

**Personal Philosophy of Leadership**

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June 21, 2023

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### **Introduction**

In this paper, I will discuss the concept of leadership, highlighting 3 major leadership theories of leadership that have influenced me. I will also analyze my own leadership style using several assessments from the Northouse text to assess my effectiveness in the leadership approaches. These assessments will assist in describing qualities and characteristics comparable to effective leaders. Next, I will discuss what effective followership is, why it is an important component of leadership, and how I can enhance my effectiveness as a follower while encouraging the same in others. Throughout the paper, I will reflect on three key leadership lessons I have learned with two specific actions I will take to enhance my leadership effective. Lastly, as a culmination to the influences and perspective provided, I will share my definition of leadership.

### **Making a Connection**

In 1854, the Atlantic Telegraph Company led by Cyrus West Field began to construct the world's first transatlantic telegraph cable. This cable was approximately 340,500 miles of copper and iron that stretched 2,877 miles along the ocean floor from the Ireland island of Valentia Island west to northeastern Trinity Bay of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada. In the television series *Touch* which aired from year 2012 to 2013, the story of this massive project of ingenuity was briefly mentioned, explaining that "once the cable was in place, you could use electrical impulses and signal code to send any message you wanted to the other side of the world" (Jake B., 2012). The main character in the series Jake Bohm goes on in a monolog sharing how human beings too have an impulse but in the form of sharing ideas "...and the desire to know we've been heard. It's all part of our need for community" (Jake B., 2012). It is

with this notion that he further asserts that it is the very reason why we send out messages and look for a response from those we send messages to.

After 4 years of construction of the Transatlantic telegraph cable, the first communication was sent on August 16, 1858. The transmission was poor and after only 3 weeks of attempted improvements, the cable failed. Despite its failure, desperation of hearing something and to know that we ourselves were heard from across two continents was worth the undertaking. It was because of our willingness to wait for a response in the hopes for connecting with other people. Jake Bohm metaphorically demonstrates the nexus between the transatlantic cable and our desire for connection asserting that just because a message has not been received, it does not always mean it was not sent to us and that it could mean that we are not listening hard enough. I take it a step further to ponder; what if that desire for connection is the effort of exercising leadership?

If we intend to lead others, we must be willing to do what seems at times the impossible of building connections with others who may have different ethics, beliefs, values, and perspectives of how they see the world; things that can be continentally polarizing at times. Leadership demands that we exercise empathy at times "...recognizing someone's opinion and how they arrived at their perspective" (Witkowski. 2023). Leadership also demands that we open our minds to be conscious of what impulses we send to those we are trying to reach. Everyone has the capability to exercise leadership in both our professional and personal lives. In our efforts, we ask ourselves if we possess the capacity to do so or if we truly are invoking change especially at times when it seems that change is manifesting slowly or seemingly to be ignored. It may only be in times of crises where we may see the fruits of our labor from people we are responsible for under our leadership rising to the occasion due to our impact. It is with this

possibility that we reaffirm that just because we may not receive an explicit or clear response to our leadership, it doesn't mean our followers were not receptive to what we are conveying. Perhaps we in our attempts of exercising leadership just aren't observing the impact hard enough.

### **The Leadership Messages Transmitted**

The law enforcement profession has provided me an opportunity to exercise various forms of leadership among my colleagues and the communities I have served. In this time, my leadership traits exhibited have shifted although the intent has always remained the same: to protect and build stronger communities with respect and dignity of all people. I have always had a desire to fight wrongs, be an advocate for the defenseless, and collaborate with communities, in part by sharing my own life experiences as examples that contradict implicit biases people possess about low-income and minority communities. In my later years of this profession, I found myself expanding my platform of influence through creating a professional development consulting firm which allowed me to expand the way in which I provide service to communities. Throughout my entire career journey, three (3) leadership theories arose as not only everyday business practices but a way of life:

#### **Servant Leadership**

Servant Leadership is a mindset as opposed to a theory or formula because it is entrenched in psychological characteristics that emphasize due concern for the followers they ultimately lead. As a peace officer, I recognize servant leadership as the explanation for the nobility of the profession when practiced authentically and with compassion for the community that is served. First, we must acknowledge the awesome power and responsibility that is given to a peace officer; power that must be nurtured and resistive to temptation of abuse. Dan Cable his

Harvard Business Review Article *How Humble Leadership Really Works* reminds us that in any business power “can cause leaders to become overly obsessed with outcomes and control, and, therefore, treat their employees as means to an end” (Cable, 2023). The results do not just pertain to employees but also constituents that are served. The unfair advantage of expectation however is how easily the public at large forgets how in the most difficult of circumstances, peace officers are often asked to do the things that others cannot do, won't do, or aren't qualified to do. In attempting to fulfill the demands of the community, peace officers are often exposed to witnessing the worst of humanity and other traumatizing moments that are severe and shock the conscious leading to unhealthy uses of power. Between these moments are additional request from the public who expect outstanding friendly customer service without consideration to what these officers may have been exposed to just minutes prior.

While some may say that peace officers sign up for these disastrous moments, one never considers that those same moments are what is experienced by the public prompting a police officer's response and no one would ever suggest that a person's mere presence of living in a particular community or being at the right place at the right time to become a victim was a social contract to their demise. Despite this silly cliché assertion, law enforcement officers continue to respond to the needs of the public without hesitation. In these responses, they are still expected to maintain a positive attitude, keeping a smile on their faces, hitting the emotional and adrenaline reset button over and over again as they go to the next call that could be something, could be a bunch of nothing, or could be their last. As each day passes, no one ever considers the impact these traumatizing experiences have on an officer's personal life and if it exists, where is there room to enjoy life after dealing with so much sorrow? Not even the peace officer themselves think about it during certain times in their career and that is because as Robert Greenleaf has

said, "a great leader is a servant first." To be a servant leader is to put others before yourself. It is the way of building community even in moments where it feels as though the community has turned against you.

Through the struggles of absorbing the burdens of others, one learns how to triage their own emotions and in doing so, personal growth takes place. Nurturing the spirit is not just a way of providing joy and fulfillment in the work that is done but also bringing calm to the chaos in others' lives through comfort and reliability when called upon. As with most peace officers I know, joining the profession, especially in today's challenging times, it truly is a natural feeling as it can truly be a thankless job with no compensation that will ever satisfy the standard of living or pay you for the physical and psychological toll it takes on you. "It is the ability to empower and encourage others, its building trust, and in pursuing all these desires, one has to be committed to the common cause and the community that is being built around it" (Servant Leadership, 2022).

I've come to understand that being a Servant Leader is not easy and comes with a sacrifice to that person's way of life. Those who are willing to take on the burdens and challenges must possess a mental readiness that prepares them for people to take for granted and take advantage of their deeds. If we look at Servant Leadership from a more global perspective, we can set aside its transformation from an organizational view and see it from any form of community. For example, when you have peace officers who constantly practice empathic listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, a commitment to the growth of the people within the community they serve, and all around, the building of community, the average community member puts a far greater deal of trust in the law enforcement profession as a whole. When people trust their law enforcement, they tend to be

more cooperative witnesses when crime occurs, they feel safer, and partnerships are formed between the community and law enforcement that makes the peace officer, the servant leader more appreciated and less psychologically and emotionally disturbed, giving them the ability to think more clearly in the actions they take to protect themselves and the community at large. With any profession, “The best way to make servant leadership a part of how you run your business is to build it into the founding values of the company” (Spiro, 2021).

### **Authentic Leadership**

As one of the newest theories to be explored, Authentic leadership can be used as an opportunity to build a bridge between differences among employees in the workplace. A duty of care is how to best describe this leadership model: to care about a colleague's performance, their welfare, and both their personal and professional quality of life. What makes this approach relevant to how followers engage an authentic leader is not the actions of the leader alone. As the model suggests, there is consistency at work where subordinates bear witness to behaviors that are in line with the leader's values and morals that go unwavering. Authentic leaders form a habit of remaining true to their values but imposing those values on those that follow. This is done through sharing their purpose, building relationships, speaking from the heart, demonstrating their values through action, and consistently remaining self-disciplined even in the most unfortunate or difficult of circumstances. It is being your true self however recognizing “being your true self is not the same as being spontaneous” (Vlachoutisicos, 2014). In other words, we want to be curious in all aspects mentioned by soliciting more information before forming an opinion or responding with constructive criticism.

Like Servant Leadership, while this leadership style too may appear to be noble, it does come with a price. Genuine behavior can leave the leader vulnerable to those who challenge their



true authenticity. I have witnessed this in certain neighborhoods I grew up in with high crime, gangs, and drug addiction. Those youths like me who envisioned a higher quality of life away from our current circumstances were accused of being "sellouts" or other racially derogatory terms to suggest while we represented a particular population externally, our internal self was that of a life of another race. Common was the test of cognitive dissonance and social conformity challenges from peers to see if values would be compromised to fit in. From experience, it was difficult to express words of encouragement from the heart as this was seen as being "a square", a condescending term like a nerd.

In the law enforcement profession, similar challenges exist for an authentic leader. One who is seen as always doing things "by the book" or consistently looking for criminal activity with a consistent attitude and passion for wanting to serve the community is seen as a "super cop". These same peace officers are consistently making attempts to form relationships with community members, forming a connection with those they serve with the hopes of relying upon those same community members to aid them in witness information or intelligence when attempting to solve crimes or be proactive in crime prevention.

2 strategies a leader can use for authenticity is to not announce intentions but to simply act in accordance with their intentions. In simpler terms, we do not focus on what we say or do but instead on how we say or do something. And of course, these words and acts should be consistent. Second, Authentic leaders should focus on a long-term strategy of winning over followers. No part of this leadership style is instantly rewarded. The goal of obtaining followers in this fashion is long-term. "Like long-distance runners, authentic leaders with self-discipline are able to stay focused on their goals." The practice of authenticity long term should be a natural feeling, very similar to that of a servant leader.

## **Adaptive Leadership**

In my entire law enforcement career, adaptive leadership has been at the forefront of the way in which peace officers conduct business and enforce the law. Each year, voters have the opportunity to introduce new laws, repeal laws, or lessen the criminality of behaviors deemed socially unacceptable. These laws rather enacted or removed exist commonly in the states' penal codes, vehicle codes, welfare institution codes, and business professions codes. Supervisors and managers of a law enforcement agency are tasked with ensuring the organization's manual of policies and procedures are aligned with the current conditions of those laws. This is to ensure that those enforcing the law do so without conflict between what is administrative procedures or permissible with the most current law. What cannot be controlled is how those enforcing the law feel in their opinion about changes of the law regardless of their practice of neutrality and how those feelings are expressed to the public being served. It is this challenge where adaptive leadership is needed on multiple tiers from the organization's chief executive accepting the change, management memorializing the change, supervisors encouraging the change, and the peace officers interacting with the public sometimes requiring education on the impact of the change, especially for victims. As noted by McLaughlin, "Adaptive leadership has been used effectively to explain how leaders encourage productive change across multiple levels, including self, organizational, community, and societal" (McLaughlin, 2020, pg., 285).

One example of Adaptive leadership related to the challenge referenced is in California where Proposition 47, proposition 57, and Assembly Bill 109 were enacted over the last 9 years. The people through a majority vote supported these propositions and bills with the intent of reducing prison populations and reducing the scheduled punishment for felonious crimes, making many of them misdemeanors. What the public did not consider was the impact this

would have on how law enforcement would pursue crime. Thefts that occurred valuing over \$450 were once a felony. This has now changed to \$950. Suspects who commit misdemeanor thefts cannot be placed under arrest unless a private persons arrest is made by the victim. Even if the victim places the person under arrest, overall, misdemeanors with the exception of specific types now result in an issuance of a citation, even at the scene of the crime with a promise to appear, leaving offenders out on the street with no confinement or requirement of bail being posted for release. Even when a suspect fails to appear in court, no jail time is issued but instead another citation of a promise to appear if or when they are found. Just as equally frustrating for victims, peace officers also find frustration in their desire to protect the public. However, peace officers must do enforcement in a case and manner prescribed by law. Supervisors often have to remind their subordinates of the detriments of expressing an opinion in current laws or lack thereof even under good intentions. The way supervisors encourage people to adapt or "...to face and deal with problems, challenges, and changes" (McLaughlin, 2020, pg., 285) is to remind them of the practice of police legitimacy with the goal of building trust with the community. In this regard, building that trust is expressing empathy for those who are disadvantaged by the change in law while still meeting the organizations' main goal of protecting people and property.

### **Cables Connect Followers to Leaders**

Since the telegraph cable of 1858, nearly a thousand technologically more evolved cables exist across oceans of water to connect two points of land. When we think about who we make connections with, we naturally think about the people we align with who at the surface are like us. But when it comes to the efforts put forth in creating these submarine cables, its common purpose is not to connect people and things that are alike. We build these cables to bring different people together. People from different regions, different areas, and different

communities who at times may even have different resources. Leadership theories allows us an opportunity to exchange ideas, viewpoints, and resources in the form of collaboration to pursue or evolve an organization's goal. Followership in leadership helps us do this.

An effective follower is one that is jointly committed to the organization's Core Purpose which is defined as "a company's reason for being" (Collins, 1996 pg. 6). Generally, the follower works collaboratively amongst all levels within the organization even when there are differences in personalities or opinions. What's unique about an effective follower is how their performance and characteristics are a rubric to the effectiveness of a leader. As suggested by Mc Laughlin et al., (2020), A follower's characteristics along with other attributes "...determine the degree to which followers find the behavior of a leader an immediate source of notification or instrumental to some future satisfaction" (Mc Laughlin, 2020, pg. 137). Today's transatlantic cables must always maintain a specified engineer standard and undergo stress test to ensure its effectiveness. Stress tests invoke questions that should be raised when there are signs of weakness or deterioration. Leaders can be challenged by effective followers when they are given the ability to challenge their leaders in a constructive manner to seek clarification of a goal and have the ability to take action on behalf of the organization without fear of consequences from the leader.

As the relationship between leaders and follows develop, we find commonality among people we would have never thought we would have things in common with because of how different we may appear at the surface level. Followers often align with those who lead them due to a shared series of values and beliefs which should be the organization's core values. As open-minded followers, we must stop to look at the opportunities where we can build bridges. Opportunities to connect with others and share ideas. Underneath the surface, we find that we as humans have similar wants and needs.

### **Leadership Defined by Experiences**

In reflecting on the various theories of leadership, I question how it would be possible to define leadership without an experience to lead or to follow a leader. One must know what they look for in or what they have gone through to determine what leadership is to them. That is what makes the concept multifaceted. It is also for this reason; I chose to define the term after sharing much of my own experiences that have shaped how I choose to practice it and the ethical considerations behind it. Leadership is the attempts to make influential connections with others without certainty of the outcome. In this, there is the transactional freedom of choice between people those who lead and those who follow for a common cause bigger than themselves.

With the invention of various leadership theories over time, we each have a moment to take today's desires of others and with ingenuity develop a new theory that influences others to be the best version of themselves professionally, personally, and community. There are words of wisdom and warning that come with the practice of leadership. That is leadership comes with great responsibility that requires constant vigilance, or overwatch. This vigilance is necessary to assure we are not engaging in pseudotransformational leadership to which we become "...self-consumed, exploitive, and power oriented, with warped moral values" (Bass & Riggio, 2006) as we lead others.

### **Personal Philosophy Ending with the Beginning in Mind**

The first transatlantic telegram that was transmitted via electronic impulse between the two continents was a letter of congratulations from Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom to James Buchanan, President of the United States. As leaders, we have the awesome opportunity to transmit important messages that bring people together and do so selflessly. The impulse we use in leadership is influence carrying the words and actions we display. Like the Transatlantic

Telegraph Cable, even if the result of such a massive undertaking end in just a few moments of connection, it doesn't mean the effort of sending that message was not worth trying. It's the dare of ingenuity to bring people together that counts. And even if we do not personally see the impact we left on others, it doesn't mean one wasn't left. We just may not be looking hard enough.

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