Leadership Final Project

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Leadership is a trait that people learn about throughout their whole life. People talk about leadership all the time, but what does it mean? Leadership has many meanings and everyone has a different definition or idea of what they think leadership stands for. Personally, I think that leadership is demonstrating positive examples, encouraging others, creating common goals among a team, helping others, listening to team member’s problems and opinions, and being an all-around good person. I define leadership this way because of the leadership experiences I have had and what I learned from them. I always think that it is difficult to put one definition on leadership, so there are many characteristics that I see in good leaders, but these are the most important to me. Leadership cannot be taught; it can only be learned through experience and the drive to be a leader. No one is born a leader; it takes a special person and the experiences they have had to make them a true leader.

My idea of leadership also holds several key values that I believe are critical to support my definition. These values include courage, integrity, dedication, teamwork, and optimism. Courage is the ability to do something that might scare or intimidate you. This class was mainly learning about courageous leaders and how they can be successful in the difficulties that they might face. Courage in leadership is important because there will be many times as a leader that you will have to do something that you may be frightened to do. I know that I have been scared to do many things as a leader but it is that courage that I have that has made me stronger. Integrity means being honest even when it is easier to lie or hide the truth. Honesty is important in leadership because sometimes you have to be honest with the situation that might be at hand with you and your team. A leader that has integrity also has to be honest with themselves. They ask themselves if they are doing the right thing for themselves and the people they are leading. They must always keep everyone’s best interest in mind. Dedication is another key value for leaders to have. Dedication is easily one of my favorite characteristics because I think that I am very dedicated. Dedication means being committed to an assignment or duty. This quality is important for leaders to have because without dedication, things will not get done. Leaders have to be dedicated to completing tasks and wanting to better their team. Teamwork means working together to achieve a common goal. As a leader, you have to make sure that the team knows how to work together in easy and difficult times. Working as a team means that tasks will be accomplished easier. Teamwork uses communication and equal participation to be effective. It is important for a leader to make sure that the people know how to work together as a team because they will benefit more from working together than trying to do everything on their own. Optimism is another important quality that means being positive, especially in times of negativity. I think that being positive is so important in any aspect of life, especially leadership. As a leader, if you are negative, then your team will be negative as well. However, if the leader is optimistic, this shows the team, even in times that may be difficult, being positive will help strengthen them and help them be more successful as a whole.

One lesson in leadership that I have learned that contributes to my definition of leadership is not to be the boss, but a manager and a team member. Sometimes people in leadership positions can get carried away with their power and let it go to their head. This leads to the other team members to think negatively about their “leader.” A leader should work at the same level as the rest of the team. The leaders are just there to set an example and help keep the team on track. I know that personally it is difficult to work with someone who comes off as bossy because people do not like to be forced or pushed to do something they do not want to do. Instead, the leader should be helpful and contribute to the cause as much as the other team members. This is an important lesson from this class because I know that in my personal leadership positions, it can be hard not to act like the boss, but you just have to remind yourself why you are there and why you were chosen to be that leader. This contributes to my definition of leadership because being a manager and team member are important qualities that a leader should have. Bossy leaders are not as successful as the leaders that help manage the team.

Another lesson in leadership that I have learned is dealing with conflict and difficult people. Every member of the team deals with conflict differently and it may not always line up with your views. We did an activity in class where we were given a situation that had conflict. The conflict was dealing with members in a group project that are either mean, doing nothing to contribute, or are very quiet. As a group, we had to determine what the best action to take would be. As a team, we worked together to figure out what we thought was the best way to go about dealing with the conflict and what to say to the difficult people. I think this was a good lesson to learn because there will always be times when you are in a leadership position and need to talk with people that may be causing conflict. The leader and the rest of the team members need to know the best way to go about dealing with it. There are several ideas to keep in mind when dealing with difficult people and conflict situations. It is important to learn not to let your emotions get in the way instead of dealing with the problem and how it is impacting the group. It can be difficult to try and let your feelings control your actions. It is also important to express appreciation for the resolved conflict because this shows team members that you want conflict to be resolved in a mature way. Another idea to keep in mind is to stay positive throughout the conflict. If you attack the difficult person, this will not make them want to work with you. Instead, staying positive shows that you want to help the person and not just attack them. One last thing to keep in mind when dealing with conflict is to not react to every problem right away. Sometimes it is important to take a step back and wait a little bit before expressing a reaction to the conflict or difficult person. Reacting right away may cause an even bigger conflict that will be more difficult to handle. However, if you think about your reaction and what you want to say to deal with the conflict in a calm manner, it is more likely that the conflict will get resolved. This contributes to my definition of a leader because leaders are able to deal with conflict in the appropriate way and still be mature about it (Ulmer, 2017).

A third lesson that I have learned in leadership is communication and listening skills. The leader must remember that everything they say may be taken differently from person to person. It is always important to communicate a lot and clarify the messages they are sending so that they do not get misconstrued. The sender and the receiver both have important roles in a conversation. The leader is often both the sender and receiver of information because they have to be able to relay information to their team members and listen to the feedback those team members are giving them. Nonverbal and verbal skills are important for leaders have. Nonverbal skills are the most important to have because the listener will get most of the information that you are portraying from your nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues can mean the difference between a positive conversation and a negative one. Verbal skills are also important to have because how you say the information can make all the difference. There is also a difference between listening and hearing. Listening is just the perception of sound into the ear. Hearing is actively concentrating on what the other person is saying. A leader must be able to understand, not just listen to what the other team members are saying. Most of the time, people are not listening to what the other person is saying. Instead they are waiting for an opportunity to say something about themselves. Leaders should be considering what their team members are saying, instead of waiting for the opportunity to talk about themselves. This is a very important act of communication and where most information is misconstrued so it is important to always listen intently. This contributes to my definition of leadership because a leader who communicates and listens appropriately will be more successful with their team members than with someone who does not communicate appropriately (Ulmer, 2017).

Another lesson in leadership that I learned is facing adversity. This means facing difficult situations. There are many examples where leaders might face diversity. One example is everyone has a different personality and they can be difficult to get along with because they do not match up to their personality type. However, a successful leader is able to overcome this adversity and work with different people’s personality. Another example of how leaders might face adversity is when they are faced with a challenging situation and they need to figure out as a group how to fix and improve that situation. It is important for them not to take control of the issue, but instead consult with their team members to find a solution. Facing adversity adds to my definition of leadership because all leaders have had an experience where they have faced difficult situations. It is how they overcome and deal with those situations that makes them a successful leader.

The last lesson I learned is that courageous leaders are the most successful. Courage was the main quality that this class was based around. Courage, as mentioned earlier, is doing something that someone may not want to do because they are scared. There are many lessons I learned from this class about courageous leaders. They are rare and it is very difficult to become a courageous leader. Courageous leaders are not afraid to see the truth behind the situation. They do not avoid the topic, instead, they face the problem head on in a mature way. This can be scary for some leaders because they do not want to face reality. They are also not afraid to listen and give feedback. Sometimes leaders feel that when people give them feedback it is negative towards them and it upsets them. Instead, courageous leaders are able to learn from the feedback from the group in order become a better leader. Courageous leaders are also not scared to focus on the issue. They take action to lead the group in fixing the issue at hand. They are not afraid to communicate effectively. If a leader is scared to communicate with their team because they fear the reaction they might get, they are not a good leader. This does not mean being able to say whatever they want and not realizing how it may impact other people. Instead it is being able to communicate about the issues or positive aspects of the group. Courageous leaders are not scared of change. Change can be difficult for anyone and for the most part people do not like change. People like to stick to their routine and not change them. It can be difficult for leaders to adapt to change but courageous leaders realize if change needs to happen within their team and are not afraid to realize when change is needed. This contributes to my definition of leadership because courageous leaders encompass so many qualities that fit into a successful leader and being courageous is one of the most important qualities that a leader should have (Tardanico, 2014).

I have learned so much about what leadership means to me throughout this course. I would say that I have had several leadership positions while at Longwood. I am the Scholarship Chairman for my sorority, I have lead a Big Event site, I have been an Honors Mentor, I am a member of the Student Nurses Association, and in the past I was a member of the Honors Student Association. However, I feel like being involved in a lot of activities does not teach you to be a leader. I have learned that I need to actively participate and want to better myself to become a leader. I know that I have grown since coming to college in my leadership abilities because I have stepped out of my shell and taken on tasks that I never thought I would do before. I will use the information I have learned in this course as I continue my time at Longwood and after graduation because leadership skills are some of the most important qualities that a person should have. Even if I am not in high position for a club or other organization, it is still important to have leadership positions as a team member of the group. I have learned much more than five lessons in this leadership course and there is still so much information for me to learn about leadership. In my next few years at Longwood, I would like to branch out even more and try to join leadership positions where I am on an executive board. Having these leadership positions here and there throughout college will improve my resume and help me stand apart from other applicants when it comes time to get a job.

References

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