

Personal Philosophy of Leadership

Stephen D. Robbins

Gonzaga University ORGL 500 – Organizational Leadership

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I stand today on the shoulders of many teachers, mentors, and experiences. My world view and philosophy of leadership are a result of all that have gone before. It has also been shaped by my will in response to the Spirit's prompting and in reaction to life's many circumstances. I cannot separate secular and religious; I only see a continuum of life in relationship to God, creation, and humankind. As I am given the opportunity to lead others, I will do so springing from that framework.

One has only to visit the local bookstore to see hundreds of volumes on the topic of leadership, each with a different slant or interpretation. There does not appear to be any solid, agreed-upon definition. However, "most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization" (Yukl, 2010, p. 3). That process of influence, direct or indirect (p.5) will take shape based on the leader's core values, beliefs, and experience in a given situation. The motivation for leaders to influence their followers will be as varied as there are situations or leaders.

My motivation and philosophy of leadership is rooted in a deep seated belief in two basic assertions based on the following,

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Genesis 1:26 (English Standard Version, 2001)

My consciousness has been clearly informed by these two basic beliefs and forms the basis of my world view. Firstly, human beings are a reflection of God and thus have intrinsic value and worth. Secondly, our responsibility is to care for the earth.

The problem is that evil, pride, pure self-interest, hatred, and oppression abound. They rip apart the fabric of decency, beauty, and order. I espouse certain theological viewpoints that explain this, but since they are beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say my philosophy of leadership is one that sees everything in relationship to God, humanity, and the environment. Institutions of all kinds, political, economic, social, and religious, rightfully exist to help restore proper balance and order. They should do so with full recognition of the intrinsic worth of all human beings. This is a proper leadership role. Anything less is self-serving. Some may say this is a purely spiritual and Pollyannaish view. Not so. True leaders must address the whole person, body, mind, and spirit in relationship to their environment. Theologians, psychologists, financial experts, doctors, politicians, all endeavor to bring about order and balance in different ways. We need leaders in all those fields, and more.

With that premise as foundation, the overarching law governing all forms of relationships is,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:37-39 (English Standard Version, 2001)

The law of love should guide a leader's action, simply stated, where the interests of others are as important as those of the leader. The leader has the responsibility to

foster such things as order, harmony, and balance, and should be an agent of transformation within the organization to help bring to fruition the legitimate and proper aims of the organization while at the same time actualizing its members to achieve their potential. Over three hundred years before Christ, Aristotle said,

The end toward which men strive in life is happiness. Happiness for each creature is found in the best possible performance of the function for which he is peculiarly adapted. Man then finds his highest and most lasting happiness in the active life of his soul. (Aristotle, & Loomis, 1943, p.86)

It is interesting to note how much contemporary leadership thought has returned to this very thing. I do not see where the leader has a greater allegiance to either the organization or its members. Her responsibility is equally to both. He should be “an instrument to individual and group development and the satisfaction of authentic human needs” (Carey, 1999, *Part four: Two options*, p. 5). To the extent that the organization infringes on the member’s actualization of potential, it becomes oppressive. “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression” (Freire, 1993, p. 55). Likewise, where the members seek to destroy or otherwise limit the legitimate potential of the organization, they too are being oppressive.

The leader’s role is a difficult one. Achieving the goals of the organization, while at the same time actualizing its members, will certainly draw on all the leader’s resources. A deep courage will be needed, one that stems from deep-seated core principles and values. It is interesting to note that even though organizations differ widely from country to country and among different peoples, research shows that the same leadership values

are considered important. They are honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent (Kouzes, & Posner, 2007, p. 29). These core values build credibility which is the real foundation of good leadership (p.37). They become power to influence. Like a magnetic field to ferrous metal, positive or negative values will be reflected in the members.

We can never see a field, but we can easily see its influence by looking at behavior. To learn what's in the field, look at what people are doing. They have picked up the messages, discerned what is truly valued, and then shaped their behavior accordingly. (Wheatley, 1999, p.55)

Leaders must maintain and consistently model integrity. A genuine concern, or not, for members' growth and actualization will be felt. It cannot be faked. A leader's actions must reflect a life in which the inner and outer worlds are in harmony (Palmer, 2007, p. 173). This may be referred to as living "divided no more" (p. 173). It requires that a leader "find a new center for one's life, a center external to the institution and its demands" (p. 174).

Establishing true guiding principles will be the only way a leader is able to bridge the demands of both members and organization. They are the leader's compass.

Principles are not invented by us or by society; they are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships and human organizations....to the degree people recognize and live in harmony with such basic principles as fairness, equity, justice, integrity, honesty, and trust, they move toward either survival and stability on the one hand or disintegration and destruction on the other. (Covey, 1991, p. 18)

There are any number of organizations and styles. A leader may find herself in an organization fully embedded in a defined methodology or frame (Carey, 1999, *Part two: The five frames*). Issues vary widely from one organization to the other. If the leader has internalized and acts out of his core principles, both the organization and its members will be transformed. This transformational leadership should be the goal of all leaders. "Transforming, moral leadership is not a tool, then, but rather a process which makes of the leader a tool, i.e. an instrument to individual and group development and the satisfaction of authentic human needs" (Carey, 1999, *Part Four: Two Options*, p. 5).

I believe the best leaders are servants, both to the organization and its members. The best politicians serve their constituents. The best bosses serve the organization and members. The best ministers serve God and mankind. The ability to serve well comes from a constant examination of one's inner life, aligning it with timeless principles and truth, and then consistently living the outer life in harmony with it. "Authentic leadership, then, implies a self-transcendence that comes only with genuine self-enlightenment, and that is the product of patient psychological reflection, or spiritual grace, or both" (Carey, 1999, *Part Four: Two Options*, p. 4).

My philosophy of leadership sees life as a network of relationships to God, creation, and humankind. Good leadership takes a path of movement (Palmer, 2007, p. 171), in which the leader will persistently find a way to achieve the proper goals of organizations, while at the same time helping its members actualize their full potential. To do so will require integrity, uncompromising deep seated principles, and a commitment to always make the right decisions based on them. Is it difficult and challenging? Yes. However, doing so will transform all the leader's relationships.

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