

## **Leadership and Management Treatise**

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## LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL MODEL

### Leadership Mission Statement

As a leader, I will strive to succeed by understanding the needs of my clients and my coworkers, and by matching these needs to the goals of my organization as a whole.

Simply put, this means that my leadership philosophy is about relationships, partnerships, and teamwork, facilitated through open communication, as my values should demonstrate.

### Leadership Values

*1. People come first, in all cases and with no exceptions: everything comes down to relationship building.*

The end result is good customer service and emotionally intelligent management. As a leader, my focus must always remain on the needs of the people I am trying to serve, both internally and externally. If I lose focus on my external customers, the entire reason for my organization's existence is lost. If I lose focus on the needs of my internal stakeholders, I lose the use of my primary tool for serving my external customers.

The goal must be to create a "learning culture" where individuals know each other, understand their roles, responsibilities, and personalities, communicate freely, trust each other, and engage in continuous and honest evaluation (Maccoby, 2003). Customers and coworkers must be viewed as partners, with whom the leader is working toward a common goal. They must also be seen as individuals worthy of

attention as human beings rather than just as tools for the organization's use; the idea of speaking to customers about something other than business (Blanchard and Bowles, 1993) or of having a best friend at work (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999) are good examples.

Customer service must be based on a partnership, as discussed above, but must also be a concept that all staff members at all levels "buy into". Church (1995) found that empowering front line workers to do what is necessary to make customers happy has a substantial effect on customer service ratings and on profitability, and concluded that "Managing individual relationships with direct reports and within the team is as important to ensuring service quality and organizational performance as effectively completing the task at hand" (p. 30). In other words, the relationship, again, is the most important thing.

## *2. Customer service must be the primary goal of every organization.*

This rule applies to non-profit and government agencies as well as commercial establishments. Organizations that realize this fact will be successful. Organizations that don't realize it will fail.

I once worked for a company whose philosophy stated that "our primary objective is to take care of our customer." My manager often remarked that this wasn't entirely true: the company's primary objective was in fact to make money. It just so happened that the most effective way of doing so was to take care of the customer. Too many companies lose sight of this; Winn-Dixie and Publix supermarkets in Florida are a good example. A self-published company history of the former focuses

primarily on mergers and acquisitions, blaming unions and the government for all problems, and pricing for maximum profit, while a similar history of the latter is almost exclusively concerned with customer service and improving the shopping experience (Davis, 1990; Watters, 1980). The former has struggled for years, not knowing which customers it wanted to serve, and therefore not knowing how to compete effectively. Guess which company is in trouble today and which one is thriving?

### *3. Open and honest communication is essential.*

As a leader, I must be approachable and must make it clear that I listen to all input, even when I don't always agree. This will help create the "learning culture" discussed above. It is essential to view customers (and coworkers, for that matter) as partners, and to establish a relationship where real feedback is solicited (particularly complaints) and where customers perceive a "willingness to listen" (Plymire, 1992, p.75). Emotionally intelligent communication helps leaders to more fully articulate goals and objectives, to create enthusiasm, to encourage flexibility, and to build cooperation and trust within the team (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002).

### *4. Consensus, teamwork, and respect for others make everything easier and more pleasant.*

Management by consensus is not always possible or advisable, but it's a wonderful thing when it does happen. A team-based approach is my preferred method, because I believe that interaction generally produces a stronger result than

autocracy. "Casting" the team is the most important thing, requiring careful assessment of both their talents and skills and of their emotional attitudes. With respect to emotionally intelligent team dynamics, Ashkanasy and Daus (2002) recommend assessing the emotional impact of jobs, and creating a positive emotional climate for the team through modeling. Riggs (2001), Maccoby (2003), and Russell (2002) all stress the importance of creating an environment of trust, and Russell's "servant leadership" strategy is "based on the values of humility and respect for others" (pp. 80-81).

### **Talents and Fears**

I believe that I have a good emotional barometer, and a strong ability to gauge the emotions and concerns of others. I am empathetic, and in my past management positions, I was always very concerned with how my actions were perceived by others. I was always conscious of how I set the emotional tone for the day with my own behavior, and I tried to behave appropriately (even if I didn't always succeed).

Generally, I believe that I have strong interpersonal and communications skills, and understand how to proceed diplomatically in a group situation. I do well with conflict management, and am generally very tenacious when confronted with the need to find solutions. I pick up quickly what is important to whom, and I have always been able to focus on the ideal customer: I generally know who that customer is and how she wants to be treated.

### *Fears:*

As I moved forward into a leadership role, I should pay attention to certain areas where there is room for improvement. I tend to be somewhat introverted and independent in nature; despite the fact that my interpersonal skills are strong, I am not particularly aggressive at seeking out other people, and my independent nature often means that I can be a bit impatient at times, not to mention somewhat autocratic. Perhaps paradoxically, I also feel that I could often stand to be more self-confident and assertive within my professional life.

### **Vision of a Future Me**

In my ideal future, I would be self-employed as a consultant to libraries and archives, managing digitization and preservation projects. This would only be possible after several years of work in the field, where I would have a chance to gain experience in both the technical and management aspects of the job, not to mention professional contacts.

I like to think that I would be managing my own small team, and that I would hire effectively enough to allow me to use a somewhat informal “hands off” approach, allowing people to do their jobs in their preferred way as long as quality and productivity goals were being met. I have always worked best in a collaborative environment, and I would try to hire others who do so as well, meaning that I would need a somewhat seasoned staff. I would hope to accomplish this by allowing my staff to grow (become “heroes”) in their current roles without constantly feeling the

need to aim for the “next rung” in order to feel satisfied professionally and financially (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999).

I would extend this collaborative environment to include my clients as well. This is how I currently operate as a freelancer; I try to understand their unique needs and become as much of an “insider” as possible, addressing my clients using “we” rather than “you” and “I”. I have been successful operating this way in the past, and have taken clients back from much larger operators on occasion by personalizing customer service and using a team/partnership model, so I see no reason to change.

### **MY TOP FIVE QUESTIONS**

*1. How is management within an LIS setting similar and different from management in a business environment?*

Good leadership and management is a universal thing, although a non-profit organization may require rethinking the practice and application of theory. For example, a library will define its “bottom line” differently than a for-profit enterprise would; Woodward (2005) suggested using a proportion of library patrons to community residents at large as a measure. Also, a library manager might employ a somewhat different set of resources, relying more on volunteer labor or staff creativity (and expanded job descriptions) than on cash funding, as a corporate manager might. Despite the different *types* of resources, however, it all comes down to managing and using effectively whatever resources are *available*. Non-profit managers may also have to work harder to find team motivators other than money, although studies have generally shown that money is not the prime motivator for most employees.

Riggs (2001) suggested that it is particularly important for managers in a library setting to understand the difference between leadership and management, and that flexibility and the ability to “embrace change” are of paramount importance. He also suggested several specific qualities that should be expected of leaders within the field, including vision, dreams, creativity, planning, courage, “getting the truth”, trust, values, passion for the work, “caring for colleagues”, communicating, transforming, and “inspirational motivation”. Interestingly, Riggs also cited “innovation and entrepreneurship” as essential characteristics for success in a library leadership position, which is consistent with the customer-driven focus of Woodward (2005) and others.

*2. It's easier to deal with employees who are very good or very bad at their jobs. How do you deal with the ones who aren't terribly good at what they do, but also aren't "bad enough" to merit heavy-duty discipline?*

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) found that great managers define unacceptable performance as “any level that hovers around average with no trend upward” (p. 207) and that great managers further do not allow employees to stagnate at this level for very long. Ashkanasy and Daus (2002), working from an emotional intelligence perspective, would suggest a “progressive process” (p. 84) starting with reemphasizing goals and expectations, and setting a timetable for improvement. If this were not successful, progressively more negative consequences, up to and including termination, would follow. In any case, the unacceptable performance should not be rewarded.

Given an employee who fits this description, it might be wise to reassess his skills and talents and determine whether there might be another position that would be a better fit. It would be ideal to find a position within the organization, but for the sake of both the employee and the organization, the bad fit must ultimately be corrected somehow. A focus on outcomes and a clear communication of expectations should make this a fairly straightforward process.

*3. What are some strategies for maximizing communication both up and down the hierarchy?*

To start, it is necessary to provide the actual tools needed for communication, whether they include a telephone system, email network, or carrier pigeons. If communication is difficult, it won't happen. This relates to one of the "Base Camp" questions cited in Buckingham and Coffman (1999): "Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?" (p. 28).

Assuming this basic need is met, the organization needs to work on providing a culture that values and rewards communication rather than stifling it, or worse, punishing the messenger. Managers must be approachable and willing to listen, and also to show that they are actually paying attention to this input, lest their employees start withholding feedback the management really needs (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2002). In fact, they should actively solicit input, positive and negative, from coworkers and customers (Plymire, 1992). Emotionally intelligent managers will also recognize when there are problems, and will ask specific questions to try to bring these issues to light before employees "become emotionally trapped in a cycle of

negative motion” (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002, p.80). Making communication and ongoing feedback an integral part of the organizational culture is probably the best way to make sure that it happens.

*4. Is it OK to set different expectations among team members based on their level of contribution to the organization? For example, is it OK to tolerate habitual lateness from someone who otherwise does outstanding work while penalizing it in someone else whose work is not so good?*

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) are very much in favor of treating top performers differently from lesser achievers. Not only do managers learn more by spending time with successful employees, they also reinforce positive behaviors among their best workers by giving them more time and attention.

If the manager is focusing on outcomes rather than processes, the answer should be clear: if the employee is succeeding -- or not performing -- in his current role, everything else is pretty much irrelevant. Reward the success. If the problem is affecting outcomes, find and fix it (if it can be fixed), or ease the employee into something else, even out the door in necessary. It will be better for him and for the organization in the long run. If outcomes aren't affected, consider whether or not there's even a problem to fix.

*5. Where is the balancing point when an employee's cultural needs and norms conflict with those of the organization?*

This is a difficult question, and I'm still not certain how I'd answer it. It is essential that managers respect diversity and recognize that they're leading individuals rather than lemmings or mere tools. If the focus is on outcomes, there is generally room for significant variation in processes, as long as the results are consistently good. However, if the needs of one individual are adversely affecting the productivity and morale of everyone else within the organization, something has to be done. The important thing to determine is whether the problem stems from the one individual's needs and norms or from the other coworkers' resistance or intolerance to them. I don't think there's a set way to make that call, and there probably never will be; it must be assessed case by case, and extremely carefully.

## **LATERAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Johnston (1997) states that managing your supervisor is not about manipulating or controlling her, but about establishing an optimal working relationship, one that is mutually beneficial. Johnson emphasizes the need for subordinates to take the responsibility for building the relationship by understanding the manager's goals and objectives, his pressures and stress level, and his preferred work habits.

Communication is important; the manager should be informed -- none of the "CEO disease" discussed by Goleman et al. (2002) -- but the flow of information must also be managed and organized, so as to facilitate decision-making.

Clearly, the emphasis here is on the behavior of the subordinate rather than of the manager. Non-management employees must recognize their responsibilities and their own effect on the organization as a whole. While many aspects of organizational culture are somewhat “top down” in nature, lower-level employees do have a role and some say.

I would contribute to my organization’s “culture of learning” in the following ways:

- By following the platinum rule and treating customers and co-workers as I believe they should be treated (and hopefully, as they want to be treated), within the rules of the organization.
- By offering constructive input whenever the situation allows it, and by showing that I am willing to receive such input.
- By understanding how my own “contagious” emotions affect those around me.
- By getting to know the organization as thoroughly as I can so that I will understand my own impact on budgeting, quality management, etc.
- By volunteering for assignments where I can make a difference.
- By avoiding gossip, kvetching, “quacking like a duck”, etc.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, leadership and management *and* customer service are about the same two things: relationships and communication. As a leader, I hope that I may always recognize this fact and act accordingly, by understanding the needs of my team members, customers, and other stakeholders, by listening to their needs and

clearly communicating my goals and expectations, and by assuming my subordinates have the ability to meet those expectations until they give me reason to believe otherwise.

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