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CPD 400

Application Paper

2 December 2024

**Introduction**

When I hear the word “leadership,” my mind goes straight to the person that taught me what a leader looks like. That person is my upper school math teacher. To many, she was just a math teacher. To me, she had an answer to every question I asked, she had advice for any hurdle I had run into, she was mindful, she was patient, she was encouraging, she was an example. My school had a leadership program that she headed. When she chose me to be a part of it, I was a timid and shy new girl at the school. Her belief in me pulled me out of my shell, enabled confidence, and most importantly, taught me to - like her - lead by example.

**Leadership Qualities**

In this class, we have taken the semester to focus on the qualities of a strong leader. A strong leader is not hard to identify. In relation to the leader I chose, she shows these qualities effortlessly. I know my leader faces battles in the dark, but I have never once seen that stop her. In fact, it amazes me some of the things she continues to do. Just as a strong leader, she has endurance to push through her barriers.

To begin, a great leader has a vision. They can see long-term, and they keep their goals in sight (CCL, 2024). I am sure my leader has many visions, but from my point-of-view, I know that she has visions for her students. She saw something in me that I did not see in myself. She was always reassuring me of my goals. Every teacher wants to see their students succeed, but it takes a leader to bring potential to reality – to bring their vision to life.

Similarly, an essential quality of a good leader is transparency. Transparency builds trust and respect in an organization (Landry, 2018). My teacher was transparent with us. She was open about what she expected, her goals, and any challenges that ever came about. She did not hesitate correcting behavior that was undesired. Though this may sound bad initially, she let us know when she was disappointed. This was my driving factor. Because she saw so much in me, I strived to make her proud. Her transparency when I was in the wrong just helped me grow. Now, I find transparency crucial when portraying your ideas and chasing your goals.

An effective leader is emotionally stable. They can regulate their emotions, cope with changes, and tolerate stress (Wale). As hard as I can imagine it must have been, my leader seldom raised her voice. She kept her frustration at bay, and I never saw her “shut down” when a situation got stressful. I know that the COVID-19 pandemic was especially hard on teachers who had never had the need to understand online learning. She adapted to the change and still made herself just as accessible across a screen as she had in a classroom. Some teachers accepted that fact that online learning was challenging, so they cut their workload back. My leader so seamlessly took to the online system that it was one of the only classes my academics remained constant in. The ability to cope and overcome the emotions that bring frustration and overwhelming feelings shows stability, keeps a team organized, and gives them a sense of trust in one’s leadership skills.

In addition, a strong leader is empathetic. They put their goals and interests aside to focus on their team. Whether that focus may be on outside life, physical health, or mental health - a leader puts themselves in their teams’ shoes and provides support where needed (Tracy). One of the greatest things that continues to stand out to me about my leader is the time that she brought me aside because she noticed something was off. She saw a change in behavior, which she addressed with empathy rather than retaliation. She took time to just talk to me about nothing specific but about everything that was going through my mind. She offered me her support and advice, as well.

Lastly, a great leader has the ability to influence others. They are an example to those around them (Landry, 2018). I am a testament to the fact that my leader has the ability to influence others. Her influence on me is the reason I am in this class and decided to go down this leadership path. Though I speak all of these from a personal perspective, if she has had this type of impact on me, I know that she has had a similar impact on others through her years of leading. For me, though, her lessons went far beyond geometry.

**Personal Application**

Yes, I have seen all these traits exhibited by my chosen leader, but what does that have to do with me? Then, those skills helped me grow through the most impressionable years of my life. Now, I can strive to be a reflection of what I learned from her in that time. No matter what stage of life I am in, it will always benefit to consider what she taught me about being a good leader.

I believe that it is important to be an everyday leader. My future job may not require me to lead. I may not have a team that looks to me for answers. To me, leadership outside of the organization – in your family or community - is just as important as leadership within.

Like my math teacher, I can have a vision. I can look beyond the short-term and see the future that I want. It is so important to have an end goal. Whether this goal is corporately minded or personally sought, a vision serves as motivation. What is the shot worth if you are not aiming at anything?

Next, I have come to find transparency essential when working in group settings throughout my time at Old Dominion thus far. You must be open with everyone about everything. If not, you are carrying the weight, and the team is walking blindly. In all aspects of my life, I try to be transparent and clear about what I expect. I also have realized that positive, along with negative, feedback is included in transparency. As a leader, knowing how to communicate that feedback is what gains you respect and trust.

I mentioned my leader having emotional stability. With our world being so uncertain and life throwing constant curveballs, it can be difficult to regulate your emotions. As a leader, you need to take charge and behave as an example. Seeing a calm and collected person amid turmoil is so refreshing, and that is the person I look to. I continue to work on maintaining composure, knowing this is a critical aspect of leadership growth.

As much as my leader’s empathy affected me, I understand how important it is to see things from other’s perspectives. In a time where everyone has different opinions and many feel misunderstood, I can strive to have an open mind when listening to others. Even if I may not agree, as a leader, it is my responsibility to make everyone feel their ideas are valid – because they are! I cannot do anything on my own, and the best leader welcomes advice and differing perspectives.

Finally, being an influence on others comes with performing respectable actions. It is being an example that others can follow. A great leader influenced me. I might not have the ability to fill her shoes, but I hope that one day someone will look to me as an example, just as I have looked at her.

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