

**Leaning and Actions**

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## Learning and Actions

Ethical leadership is a growing field. It is a part of leadership that has only recently started to grow and gain importance. It is something that is very important to any leadership field and should be practiced by all leaders. By showing ethics and compassion, leaders will gain more respect from their employees and will in turn inspire better work. Throughout this course we have gone over many different styles and aspects of ethical leadership. This course incorporated both readings and papers, as well as weekly discussion boards. In the discussion boards we had a chance to talk with our peers and share our thoughts and ideas. We also replied back to others to contribute more of our own experiences. This allowed us to gain more ideas and perspectives that we might not have thought of otherwise. This paper will go over the important aspects of this class and will brainstorm ideas on how I will use what I learned and apply it to my everyday life and work.

The introduction unit of the course was simply talking about what leadership means to us and what specifically ethical leadership means. To me, leadership means working with people and staff to accomplish a goal. It is getting the staff to trust you and wanting to work and contribute ideas. I believe it is also about creating new ideas and concepts in order to better the business. Ethical leadership is acting with integrity and encouraging others around you to do so as well (Terzieva 2024). Ethical leaders try and cultivate an environment that is built on a foundation of fairness, respect, and understanding, and value people over profit (Terzieva 2024). All of this is very important to the overall culture of the workplace. If people are treated as people, they are going to be happier and in turn have better productivity and better job performance. Employee's are much more likely going to put in better work for someone who treats them with respect.

As the course progressed, we started going over more in-depth examples of ethical leadership. The second unit was on moral reasoning, specifically Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning. Kohlberg's theory is a framework that breaks down people's stages of reasoning into 3 levels with stages intertwined. The levels include the preconventional level, conventional level, and postconventional level or obedience level (Sanders 2024). The first level, the preconventional level, consists of two stages, the punishment or obedience orientation, and the instrumental purpose. This level is usually more so the stage where children fall into. It is the level where morals are enforced and driven by external forces (Sanders 2024). The individual's actions are either determined by wanting to avoid punishment or gain a reward. In children this happens as they start to learn the consequences of their actions and are driven by reward systems set in place. The second level of development is the conventional level encompasses the good boy/girl mentality and the law-and-order mentality (Sanders 2024). This level is more determined by social norms and conformity. The individual wants to create relationships and is morally driven by sticking to societal norms. The last stage is the postconventional level, and it consists of the social contract orientation stage and the universal ethical principal stage (Sanders 2024). This is the stage where the individual is driven by morals that are not set in stone or written down. They take into account many different sides of a story and try to see the world from other perspectives. They know that there are sometimes exceptions to rules if it helps their idea of the greater good (Sanders 2024).

In this unit we also discussed different ethical frameworks. We discussed different views of thinking and how it applied back to leadership and business. One of the frameworks discussed was utilitarianism. This is the idea that rights and morals are tied to what the best outcome will be for the largest number of people (*What are ethical frameworks?*). We also discussed rights

and care-based ethics. In these frameworks morals are determined by everyone's rights and well being (*What are ethical frameworks?*). In our discussion board for the week, we discussed what we felt was the most pressing concern in business and some of our ideas to correct it. We linked back to the frameworks learned to create a strong moral reasoning and ethics. Some of the topics brought up included the mental health crisis, climate change, dealing with multiple diverse types of people, remote work, and many others. It was remarkably interesting to see our peers' thoughts and feelings on important topics. It helped us to get a clear picture of what everyone values and how they conduct business.

Our next unit focused on learning about a Mensch. A Mensch is a Yiddish term for a person who lives with the highest morals, integrity, and honesty (Sjmadmin). They are someone who always tries and looks to the bright side of things and tries to build relationships and bring the good out of people. In leadership, striving to be a mensch is particularly important. Every leader should be held to the standards of a mensch, especially when it comes to integrity and morals. It is important to be able to trust leadership and feel that they are putting their workers first and that their morals align with our own. Unfortunately, that is not the case for many leaders today. As new and aspiring leaders, it is our responsibility to make sure that the next generation strives to be the best leaders they can be and emulate a mensch.

The next few weeks we focused on other traits that leaders should have that would emulate a mensch. The specific topics discussed were gratitude, resilience, and compassion. In leadership all of these traits and qualities are very important. Having gratitude in the workplace will help to keep people grounded. If you are always positive and thankful for what you have, then as a leader, you will be more approachable and more understanding. It is also important to be thankful for where you are and remember where you started. Everyone started at the bottom

once and it is important to remember that and treat people accordingly. Having resilience is also very important. In business and in life there will always be setbacks. We need to be able to move on and grow from them and treat everything as an opportunity to learn. The last topic was about compassion and relationships. This sort of goes hand in hand with gratitude, but it is very important to leaders. Being compassionate is essential to building relationships with people. If you cannot build a strong relationship, then you will have a hard time connecting with the staff and getting them to trust you. If there is no trust, then they will not produce their best work for you.

The next part of this paper will go over how I plan on using what was learned in class and apply it to my daily life and career. I am currently working as a General Manager in a steakhouse. I started at the same restaurant that I am currently at and moved my way up from a server all the way to the GM. I have learned a lot over the course of the four years, but I still have a lot to learn, especially in the leadership aspect and how to manager people. That is where this course and the leadership major come in. The topics outlined in the beginning of the paper are all important to the restaurant business and the rest of the leadership workforce. Learning about ethical leadership is important to keep a good culture and environment.

When reviewing what we think our definition of ethical leadership is, it helps to see what is important to us and what is important to others. Looking over the discussion board you can see that most people feel that a good ethical leader is someone who holds strong morals and integrity. That shows that those qualities are important to people and should be something that I practice in everyday leadership. The way that I can implement that in my daily work would be to just always try and hold myself to the best standards. I need to always be thinking critically and really thinking about what I believe in and act on my morals. For example, there will be times

that I need to stick up for my employees with rude guests and to back them. I need to do it in a polite and nice way, but I still cannot bend on what I believe is right, even if it seems very difficult. I also need to have a strong integrity. My boss put me in this position because she trusts me. There are a lot of parts of this job that are completely based off trust, like the money, the alcohol, and even just making sure I am working my contracted hours. I need to always work with integrity and never show anything that will break that trust, otherwise it will be very difficult or impossible to get back.

Learning about moral reasoning is also important. Sometimes it can feel like learning the exact terminology for things can be tedious or not necessarily useful, but I feel like it draws attention to something that you might not always think about. By knowing the actual framework and terminology, you can make sure that you are in the correct category that you want to be. For example, for moral reasoning, as a leader you want to be in stage three. You want to make decisions for the good of the entire team and not just yourself. In the restaurant there are plenty of times that we need to look at what is good for the whole staff. Sometimes it might not be the best decision for one person or for us, but it is what will benefit the most people. This is especially true in the unfortunate instances where you need to let someone go. This happened with us when we had an employee who was a fantastic server. He constantly had guest compliments but unfortunately, he was becoming increasingly toxic to the rest of the group. As the other servers started coming forward it became apparent that he was causing trouble for others. Even though he was a fantastic server and brought in business, he was toxic in the work environment and needed to be let go. That was a decision that was a part of the postconventional stage because it was more about the great good and took multiple people's experiences into play.

When learning about a mensch it is always important to look at how you can emulate that yourself. In the restaurant business there can be a lot of negativity. It is important to always try and rise to the negativity and get a unique perspective. In the heat of the moment, it can be very difficult to curb your emotions and not snap at people or lose your temper. It is those times that you need to control your emotions and try and take the higher road, especially when dealing with younger employees. It can also be hard sometimes to really try and build relationships with people. Sometimes it might feel like it is not important or something small but going that extra mile for people will help them know you really do care for them.

Through this course was had to read a leadership book and write a review on the book. The book that I chose was *The Leadership Star* by Brian Hartzler. There was a line in the book that really stood out to me. Hartzler was asking a group to show of hands if they cared about their employees, and all hands went up. He then asked them if he asked their employees if they thought their management cared about them would they say yes? Hartzler explained that there was some nervous laughter and some of them put their hands down (Hartzler 6). It showed that it is one thing to just say that you care about your employees, but you need to show it. Care is an action verb (Hartzler 6). A mensch would take the time to really show all employees that they care. Some ways that I try and do it in my work life are simply just by listening. There are plenty of employees that are going through a hard time and even just a check in now and then goes a long way. It shows that you care, and you are trying to make an effort.

Having gratitude and resilience is also very important. It is also something that you need to teach people. Working in the restaurant business you meet some difficult people. I need to remind myself a lot to be grateful for wonderful people I meet and try and stay resilient with the not so wonderful people. When having a bad guest interaction or a bad review I remind myself

that one bad interaction does not define our entire business or myself personally. I need to look at the positives and see that there is more positive there. It is important to look at the bad feedback and see it is something that needs to be addressed and use it as a learning opportunity. When I was first starting out, I would shut down from it, but I have realized that I can use it as a learning tool and grow from it.

Throughout this course we learned many different tools that we can use to be better leaders. It is important to take a step back and reflect on what was learned and how we can use it in the real world. Without this reflection then there would be no point in learning new ideas. The last section of the course was on our callings. Work can absolutely be your calling, and that should be the ultimate goal. I do feel like I am still trying to figure out what my calling exactly is. I do really like where I am in my career and how far I have come, but I am not sure that this is the final step for me. I want to use the tools and knowledge that I have learned in this course and the other courses that I will take at ODU to try and broaden my perspectives and to try and find my one true calling.

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