

Connect, Grow, and Inspire:

A Personal Leadership Philosophy

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I want everyone to feel happy. This is one of the core values I hold in my life that translates to my own personal philosophy in leadership and teaching. Growing up, I saw teachers' consistent kindness, generosity and willingness to help others no matter what and these teachers formed how I see leadership. In the words of Susan Scott, "You will not single-handedly cause or prevent success." (Scott, 2011). To me, these two ideas helped me to form my leadership philosophy, it's all about the team. I am calling my personal leadership philosophy "Connect, Grow and Inspire" because I believe that these are the steps I aim to follow when acting as a leader and I believe in helping others in following these steps towards their own personal success and the overall success of the organizations and teams in which we work. As a side note, I would also like to think that this title can be easy to remember and therefore apply using the abbreviation C.G.I. As I was writing this personal philosophy, there were lots of different understandings, definitions and roles used to describe the servant leader and I would like to bring attention to these ideas that have formed the facets of complexity in my own personal definition of leadership.

Robert K. Greenleaf in his book 'Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness', describes the servant leaders as someone who has a natural feeling to serve first and later, makes the decision to lead (Greenleaf, 2002). Having the service and seeing to people's needs as the first priority, distinguishes the leader as one of true service. In Susan Scott's Memo to Leaders, a point made is to, "Surround yourself with people who model accountability, ferocious integrity, personal authenticity, the capacity to connect with others at a deep level, sheer courage, and a commitment to champion the common good over narrow self-interest." (Scott, 2011). As a leader, we aim to hire those who are smarter than us. To take it a step further, hiring smart people with conscience will increase the likelihood of having a continuously growing leader. The leader supports and elevates the hire to become the self-actualized and highest version of themselves. Finally, in Brené Brown's book, 'Dare to Lead', she states that, "Daring leaders must care for and be connected to the people they lead."

(Brown, 2019). The connection and trust built between a leader and her followers can determine and predict the level of success that the team as a whole and the team as individuals can achieve.

In my own experience, I like to think about the ways that I connect with my team members. My first strategy towards connecting with my team members is to speak their language. To quote Nelson Mandela, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart." This shows that you care enough to engage with them on their level and this can also build a foundation of trust that is easy to build upon later. The establishment of this trust and linguistic continuity is the foundation for the Connect part of my personal leadership philosophy. Brené Brown's work also makes up a lot of the connection piece. In my own experience, I have been able to rise to leadership positions in many contexts because I was able to speak in many languages and act as a bridge through my ability to translate between groups and listen and understand what different people were saying and understand their needs based on the information they said. I also like to make friends and show others I care through listening and helping others when I can. When you get to know the people you work with and really take the time to listen and be attentive to what they are saying, you not only build those relationships but you can also better guide and cater to their needs of their own personal growth path which brings us to step two of my philosophy, Grow.

I have always described myself and have been described as a lifelong learner and very ambitious. Because of this, I challenge myself to always keep learning and I do that through classes like degrees or other general professional development. In my team, I like to encourage others to continue their own educational journeys and pursue knowledge in a way that best serves them. I try to do this by leading by example, my rationale being if everyone on my team sees that I am working hard towards developing my skills and learning new things, they will be more likely to follow that for themselves too and I always have plenty of professional

development and courses in my back pocket to recommend to people. When I am hiring new staff, I try to keep this in mind too and try to hire those who know more than me and who have more experience than I do so I can also learn from the wealth of knowledge they bring into the organization.

Finally, as Greenleaf noted in this book, that final step to being a truly great servant leader is that step that leads others to self-actualization. To me, this means helping to guide and inspire others towards achieving their own personal heights. As a teacher mentor, I loved getting to see my mentees get to the stage of dreaming and then having the opportunity to support them in those dreams. My first mentee aspired to be a teacher leader and is now doing just that in HongKong. In a way, seeing the success of others, especially those who I was able to support and guide along the way is the most rewarding part of being a leader.

In conclusion, my leadership philosophy is to connect with your team, support them in their own personal growth and to inspire them to reach for the stars and be the best they can be. When a leader achieves these three steps, they go from being a textbook servant leader to a leader who goes beyond the servant leader to an inspirational one.

References

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