in times of struggle did you ever truly believe in them?

Basketball has also provided two other mentors who have shaped the type of leader that I desire to be. The first is professional basketball player Giannis Antetokounmpo, who was living in poverty in Greece, before being drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks, then through nearly a decade of hard work and dedication led the franchise to a championship in 2021. Though, as touched on earlier I believe that the good leader shines brightest in the face of adversity, and winning the championship was full of adversity for Giannis and his team. There was one moment

in particular that has always stood out to me. Giannis shined in the first two games of the NBA Finals, but his teammates struggled to live up to the moment. Despite the loss in game two, there was a timeout where Giannis passionately spoke and rallied his teammates to stick to the plan and trust each other (Rohlin, 2021). The Milwaukee Bucks would storm back to win four straight games and ultimately the championship, and I've always seen that timeout as a turning point for the series. As a leader, he kept everyone focused and motivated even when they could have easily succumbed to the pressure.

Then there was the aptly named Coach Ball who I played under from middle school through varsity. He was strict, without being overly harsh, and he always pushed us to be the best we could be. He was always very upfront about his expectations for us before a practice or game. He was quick to point out when we failed to reach those expectations but was equally quick to praise us when we exceeded in meeting those expectations. From him, a leader, should be upfront about what is expected of the team, instill accountability, and find the balance between constructive criticism and praise. A leader should push the team to improve while still taking the time to recognize the effort already dedicated to reaching this point.

I believe that Coach Ball's example of leading a team of student-athletes is the leadership influence I have utilized the most. This is because since graduating from high school I have been employed at an early childhood education center with an after-school program, so I have had plenty of experience leading children. Coach Ball would always lay out our expectations to start the day, and now I often find myself doing the same before starting a game, preparing for a field trip, or art project with the children at work. From there I remind the children of those expectations or continue to encourage them to keep living up to those expectations.

Not only has my experience of working in childcare been an opportunity to apply my lessons learned in leadership, but it has also been a place that has provided me with challenges to my leadership ability as well as a source of new mentors. One challenge was being assigned to lead a rock painting course during a summer camp. So, for a week, a group of the same kids would come to my station to paint rocks for an hour. I am not a particularly crafty person, and I struggled to keep the children engaged with the activity. I did not initially have enthusiasm for the project and as a result, the children did not either. I discussed the matter with my lead teacher and ultimately we found a solution to turn the activity into a competition. I would choose a daily theme, and the students would paint a rock to that theme and then get the opportunity to show off their finished projects, which were voted on by the entire camp. The competitive aspect helped keep the children engaged with the project throughout the week.

As mentioned earlier, my job also provided me with new mentors. The one that comes to mind was the first lead teacher I worked under the first summer I worked there. She was the lead teacher, a position that carried additional responsibilities and power in running the daily routine, yet she was incredibly diplomatic in that role. Every week we would have a brief meeting with all the summer camp staff, and she would check in on how we felt, what we needed, our thoughts on upcoming plans, etc. Even though I had only been there a few weeks she empowered me to share my thoughts and valued the feedback from all the staff under her. I believe a leader should have that connection with those under them and create an environment where the team feels valued and heard.

Ultimately, the development of a personal leadership philosophy is not a one-and-done matter. Instead, it is a continuous and living project that will continue to grow and change as life marches on. For me, the next step in developing my personal leadership style is to continue to

solidify the trademarks of the leader I want to be and embrace the opportunities to be a leader to grow into someone better. I'll admit I need to practice being a stronger leader who is unafraid to use their voice and lead the charge. This will mean I need to continue to build self-confidence in my leadership, remember to employ the values I had identified above in times of success and failure, and continue to seek out mentors to learn from.

References

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