

**Personal Leadership Philosophy**

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CYSE 494

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November 2, 2025

## **Introduction**

Growing up, it would have been hard for me to think of myself as a leader in any context. The typical image of a confident, extroverted, brilliant woman standing at the front of a room was not one I could associate myself with as an introvert that preferred the worlds I could read about rather than participate in, let alone lead. Over time, this idea of what a leader should be shifted and I started to see how I could be a leader in my own right. What I once attributed to confidence and people-skills, I have now realized is just a reflection of putting one's passion and mission ahead of any insecurities I might have about social situations. In many ways, I think this is what a true leader is; someone who recognizes their weaknesses and instead focuses on their strengths to achieve what is truly important to them. This journey was not one I took alone or even quickly, but over time from formative influences, some amazing leadership mentors, and my own opportunity to lead a cybersecurity educational organization.

## **Influences & Beliefs**

One thing that has always stayed with me in what I expect from my leaders and try to embody in my own leadership roles is a strong work ethic. Growing up, I was able to see family members and even church leaders in roles that required a drive, motivation, and passion for their work that translated into a strong work ethic. As a leader, this shows one's team that they care just as much about what one is working on and inspires them to do the same. Even in my own job, I try to let my work ethic be the representation of how much I care and that I will give as much of an effort as possible. Even when it isn't possible to give a full hundred percent to something, giving the most possible within reason is what I strive to do.

In many ways, this also translates into my volunteering experiences which have influenced how I look at leadership as well. Oftentimes, I would see something going on in my

community, church, or school that I knew I could help with or it was a solution to a problem that I had noticed. My leadership philosophy was that I cannot expect others to notice the same thing or commit effort to something if I am not first willing to do it as well. A great example of this was when my school considered cutting the budget for my high school's cybersecurity team because of a lack of student officer volunteers. I did not feel it was right for me to wish someone else would step up so I could continue in the club if I was not also willing to do the same. In the end, it became an excellent leadership opportunity where I was able to learn how to effectively manage a team, identify individual strengths, and learn how to have diverse members collaborate effectively. During this time, I was also able to hone my own leadership approach into one that values integrity, empathy, supporting one another especially where one's strengths and weaknesses complement one another, compassion, and how to bring levity to stressful situations. This "getting the job done" attitude in a supportive environment is the leadership philosophy that I most identify with personally and is the same as some of the best leaders I have been fortunate enough to work under.

### **Influential Entrepreneurs**

Some of the most influential people I know that have influenced my leadership style are actually two entrepreneurs for the first company I ever worked for. The first spent decades in various IT roles before realizing that there wasn't an IT provider in his hometown that could act as the "mom-and-pop shop" of IT for the smaller clinics in the area that couldn't handle their technological needs. Even after starting a successful IT managed service provider that has expanded out of solely healthcare clients, he still gives back to that community by hosting medical technology workshops and teaches classes for students, like I once was, to give them a tech opportunity in a rural community. From him, I learned how to use one's passion to drive

success. I also learned the importance of recognizing one's strengths and playing to those; he self-admitted multiple times how he was not the most technically capable person in a room, but his ability to effectively communicate and execute plans made him valuable to every interaction. On the flip side, the second entrepreneur helped found that same company with a focus on the technical innovation he saw lacking in his other jobs. He showed me how to be confident in one's technical abilities and bring that to a leadership style. Without him, I don't think I would be able to do the job I do now even half as efficiently. Both of their abilities to understand one's team and how to connect diverse personalities with an empathetic touch have been profoundly impactful in my own development of a leadership style.

### **Growth & Challenges**

Despite all of these amazing opportunities and leadership experiences, I am very aware that I have a lot to learn when it comes to being a truly good leader. One of the biggest challenges I face in my opinion is an internal one that has not left me since I first imagined what a leader should be. I have never been the most confident individual in a room, and very rarely am I confident in my own abilities. Working in the cybersecurity industry has given me a unique mountain to climb in a digital male-dominated industry where I am a woman from a predominantly rural community. This, faced with a lack of confidence, creates an imposter syndrome that often makes it difficult to be a good leader. That being said, I am passionate about what I do and every day gives me a new opportunity to prove to myself and others that I can be confident in myself based on what I have already accomplished, learned, and will continue to do. I am slowly moving towards a better version of myself as a leader where I can use my different background to make an even bigger impact in a setting that is not necessarily used to that perspective. In many ways, that is another way that I think someone can become a good leader.

## **Conclusion**

As a whole, leadership can look differently for everyone and the best leaders are the ones that can play to what their own strengths and weaknesses are in that setting. I am fortunate to have had various mentors and experiences that have allowed me to grow as a leader myself. Without growing up seeing so many leaders in my family, being able to volunteer in leadership capacities, and working for some amazing leader-entrepreneurs, I would not be as confident as I am in my own leadership roles now. Both at my cybersecurity job and as student director of a statewide cybersecurity organization, I get to use those traits that I've seen modelled to become the best version of myself as a leader that I can be and continuously grow to improve. Even though there will always be challenges associated with that journey, I feel ready to take them on just as any other leader would: with compassion, integrity, and a strong work ethic.