

On Leadership Philosophy

When I think about leadership, I don't picture someone giving big speeches or running a major company. I picture people I've actually worked with—people who showed up, helped others, made smart decisions, and kept things moving even when everything was chaotic. My ideas about leadership didn't come from one single person or book. They came from different experiences I've had, both good and bad, and from a few people who had a big impact on how I think.

One major influence on my leadership philosophy is my first job working tech support at a small IT company. The manager there wasn't flashy or loud. He was calm, organized, and always listened. What really stuck with me was how he handled pressure. During an outage, when everything was down and clients were panicking, he didn't yell or rush anyone. Instead, he delegated tasks clearly, trusted us to handle them, and made sure we had what we needed. That showed me that leadership isn't about being the smartest person in the room—it's about knowing how to manage a situation and support your team. It also showed me that people perform better when they know they're supported, not when they feel like they're being watched or micromanaged.

On the other hand, I've also worked with people who made me realize what kind of leader I don't want to be. At another job, there was a project lead who micromanaged everything. He didn't trust anyone to do their job, and that led to stress, delays, and high turnover. It taught me that trust and communication are two of the most important things in leadership. If your team doesn't feel like they can talk to you, or if they think you'll just redo their work anyway, they stop trying. That experience helped me realize that a leader's job is to empower, not control. You

have to give people room to grow and learn. If they mess up, use it as a learning opportunity. Hovering over their shoulder only makes things worse.

Another big influence on my leadership approach is my experience in cybersecurity classes and team projects. Group work can be frustrating, especially when people don't pull their weight or communication breaks down. But I've had several opportunities to step up and help keep things organized. For example, in a recent project where we had to simulate a network intrusion and build a defense plan, we were falling behind because no one was really taking the lead. I decided to break the work into smaller pieces and assign tasks based on everyone's strengths. I also set up a shared checklist so everyone could track progress. That one decision helped us get back on track and finish on time. It made me realize that leadership isn't always about authority—it's about recognizing what needs to be done and helping make it happen.

There's also something I learned from coaching a youth soccer team in high school that still sticks with me. The kids were around eight or nine, and while it might sound unrelated to cybersecurity, it taught me a lot about patience, encouragement, and adapting to different personalities. Some kids needed structure, others just needed confidence. The same applies to any team—people respond to different styles, and a good leader knows how to adapt instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach. I also learned that just because you're in charge doesn't mean people will automatically listen. You have to earn their trust and respect by being consistent and fair.

One of the challenges I'm still working on is being more confident when speaking up, especially in situations where I'm not 100% sure I'm right. In technical discussions, it's easy to feel intimidated when someone has more experience or a louder voice.

But I've learned that leadership sometimes means asking the “dumb” question or pointing out something that doesn't seem right, even if it's uncomfortable. It's better to speak up than let a mistake go unnoticed. I've been practicing this more in my classes and during internships by preparing better before meetings and asking clarifying questions when I don't understand something. I'm realizing that confidence isn't about knowing everything—it's about being willing to learn and contribute anyway.

Looking ahead, I hope to grow into a leadership role in the cybersecurity field, whether that means leading a team or just being a reliable go-to person in a workplace. I want to be the kind of leader who is approachable, clear, and trustworthy. I don't think leadership is about having power, I think it's about building people up. A lot of cybersecurity work happens behind the scenes, but even in those environments, people need leaders who can guide, communicate well, and create a space where others feel like their work matters.

My leadership philosophy is still developing, but it's grounded in real-world experiences. I believe in staying calm under pressure, giving others room to grow, and leading by example. I don't think leaders need to have all the answers, but they should be able to ask the right questions and bring out the best in their teams. I also believe that feedback is key, both giving it and being open to receiving it.

In conclusion, leadership to me isn't about status—it's about service. It's about doing what needs to be done, helping others do their best, and being someone people can count on. Whether it's in cybersecurity or anywhere else, that's the kind of leader I want to be.