

Running Head: PHILOSOPHY OF LEADERSHIP STATEMENT

Philosophy of Leadership Statement

Melissa Mattingly

Professor MaryLee Davis

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A little girl is the bossiest person in her class. She can't help but tell her little sister and all her friends what they should do and how they should do it. Her teachers and parents worry. They encourage healthier expressions of this bossiness. Gradually, parents and teachers stop calling the girl bossy and start cautiously praising her leadership abilities. This little girl is me. While this story is a personal one from a long time ago, it provides some idea of my background. The story also illustrates our society's convoluted ideas on leadership; a little girl liking people to listen to her does not make a leader. In this paper, I will reflect on leadership issues and experiences from my past and present, utilizing theories of leadership to understand myself better. I will then use concepts from the course readings, discussions and assignments to reflect on the kind of leader I hope to be in the future.

Past

As a child I was bossy, wanting people to listen to me and do things my way. I believe these attitudes developed from being a first-born child who was five years older than my sister. I often acted like a second mother to my sister, telling her what to do. This attitude of bossiness continued in my interactions with childhood friends and classmates. My parents and teachers were conscious of my bossy attitude and worked to help me control it. In serious reflection on my developed personality, I can say that I continue to have a general tendency towards bossiness but work hard to recognize and control it.

This analysis of my childhood nature and familial interactions can be considered part of a psychodynamic approach to understanding and explaining leadership. "The psychodynamic approach begins with an examination of the roots of the individual in the family" (Stech, 2007, p. 238). The psychodynamic approach believes that it is difficult to change personality traits, especially during times of stress (Stech, 2007). I agree that it is very difficult to not be bossy in

both general and leadership interactions. When a situation becomes particularly stressful, I can often revert to bossiness. The psychodynamic approach would encourage me to “accept [my] own personality characteristics and quirks, understand the effect they have on followers, and accept the features and idiosyncrasies of followers” (Stech, 2007, p. 239). The psychodynamic approach is the approach to leadership I would have most identified with before taking this course, EAD 801, Leadership and Organizational Development. Before reading about the numerous theories of leadership, I thought that personality had the greatest effect on leadership. While I still agree that it is important to recognize one’s personality, understand how it affects others, and that personality is difficult to change, I believe there are stronger approaches to leadership that can work in conjunction with the psychodynamic approach. I will discuss those other approaches in the upcoming sections of this paper.

The psychodynamic approach also explains that I respect and follow authority figures in my current life because I learned that lesson as a child (Stech, 2007). Both my mother and father were strong and authoritarian as they raised me. As an adult, I show great deference to those in authority positions, such as my supervisor, dean of my college, president of the university where I work and professors from whom I take classes.

Present

While it is important to acknowledge and analyze my past for how it has influenced my experiences with and views on leadership, it is even more important to reflect on the present day. In this section, I will focus on the present day, with a loose definition of the term “present day”. I will think critically about my views on and experiences with leadership leading up to and during my enrollment in this course, EAD 801, Leadership and Organizational Development.

Before taking this course, I had not thought deeply about the concept of leadership in a scholarly way, but leadership has always interested me for two major reasons. First, because of my aforementioned personality traits, I have always enjoyed being in leadership roles, but not necessarily for the right reasons. As a younger person, I saw leadership in terms of what I now know as assigned leadership or positional leadership. Assigned/positional leadership is the leadership that a person holds because of their job title or position within an organization (Northouse, 2007). In grade school, high school, college, and even today in my workplace and graduate program, I enjoyed and enjoy holding assigned/positional power. I find it rewarding to my ego to lead people towards a goal. At the same time, during college and the time I have spent in my career and graduate program thus far, I have realized the importance and internal reward of personal power and emergent leadership. Personal power/emergent leadership is the power a person holds because of the respect that others within the organization have for him or her (Northouse, 2007). In the course of personal maturation and experience with more leadership situations through extracurricular activities in college and committees in my workplace, I have noticed that effective leadership is best exhibited when personal power/emergent leadership team up with assigned/positional leadership. This can be when a positional/assigned leader also has personal power/emergent leadership or when a positional/assigned leader works together with a personal power/emergent leader.

The second reason leadership has always interested me is because of my personal admiration for leaders. As a younger person, I was mostly interested in leaders, who I now understand, held positional leadership, such as my parents, grandparents, teachers and priests. In college and in the professional life, I continue to be interested in leaders who hold positional power, such as the Dean of the college where I work and president of the college where I work. I

even chose to study John Hannah, one of the most influential presidents of Michigan State University, for part of this class. But I have also grown more interested in personal power and assigned leadership. This had begun to happen before enrolling in this course, but the readings and discussions in EAD 801 have exaggerated my interest and helped me to understand that personal power/emergent leadership are essential in my personal philosophy of good leadership.

One arena of my professional life where I have learned much about leadership is my role as co-advisor of the Honors Students Actively Recruiting (H-STAR) Leadership Team, Alumni Distinguished Scholarship (ADS) Leadership Team and Quiz Bowl Leadership Team. As the Admissions Counselor at Michigan State University's Honors College, I work with Bess German, my supervisor and colleague, to organize the Honors College recruiting activities with H-STAR and ADS and the Quiz Bowl State Tournament. For each of these activities, we coordinate a team of current Honors College students to assist with and manage the events. With these groups of student volunteers, Bess and I try to communicate our vision for the role of the leadership team and the event the team manages. Initially, we meet with each group to set priorities, as a group, based upon a common set of principles. These principles emerge from the Honors College mission to serve high-achieving students in an individualized way. In this manner, we are utilizing Sashkin and Sashkin's conception of leadership as "[making] meaning", by providing "clear and positive *reasons* for [the] aims, actions and accomplishments" (2003, p. 8).

Bess German has been instrumental in my personal development as a leader and in the development of my general understanding of leadership. I believe that Bess mainly thinks of leadership as helping others to discover and grow their own leadership capabilities. In this way, she demonstrates some critical components of what Sashkin and Sashkin, based on ideas from

Kouzes and Posner, call transformational leadership. From Kouzes and Posner's work, Sashkin and Sashkin endorse transformational leadership as "challenging the process", "inspiring a shared vision", "enabling others to act", "modeling the way" and "encouraging the heart" (2003, pp. 40-41). When working with the student leaders, Bess "[searches] for opportunities to do things better", "[fosters] collaboration (as opposed to competition) among followers", "[supports] followers in their personal development", "[sets] an example by [her] own behavior", "[recognizes] followers' contributions" and "[finds] ways to celebrate followers' achievements" (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003, pp. 40-41). In Bess, I feel I have a transformational leader to learn from and model my future leadership after.

Future

After undertaking a thorough and thoughtful review of my past and current experiences with leadership and my beliefs about leadership, I can see an idea emerging of the leader I hope to become. Throughout the more than three months I have been enrolled in this course- in readings, class discussions, and assignments- the concept of transformational leadership has most strongly resonated with me. Out of all the leadership approaches and theories we have read about and discussed - skills, behaviors, traits, followership, situational, contingency, and path-goal - my thoughts keep returning to transformational leadership. This can be partially explained by my personal definition of transformational leadership. I think of transformational leadership as leadership that goes beyond how our class defined leadership in one of our first sessions. In our EAD 801 class session on January 22, 2009, Professor MaryLee Davis and the class defined leadership as a process that influences others to accomplish a common goal. While our class came up with this as a most basic definition of leadership, I do not hold this kind of leadership in high regard. Getting people to accomplish common goals is difficult, but I want

leadership to mean more than this. I do acknowledge I am being idealistic about leadership, but I can think of no better arena to dream grandly than a philosophy of leadership statement!

In my most idealized view of leadership, which I will term transformational leadership, much more than accomplishing a common goal occurs. The most important parts of my idealized transformational leadership come from ideas of different leadership theorists. From Kotter and Heskett, I include the concept of “including followers’ needs in the vision” (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003, 182). I think it is important to involve followers in defining a vision for an organization. In my current position as Honors College Admissions Counselor, we have had a few changes in leadership. In 2007, a new Dean joined the College and in 2008, a new Associate Dean came to us. They have worked diligently to involve the Honors College staff, who have been with the college for a range of a few months to over twenty years, in the process of thinking critically about the college’s mission and how our actions fit into that mission. I have realized that people work best when they believe in what they are doing. Communication of this shared vision is another part of my idealized conception of transformational leadership. Strong vision communication is a concept shared by most leadership theorists (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003). Paula Cunningham, former president of Lansing Community College, also strongly emphasized the importance of communication for good leadership in her comments in EAD 801, on March 19, 2009. Strong communication between the leader and followers ties directly into my first concept of idealized transformational leadership, the development of a shared vision. The leader must listen to and communicate with followers to keep them up to date and sharing in the vision.

A third concept of my idealized view of transformational leadership is empowerment of followers, another concept shared by many leadership theorists (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003). This is a concept I have seen employed by my current supervisor, Bess German. When followers are

encouraged to grow and develop as people and leaders themselves, the organization is strengthened and the shared vision is furthered. An important leadership behavior in my idealized conception of transformational leadership that underlies all three previously mentioned concepts is charisma, which Bass and Associates endorse (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003). I view charisma as what Provost Kim Wilcox, in his talk in EAD 801 on April 4, 2009, called “being a person people want to be around”. Leaders are charismatic and help other people want to share and work towards a common vision when they are true people. Genuineness is most important.

Defining my idealized conception of transformational leadership is an important task in itself, as I define my philosophy of leadership. It is even more important, and useful, to theorize on how I hope to apply my personal conception of leadership in the future. Most immediately, I can see applications of my philosophy of leadership for the HALE Master Student Association (HMSA) at Michigan State University. A few motivated second year Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Masters students founded the HMSA this year. They demonstrated many components of my idealized conception of transformational leadership by bringing many other HALE Masters students into the conversation about vision and mission, including myself. Because of the organizational nature of the HALE Masters program, most of those founding members will be graduating this year, leaving a gap in leadership. I am planning on taking a leadership role in HMSA if elected. In whatever position I undertake, I will strive to involve others in mission definition, communicate well, empower others and be an authentic person.

As I look further into the future, I hope to apply my idealized definition of transformational leadership in my professional life as well. I am currently in my fifth year as Admissions Counselor at the Honors College of Michigan State University. This is my first job following my undergraduate degree. I have learned vast amounts of knowledge about the

recruiting and admissions processes. I am even more interested in and excited about the field of recruiting and admissions than when I began. I take great personal satisfaction in helping high school students and their families wade through the often-confusing process of college admissions. I want to continue working in the field of recruiting and admissions and am looking to increase my professional responsibilities. In order to do so, I need to continue on working to implement my idealized conception of transformational leadership in my current position. I know I have room to grow as co-advisor of the H-STAR, ADS and Quiz Bowl Leadership Teams. Additionally, I can also utilize my definition of transformational leadership in my interactions with the Honors College student assistants and in my interactions with colleagues in committees across campus. When the time comes, I will be in a strong position to apply for an admissions job with more responsibility. I can see that my refined application of transformational leadership will be very important when I eventually take on a supervisory role, possibly as an Assistant Director of Admissions.

Conclusion and Beginning

Normally, I would view a conclusion as tying together the various themes of the paper and summarizing the main ideas. I will do those things in this conclusion, but I would also like to do more. As this is my philosophy of leadership, I want to make a call to action for myself, encouraging future growth and development as a leader.

Through this analysis of leadership issues and experiences from my past and present, utilizing theories of leaderships, I have come to understand myself better. I see that I have grown from a bossy young girl to a woman who has true leadership capabilities. I can also see that my thoughts on leadership have matured from a focus on personality, traits and the psychodynamic approach to a more carefully defined view of transformational leadership.

Concepts from the course readings, discussions and assignments have helped me to reflect on the leader I hope to be in the future.

Even more importantly, this analysis of my philosophy of leadership has excited me about my future. I realize that the concepts learned in this course can directly impact my future professional life. I am thankful for this opportunity to reflect on my philosophy of leadership, but this philosophy of leadership should not be static. I now ask myself to continue to refine my philosophy of leadership as I learn more in the scholarly setting and in the professional setting.

References

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