

Applying Leadership Principles

Murphy Irving Ritenour

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Dave McMillan

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Introduction

One leader that I had the chance to closely observe was the Senior Librarian who supervised me at my previous workplace. This leader oversaw the collection development and programming decisions at the public library branch I worked at. She was consulted on major decisions, such as hiring, and was the direct supervisor for most members of our staff. I worked closely alongside this leader last year as she trained me on collection development responsibilities such as ordering, weeding, and promoting materials. This leader challenged me to learn and handed me the reins to collection development decisions once I developed proficiency. I gained skills at a rapid pace thanks to her leadership.

Noticing Leadership Strengths

When reflecting on my time with this leader, I remember her leading through risk-taking, stability, team-building, confidence, and empathy which are seen as essential leadership traits (Indeed Editorial Team, 2024). This leader took a risk by promoting me to a collection development position when she did not yet know how I would fare at understanding the subject. She allowed me to choose a nonfiction subject area to begin weeding outdated books and requesting new ones, and gave me the resources I needed to learn. If she had any doubt in my abilities, I was none the wiser. Thankfully, I naturally took to collection development and was able to take on riskier projects with a higher degree of responsibility over time.

This leader provided me stability by assigning me projects with clear expectations, and setting routine meetings to discuss our goals. This “steady, reliable approach” (Indeed Editorial Team, 2024) was invaluable to me as I transitioned into my new responsibilities and learned what was expected of me. When the library had to hire for several more positions, these people were invited into our regular meetings so that communication and goals were clear. Our team

built trust by discussing our objectives regularly and offering help to one another. We were encouraged by our leader to enjoy our work by setting goals for ourselves and approaching problems creatively. If we encountered difficulty, we knew that we could discuss the issue with our leader and team-members with humor and understanding. Without the collaboration our leader encouraged, we never would have finished some of the major projects we were proud of.

Our leader's confidence was a boon to us, as "every leader should demonstrate confidence to instill motivation" (Indeed Editorial Team, 2024). A leader's confidence must be resilient, as it is most necessary when followers encounter obstacles. Knowing that my leader was confident aided my sense of stability. She displayed confidence in her ideas and my abilities, which helped me set goals in uncharted waters and develop my own confidence. Knowing that I was believed in was a source of joy for me, and "when followers feel euphoric and joyful thanks to inspiring leaders, they step outside their comfort zone" (Salas-Vallina, et al., 2020). Thanks to my leader's confidence, I gained motivation quickly, and was soon able to work independently and joyfully on projects that initially caused me anxiety.

Lastly, this leader showed empathy when I had a health issue or workplace concern. Leaders should note that "empathy... [is] unavoidable... to ensure health and wellbeing of the people within the team" (Salas-Vallina, et al., 2020). This leader's empathy made me unafraid to share my problems openly so that we could solve them together. Significantly, this leader was empathetic toward me when I needed to take another role in our organization to improve my health, and did everything she could to make sure that I succeeded. I am grateful to have worked with a leader who treated me with an abundance of understanding.

Leading to Empower

Combined, the traits my leader displayed had an empowering influence. Empowerment is a skill in itself for leaders to possess, as it helps to develop subordinates, such as myself (Campbell, n.d.). Empowering leaders are encouraging and perceptive mentors who create supportive and trusting environments (Campbell, n.d.). These adjectives aptly describe the environment I enjoyed with this leader. She deliberately mentored me to take on new responsibilities with supportive encouragement, and trusted my judgement even when I did not trust it myself yet. She perceived what I was capable of and gave me the guidance and resources I needed to learn more than I ever expected. By the end of the year I had developed collection development abilities that were a meaningful sense of pride for me, and gave me some power over what the library could provide for our community. Last year I was happier at work than ever before, likely because “research on [happiness at work] shows that self-esteem, locus of control and optimism are personal contributors to [happiness at work]” (Salas-Vallina, et al., 2020). Regrettably, I did have to leave this position, but this leader empowered me throughout the application process for my new role. I will remember this leader fondly, and know that it is my duty to be similarly empowering when I lead others.

Influencing Others

The traits that I have discussed are significant as leadership traits and as traits that I value personally. I believe that empowerment and empathy are necessary to establish stability and collaboration, and when these needs are met, people are able to take risks. Ideally, every person would feel joyful at work, yet many workplaces wear people down over time with poor leadership and unrealistic expectations. Right now, I am not a leader, but I am creating a foundation of values to drive my leadership traits and behaviors. I want to remember the influence that former leaders had on me and how they worsened or lightened difficult

environments. The workplaces I have been happiest at worked together with high degrees of collaboration and viewed each worker as a valuable individual. Yet this feeling of comradery can be eroded if even one worker is singled out and disempowered.

Presuming Competence

Great leaders must teach themselves to solve problems of motivation or poor workmanship with an empowering influence to retain a joyful workplace. Put simply, “organizations and leaders might improve followers' [happiness at work] by simply believing in them” (Salas-Vallina, et al., 2020). I have belief in each person’s ability to learn, and I presume competence when others make mistakes. I feel that presuming competence is a component of empowerment that is not discussed often enough. When I presume competence in another, I assume that there is reasoning behind their decisions and that they are intelligent enough to learn how to solve problems they are involved in. “Presuming competence means you believe that the student in question has potential to develop their thinking, learning, and understanding” (Inclusive School Communities Project, n.d.). When problems are left to fester or met with presumption of incompetence, disempowerment is inevitable. Instead, presuming competence in others beckons curiosity, and gives workers the opportunity to learn or even teach us something.

Curiosity at Work

When we approach issues in communication or process with curiosity, it is simpler to remain empathetic, and to build confidence and teamwork. Curiosity is empowering for these reasons, and it allows risk-taking through experimentation and creativity. “Curiosity is a leadership superpower that can elevate your leadership to new heights” (Insync Workplace Solutions, 2024). It is the antidote to judgemental mindsets that can derail teamwork. Curiosity

encourages learning, promotes inclusivity, and strengthens relationships (Insync Workplace Solutions, 2024). Leaders should remember to utilize it whenever possible.

Conclusion

Going forward, I must remember to hold tight to my values and serve to empower those who follow me. I aim to empower others through risk-taking, stability, team-building, confidence, and empathy. I will presume competence when my followers' present inadequate work, and communicate to solve the problem together. Above all, I am a curious person, and I think this is one of my core abilities that will aid my leadership. When I do not possess the information or abilities I need, I welcome my curiosity and presume my own competence to learn. I enjoy seeking out the resources to teach myself, and want to share the empowerment of learning with others, especially with those who are skeptical of their competence. When I do have the opportunity to lead, I will do so with my values as a driving factor, and curiosity as my first instinct. I am joyful that there is always more to learn.

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