

Northwestern University

# Personal Philosophy of Leadership

Class 481 Leaders – Instructor: Mark Clare

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## **ABSTRACT**

My personal philosophy of leadership isn't focused on one approach, theory or style. It is a mix of many different leadership approaches such as: the trait approach, the skills approach, the situation approach, the servant leader, authentic leadership and the transformational approach. While each has its strengths and weaknesses, they've played a significant role in my life from childhood to adulthood.

This paper is written to explore and understand how values, assumptions, and behaviors make up my personal philosophy of leadership as well as my life experiences and how the leadership measurement instruments confirmed my beliefs of what a leader should be and has revealed what my true leadership characteristics are.

## **EXPERIENCE MINING**

My personal philosophy of leadership continues to evolve. Studying the different leadership theories and evaluating the learning measurement instruments in this class, has shaped and re-shaped my philosophy of what a true leader is and how that leader can best apply and use their skills to be an effective leader.

The theories I found most supportive of my personal philosophy are: the trait approach (intelligence, self-confidence, integrity and sociability), the skills approach (technical, human and conceptual), the situational approach (SLII model) (the four leadership styles), the servant leader (building community, developing people, courage), authentic

leadership (connectedness, compassion) and the transformational approach (desire to influence, strong moral values). I believe that people are born leaders and their leadership skills, traits and abilities are sharpened and developed through exposure and life experiences.

As I reflect through different stages of my life from childhood to adulthood, I am reminded of my own early traits of leadership and of those who were close to me. The values that stood out most in my life's journey are **Courage**, **Passion** and **Humor**. Through being exposed to those individuals I considered to be strong leaders like my parents, family members, friends and managers; I've come to realize that I've learned and absorbed behaviors and skills from everyone that I've come in contact; both good and bad.

To best analyze my values, assumptions and behaviors of leadership, I felt it most revealing to examine and uncover how they have developed or stayed the same throughout my life.

## **Early Childhood**

### Values

As a child, I remember my parents raising me to have **courage** and not be afraid to try new things from ordering my first meal at McDonald's; speaking up in class; learning how to ride a bike and much more. Although these seem like simple tasks, the courage it took to achieve them as a child, were vital in the development of my leadership abilities. **Passion** was a value my father exuded in his work ethics and in taking care of his family. My siblings and I learned early on the importance of his dedication and loyalty to his work by holding several jobs

simultaneously to support us as a family and especially to see his children go onto college—it was his passion for us to further our education which influenced me several years later to pursue my Masters in MMI. He also went back to school to get his business degree, which fueled my passion to strive for higher education.

**Humor** may be one of the most underrated values of leadership but it is also one that I remember clearly being utilized during my childhood. Many of my elementary school teachers used humor to motivate influence and educate their students. My mother was also one who encouraged us with her humor. By adding a humorous twist to challenges we were faced with at school and in extracurricular activities, she also provided direction and support. Her coaching style (high directive-high supportive) was an approach she has used continuously throughout our lives.

### Assumptions

It is hard to define leadership with one definition. According to Stodgill (1974, p.7) from the Northouse text (2013, pg. 2) “there are as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it. Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”

We like to assume that leaders are highly educated, brave and fearless individuals who aren't afraid to do what's right. I believe that is true in some cases but not entirely the requirement based on my observations and interactions with some leaders who did or did not possess all of the characteristics listed.

A good example would be my parents who both only had a high school education but they

exhibited great leadership. They didn't let their level of education stop them from pursuing their careers and teaching their children to be focused, driven and high contributors to society. My siblings and I were taught the importance of having strong moral values, sociability and integrity.

### Behaviors

At a very young age we are taught to model the behaviors we want to see in others or lead by example. Modeling behaviors influences others and can ultimately help develop and nurture young emergent leaders.

### **Adolescent/Teen Years**

#### Values

During my junior high and high school years, my leadership values of courage, passion and humor were instilled in me but one may have been more prevalent than the others. **Humor** is the value that I remember using as my way to cope with issues, get through those tough times, and influence and lead others by making tasks and activities fun.

#### Assumptions

During those adolescent years is when those values that I'd learned as a child would be useful to me as I began to emerge as a young leader. My social intelligence and self-confidence really

began to shape as a young teen. I was always drawn to leadership through extracurricular activities such as the being head drum major in the marching band and the captain of the cheerleading squad. My courage and passion is what motivated me to take on the role of each, but I also remember using humor as a tool to get me where I wanted to go. Humor = friendliness = earns trust. As the drum major and captain of the cheerleader squad, I took my role as leader seriously and felt responsible for leading in a positive way. I remember feeling connected to those on my team and had a strong desire to influence them to do well during performances and practice. I used humor through all of school and even today in the workplace.

### Behaviors

This is truly where I began to understand what it meant to model behaviors I wanted to see from others. As the lead drum major and captain of the cheerleading squad, I was taught by those I considered leaders on how to be a good leader. The way I behaved would be modeled by those who followed me and would also encourage reciprocity. So early on, I was taught to lead by example. My social intelligence also took a front seat during high school as I became very popular and well-liked by many people including teachers and students. I didn't know it then, but I was an emergent leader. At that time however, I was too immature to work on my emotional intelligence, but was aware of its importance. Emotional intelligence meant self-awareness, which I lacked during that time but would come to know of its power and its use later in life.

### **Young Adult/Adult**

## Values

As a young adult the leadership value I displayed most was **passion**. During college I had the desire and passion to graduate and land a great job. My drive and focus landed me a job with IBM right out of college. As a new hire and very young employee of IBM, I wanted to prove that I was valuable. To do this, I had to draw upon my courage and desire to succeed to show that I had the skills and knowledge to do the job well. As my maturity level developed, I had begun to understand emotional intelligence (although I didn't know it had a name!). Initially I struggled to work in corporate America as I was only in my early 20's, straight out of college with no real work experience. My sociability skills are what helped me along the way as I met and developed relationship with my mentors. I was fortunate enough to have strong, self-confident mentors who all exhibited different leadership styles as I grew and developed. As a new employee, I required the coaching style and as I became more familiar with my corporate surroundings and what was expected of me in my role, supportive and delegating leadership styles were necessary. They all had different leadership styles and influences as some were men and some were women. The traits and characteristics they all possessed were: developing people, self-confidence, friendship, intelligence, honesty, self-respect, authority, courage and integrity. I learned a great deal about being a leader from my mentors in my early career and have continuously developed and shaped those skills even today.

## Assumptions

During my time at IBM is when I understood that leaders do not require a formal organizational position or title. A good leader will challenge you to be a better you. They teach the importance



of teamwork and building community. These are all very valuable lessons that would remain relevant in my career and home life.

### Behaviors

After I left my job at IBM I began working for my current employer. It is here where I truly emerged as a leader. The 10 years I worked at IBM, helped me developed problem-solving skills, social judgment skills and emotional intelligence. I leveraged these skills to positively influence individuals who were knowledgeable in areas where I wanted to learn. For example, I was hired to train and implement and even though this was a lower level position, I had the desire to understand the “big picture”. I used my skills to take advantage of opportunities that allowed me to understand and gain knowledge across departments that would later help me in my role.

### Ethical Leadership

The principles of ethical leadership (respecting others, serving others, building community, showing justice and manifesting honesty) played a large part in shaping my leadership philosophy and how I would act as a leader.

During most of my career, I was fortunate enough to be in the company of positive people who wanted to see me grow and develop and used different leadership styles to help me. However, as I stated earlier, I was also exposed to leadership that had gone against what I’d learn at IBM. It was my manager. She micro-managed her team, which made her subordinates, feel as if she didn’t trust us to get to get the job done without her overseeing and she showed little to no respect for my ideas or my co-worker. She lacked social and emotional intelligence and was focused more

on putting herself before her team. She wasn't a leader at all, but a manager who focused more on the task, than her employees. Her ethical egoism allowed her to focus mostly on herself, her accomplishments and desires rather than her employees.

Although to date, she was one of the worst managers I'd had ever had, I learned a lot from her and decided to work on my strengths as a an altruistic, servant leader while trying to be my authentic self to help others.

## **CRITICAL EVALUATION**

### Supporting factors

The Big Five personality traits (Fig.1) are a common thread in my life from childhood to adulthood. It falls in line of my beliefs of what good leadership is: —openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. As an adult, my leadership style and philosophy is shaped by the servant leadership, transformational leadership and authentic leadership. Learning to serve others, helping others to transform and realize their potential and accepting your true self are important factors in life in general.

Trait	Description
<b>O</b> penness	Being curious, original, intellectual, creative, and open to new ideas.
<b>C</b> onscientiousness	Being organized, systematic, punctual, achievement-oriented, and dependable.
<b>E</b> xtraversion	Being outgoing, talkative, sociable, and enjoying social situations.
<b>A</b> greeableness	Being affable, tolerant, sensitive, trusting, kind, and warm.
<b>N</b> euroticism	Being anxious, irritable, temperamental, and moody.

(Fig.1) (Organizational Behavior, Bauer and Erdogan).

According to Northouse (2013) the trait most strongly associated with leadership as well as in my own personal experience is —extraversion and is thought to be something we are born with.

It is the most important trait of effective leaders. Other major leadership traits such as: intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability are characteristics that I’ve personally observed with mentors, managers and my parents and they have been constant and consistent traits of leaders that I’ve been exposed to all of my personal and work experiences.

### Challenging factors

There are certainly other approaches that contribute to my personal philosophy of leadership such as the style approach and the psychodynamic approach, but I am mostly drawn to the trait, skills and situational approach however not without its challenges. With the strengths of each, there are weaknesses. The trait leadership approach doesn’t truly take into consideration the personality of the followers, the situation or the outcome; thus the shortcomings of this approach can prove to have inconsistent results. It also focuses on the physicality such as height and weight to be traits for effective leadership which is unreasonable measure of effectiveness when you look at some of our

greatest leaders who were of small stature (Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi and Queen Elizabeth II just to name a few).

### **CREATING VALUE WITH MY PPL**

Being a great leader comes with challenges. Developing a vision and driving significant change while simultaneously leading effectively takes work and effort on both the leader and the followers. To accomplish this, a leader must be self-aware. Understanding and knowing what you're capabilities and limitations are builds credibility with your followers.

My approach to leadership is to leverage your strengths and not focus as much on your weaknesses. Although understanding your weaknesses is important, using your strengths to influence and motivate and when used at the right time has a greater power. However, revealing your weaknesses to subordinates at the right time shows you are human and we all make mistakes. The key is to learn from them and move forward.

One new leadership challenge that I want to take that best illustrates my PPL is to further develop and focus on being a servant leader. One of the main characteristics of a servant leader is *listening*. This has always been my greatest challenge and one that I have yet to master. I know that being a good listener show compassion, empathy and value to the follower.

One long-standing professional challenge I have is to challenge myself to learn a new software program that I have been avoiding for years. It is detrimental in being an industry expert and becoming knowledgeable in something that I'm not comfortable with.

Some specific actions that I will take from the strengths and weaknesses that were surfaced in the LMIs I completed are to continue to leverage those strengths I know I possess and execute well such as building relationships, my desire to influence, develop others and encourage and motivate. The weaknesses there were revealed to me weren't as much of a concern since they weren't too

far off from my strengths in some LMIs. Weaknesses can best be leveraged as strength when you use it to help others.

They say it takes 21 days to create a habit and practicing my PPL is no different. I will do my best to practice my PPL at home and at work. Using the knowledge cards that I've written in class is a big step to accomplishing this task. Although I may not practice it every day, I will do my best to acknowledge it and continue to develop it as I grow.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

I've had the opportunity to experience different phases and levels of my own leadership capabilities from childhood to adulthood. Values such as **courage, passion and humor** rotated in relevance as I grew older and more mature. The leaders who have been in my life played a huge role in shaping my philosophy and leadership skills.

My emotional and social intelligence matured over time naturally but I've always felt I had a strong sense of sociability. I used my humor from childhood through adulthood to lead and encourage. According to an article put out by CBSnews, ([http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505125\\_162-57360678/why-Leaders-need-a-sense-of-humor/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505125_162-57360678/why-Leaders-need-a-sense-of-humor/)), humor and humility go hand in hand. "Humor is used to motivate followers; it relieves tensions and helps to break bad news. It can be used in many different ways and should be used and seen as a valuable skill of an effective leader."

Can humor be learned? I don't think it can. I believe humor is an innate trait which coincides with my philosophy that leaders are born.

Leaders need passion to inspire. If the leader is passionate, it promotes excitement in subordinates, and the desire to excel.

In the article, 5 Key Traits of Great Leaders (<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/163590>) it calls out the following “think of all the great leaders throughout the ages and try to name one that did not have passion.”

I was taught to be courageous growing up and it has proven to be a great value and skill to have to be an effective leader. The following article categorizes courage into three categories:

**TRY Courage:** The courage of initiative and action— making first attempts, pursuing pioneering efforts and stepping up to the plate

**TRUST Courage:** The courage of confidence in others— letting go of the need to control situations or outcomes, having faith in people and being open to direction and change

**TELL Courage:** The courage of voice— raising difficult issues, providing tough feedback and sharing unpopular opinions.

(<http://www.eonetwork.org/knowledgebase/specialfeatures/pages/courageisthekeytogreatleadership.aspx>)

## SUMMARY

# GREAT LEADERS



Awaken minds.  
Bring people together.  
Communicate effectively.  
Dare to take calculated risks.  
Enlighten and empower.  
Foster collaboration.  
Give you tools to succeed.  
Help you do for yourself.  
Invite and encourage questions.  
Joyfully embrace diversity.  
Keep an open mind.  
Lead by example.  
Motivate with respect.  
Never give up on you.  
Open doors to new worlds.  
Put first things first.  
Quest to make learning fun.  
Recognize problems early.  
Share roles and responsibilities.  
Take time to explain things.  
Unwrap talents and abilities.  
Value everyone's input.  
Welcome mistakes as  
part of learning.  
Xceed expectations.  
Yearn to connect, not correct.  
Zest to make a difference.

Retrieved from: <http://www.abcinspirationalpoems.com/index.php?/Great-Leaders-Poems/great-leaders-3.html>

What is a Great Leader? A great leader is many things. I chose this poem to represent my personal philosophy of leadership because it encapsulates all that I believe are important traits, characteristics and behaviors of a great leader. It describes the strengths of the leadership styles that contribute to my belief of what leadership is, specifically a GREAT leader.

My personal philosophy of leadership will always evolve. As I learn and understand how to apply different skills and theories, it will always change. However my personal philosophy will always be based on the premise that leaders are born with innate traits and characteristics that propel them to become great leaders.

Born leaders also develop skills over time through life and career experiences. These skills fit into different leadership styles at different times but I feel the styles most impactful are the servant leader, the authentic leader and the transformational leaders. All of these have strengths that highlight helping others become their best and putting the subordinate or follower's needs before your own. My goal is to become a leader that encompasses the strengths of all three.

Even though a person can learn certain skills to be a good leader, one must still possess the innate ability to believe they are a leader in order to be an effective leader.



## **APPENDIX**

Explain why you are not concerned about the weaknesses in traits and the other theories that support your PPL.

I do have concern about the weaknesses and traits and other theories that support my PPL but I believe more energy and time would be best spent focusing on the strengths. From our reading of the Northouse text, it gives some great examples and scenarios of when it is appropriate to apply those strengths. The weaknesses while important to understand in the scope of a theory does not necessarily remove the focus of its strengths.

Are these criticisms false or do you believe they show legitimate weaknesses?

I do believe the criticisms show legitimate weaknesses, however like anything, we must weigh the pros and cons and determine for ourselves if and when the theory applies.

If so, what revisions to your PPL do they suggest?

The revisions to my PPL suggest that there are weaknesses in each theory but through career experiences and mentorship, the strengths for each theory have dominance. Therefore, my PPL was focused more on highlighting the strengths.

Can you capture your PPL in a single sentence definition?

Emergent leaders are born with certain skills and traits that develop into behaviors to positively influence followers and effectively lead.

For example, our textbook defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group to achieve a common goal. As you know, this simple statement is packed with implications about the nature of leadership. If you cannot or will not provide a one sentence definition, please explain why.

n/a

What is it about your PPL that defies the one-sentence explanation?

n/a

How does your PPL explain the difference between leadership and management?

My PPL doesn't explain the difference between leadership and management but instead focuses heavily on what makes a great leader. Managers focus on tasks while leaders focus on people.

The literature we reviewed drew a pretty sharp distinction, emphasizing how leaders make deep change and invent the future for the organization and managers work to make current practices perform as well as possible.

If you agree with that distinction, how have you factored it into your PPL?

I do believe that leaders make deep change and invent the future for the organization and managers work to make current practices perform as well as possible. In my PPL, I discuss how the mentors that I've had throughout my life encouraged and influenced me to make change and shape my own future as well as that for the organization. They helped me to develop conceptual skills and see the big picture rather than what was in front of me and that it wasn't all about me.

If you don't, how does your PPL offer a new distinction?

n/a

Your PPL might claim there is no difference. If so please explain how the same people/role can both drive fundamental change and run the current operation effectively? That seems to ask way too much.

n/a

How does your PPL make sense of the nature and role of vision in leadership?

My PPL makes reference to the nature and role of vision in leadership through discussion of becoming a conceptual thinker. During my time at IBM, I learned from my mentors the importance of conceptual skills and to look at the bigger picture instead of the smaller pieces. Having this skill in place would allow me to move up from my position to eventually becoming an assigned leader through the proof of my work and emergent leadership abilities.

Can you be an effective leader without a compelling and detailed point of view about a new and important way of doing things?

I think it would be challenging to be an effective leader without a compelling and detailed point of view about a new and important way of doing things. That's what makes a great leader. A great leader is someone who challenges the normal circumstances and thinks outside the box while influencing others to do the same.

If vision is essential, what exactly is it and how do you get one?

I believe having a vision is essential and getting one, comes with life's experiences. Most of us may not start with a vision but at some point develop one. During my childhood my vision was to be the best at whatever activity I chose to do. As I got older in high school and college, my vision was to graduate on time and finally for today my vision is to graduate with a Masters in Medical Informatics. I think a vision is obtained through desires, goals and aspirations for yourself (personally) and your team (work) through observations and aligning yourself with successful individuals who help you to see that vision.

What role does change and innovation play in your PPL?

Change and innovation are key elements to leadership. In my PPL although I didn't focus heavily on innovation as a defining trait, it has relevance to be an effective leader. Good leaders promote change and adapt to change in the organization with a positive outlook. The positive outlook of change encourages others to be positive.

Being innovative is a great leadership trait and I'm not sure is one that can be developed. I believe that some people are naturally innovative, but may not be great leaders. If a leader is innovative as well, then it shows the leader as being highly intelligent, self-confident and fearless. Steve Jobs is a great example of a leader who possessed this trait.

How do you define these terms?

Innovation or being innovative is the ability to create or introduce a new way of looking at things.

Change is moving away from doing something in the same manner or doing something differently

Change and innovation, like leadership, can be a bit tricky to define. Distinctions between continuous and radical change and invention and innovation are often useful. This is related to question two but is asking you to go deeper into the meaning of the concepts of change and innovation whether you use them to contrast leadership and management or not.

Since I've already spoken about change and innovation as it relates to leadership, here I will discuss how it relates to management. Since managers are more task oriented, change and adapting to change is a common occurrence. As a manager or a member of an organization, it is guaranteed that you will encounter change. How it is dealt with, is key. Managers must be focused on the outcome and looking for positive results from subordinates, so it is imperative that they promote change in a positive way. This is something that managers and leaders have in common.

More specifically, what do Leadership-Member Exchange Theory, Transformational leadership, Servant leadership and the Psychodynamic approach have to say about your draft PPL?

Leader-Member Exchange Theory – In my PPL I gave an example of a manager I had who exhibited poor leadership qualities and was focused more on herself than others. This manager also didn't hide who was in the “in-group” and who was in the “out-group”. The behavior of putting employees in groups like this will only create an environment of distrust, dislike and creates discord amongst subordinates. I disagree with this aspect of the theory and did not include any specifics of it in my PPL.

Transformational Leadership – Transformational leadership has become one of my favorite approaches and plays a large part in my PPL. I transformed in many ways from childhood to adulthood which I pointed out in my PPL. From gaining self-confidence to my desire to influence others are characteristics that are almost tangible and therefore something that I can impart on others.

Servant Leadership – Servant leadership is another approach that initially I felt hesitant to embrace but as I read the definition and understood its true meaning, it quickly became a theory that I will apply to my work life and home life. My mentors provided servant leadership. When I became more knowledgeable in my work as a new PPL employee, they allowed me more and more to lead and make more complex decision.

Psychodynamic Approach – The psychodynamic approach was not highlighted in my paper as such but I did point out how “childhood and adolescent experiences are reflected in reactions to paternalistic, maternalistic, and familial patterns of leadership and management.” (Northouse, pg. 320) My personality and early influence of leadership was derived from learning and observing my parents and teachers.

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