

How Am I a Leader?

Joshua Morton

Old Dominion University

CPD/CYSE 494 - Entrepreneurship in Professional Studies

Professor Batchelder

November 1, 2025

As I have grown up, leadership has increasingly fascinated me, not because of the authority it can represent, but more because of the profound influence it can have on me and others. As I have grown personally and professionally, my understanding of leadership has evolved from seeing it as a position of power and control to viewing it as a complex relationship rooted in empathy, communication, and accountability. Many influences have shaped my beliefs and approach to leadership come from three main sources, in my opinion, those being: my family upbringing, my experiences with AFJROTC in high school, and finally my lessons learned as a drill team commander. These moments have again taught me that leadership is not about commanding others or micromanaging people; it is about creating an environment where your people feel valued, motivated, and empowered to perform their best.

The earliest influence I found on my leadership style came from my family, particularly my parents. Growing up my father was in the navy and held many roles in leadership being a senior chief at the end of his profession. My dad always had a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility and it was something I took note of. He rarely gave orders but always led by example in my eyes, whether it was deploying 9 months every few years or just helping our next door neighbor jump their car's drained battery. To me, he demonstrated that leadership really begins with action, not just words or some kind of innate ability of leadership. My mom, on the other hand, really embodied emotional intelligence. My mom really taught me the importance of listening, understanding perspectives, and offering encouragement. I recall a time when I had a pretty rough flag football game when I was a child, we had lost to the team, which included my neighbor from across the street, by 15 points. I remember telling my mom that I absolutely hated the other team and everyone on it. My mom sat me down and told me about the value of sportsmanship and how respecting your opponent no matter the circumstance is the way to go in

controlling my feelings. Initially I thought this was strange but eventually tried out. I sat up and shook the hand of each of my opposing teammates and eventually they shook back, and one of those opponents happened to be my friend to this day. Together my parents modeled a balance between discipline and compassion that has shaped how I interact with people in my own personal life and in team settings.

Another such influence on my leadership abilities comes from my time as a cadet in my high school's AFJROTC. Sitting as a high school freshman in AFJROTC, which had been my first high school class, terrified me. I remember thinking about how scared I was and how I wanted to leave as someone who had been shy most of his life but I recall a moment in which my instructor, Chief Patrie, spoke to us about how easy it was to leave and that it was always possible if you couldn't handle the class. Chief Patrie drilled it far into our heads that you have to *want* to be successful and that leaders persist even when under pressure. Oddly enough my feelings of fear evolved into determination as I looked at my student leaders and decided, I will be one of them. Throughout my years in high school I kept moving forward getting promoted, joining the drill team, becoming an outstanding cadet and eventually flight commander. When I became a Flight Commander in AFJROTC, I was responsible for leading a class of basic cadets, many of whom were brand new to the program. My primary task was to teach them the basics of military bearing, customs and drill procedures. I will admit at first, standing in front of a group and giving commands was intimidating, I was really worried about making an embarrassing mistake or not being respected. However, as I gained experience, I learned how to project confidence and communicate. AFJROTC helped improve my public speaking skills as I had to give instructions, corrections, and motivational speeches daily. Over time I really learned that leadership wasn't about being the loudest person in the room, it's about earning respect through

consistency and competence. Leading the class also taught me about preparation and patience as not every cadet learned at the same pace, and I quickly realized motivating people required adapting my approach to their needs. Some responded well to structured discipline, while others improved more with encouragement and one-on-one meetings. Over time I learned effective leadership requires balancing authority with empathy and my ability to communicate improved not only from practicing speaking but learning to listen and adjust to feedback. I took my lessons learned and applied them to being the drill color guard commander, a team which had notoriously not done so well at drill competitions. Obviously my team hadn't thought we would accomplish much but that wasn't something I could take and as such I altered my approach to an actual team. My approach was to set clear goals, emphasize discipline and lead by example. I made it a point to really bond with my fellow cadets but also recognize progress. After months of personal bonding and hard training of the routine we placed third in the state for AFJROTC color guard. That was the moment my leadership philosophy was cemented.

Over time, my leadership philosophy was centered on adaptability and communication as I believe leadership is a privilege that carries responsibility to help others grow. My experiences with my parents and AFJROTC helped me balance authority with empathy and really taught me to stay calm when times get tough. Although I believe I have seen a real improvement in my leadership abilities I still don't think I am perfect as nobody is. I still have areas to improve as I sometimes take too much responsibility rather than delegating tasks, and I still occasionally hesitate to conflict directly. To remedy this I plan to continue developing my communication and mentoring abilities through leadership at future jobs and through helping my community through mutual aid.