

MIT Student – ESD.801 – Leadership Development Plan

Characteristics of a great leader:

1. **Ethics** – The greatest of leaders can do amazing things – they can influence incredible change in the world. This is why the most important characteristic of any good leader is a strong sense of ethics. I hate to do this, but I will bring up the most commonly used example of someone who was a strong leader with an extreme lack of ethics – Adolf Hitler. He provides an excellent example of what can happen when you mix incredible power without responsibility. He completely changed the world, but not for the better. In order to have a strong sense of ethics – it is important to always keep yourself grounded and not believe that you are above the rules. That is when you start compromising your morals – so I guess that much of this comes down to staying grounded and not forgetting who you are and also not compromising on your values.
2. **Resourcefulness** – aka - That ability to get the job done! – You know how it is when you ask someone to do something and you just have the faith that they will be able to get the job done without coming back and asking you for lots of help or comes back with excuses for not being able to do the work. It is a rarer trait than many people think – but that makes it even more valuable. When thinking of this, I think back to my favorite slogan of all time: ‘Just Do it’ by Nike. It is so simple, yet so profound. In those 3 words you go from asking people to try their best to asking them to get the job done – no questions asked. The person who introduced this idea to me was my Flight Training Officer when I went through field training after my sophomore year of college. He had the Nike tattoo on his calf and all of his subordinates thought it looked awfully out of character for the otherwise hard-nosed military officer. At the end of our 28-day camp, he told us the story of why he got the tattoo and mentioned that it symbolizes the just do it, no questions asked attitude that is required to lead in any situation, especially in the military.
3. **Surround yourself with the best people** – The idea is that good leaders surround themselves with the best people because if someone is not better at you than something then you really have no reason for having them around. In that same vein, being able to find the best in people is an important skill in order to not alienate yourself. Everyone is good at something – it just may not be something that is immediately obvious at first sight. It is the responsibility of a good leader to find the best in people and bring that out when you are working with them. I first learned this advice from reading lessons from Andrew Carnegie – who is quite possibly the most influential businessman in all of history,
4. **Empowerment** – It is important not only for you to be talented, but for you to make everyone else around you even better. The best way for me to relate this trait of leadership is through basketball. A great example of this trait is Steve Nash. He may not be the highest scoring player, but he always makes every person around him play better by giving them plenty of opportunities to make plays and by skillfully passing them the ball at the most opportune moments. This relates to leadership in that you need to make the people around you perform better because of what you do. This is something that I spoke about with Paul English, the founder of Kayak.com, who mentioned that they

have a rule at his company that any new hire must not only come in and pull their own weight, but they should make everyone else around them more capable and happier.

5. **Genuinely caring about other people** – This is one of those things that should go without saying – and comes all the way from the times way back in the bible – because it is essentially the golden rule: Do unto others what you would have them do unto you. This is important because the people that you lead are going to be relying on you and are going to trust you to do what's best for the group. This does not always mean making the most popular decisions that your followers will like, sometimes it means going against them to make sure the job gets done. But you should always be aware of your people and sometimes it does mean making a tough decision and talking your bosses into giving your people a break. As the air force says – mission first, people always.

My near term leadership plan – Getting better at starting things

For my short term plan – I am going to work at the skills necessary to start something new. During college I had plenty of time learning how to run organizations that had already been created, but now I want to be able to start things of my own.

In order to do that I want to work on charisma and selling ideas – this basically means being able to connect with people and figure out what drives them. In order to do this I am going to continue practicing selling my ideas to different people at networking events and seeing how they react to them. This will help me work on my relating and empathy skills.

The next thing I really need to work on is my ability to connect with people from other cultures. This should be really easy because of all of the people from other countries in TPP. I am going to continue to attend the culture nights to improve my awareness of cultures from around.

The final, and in my opinion most important trait of a leader that I need to work on is figuring out how to lead other leaders. If leadership were a class, I feel that it would be taught in an advanced version of the class – as it is not always necessary, but it can be extremely helpful if you are looking to start a very successful organization. The people you need to be able to convince to follow you need to be strong leaders already – so you must be able to lead them. In order to practice this – I plan to work on projects with other strong-minded leaders successfully. An excellent example of this is Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, who says that Facebook buys companies in order to recruit other great leaders who can then go on to recruit more great followers than any one person could on their own.

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