

Leadership Philosophy of David L. Myers, PhD

Across academia, leaders often experience varying degrees of success, failure, or something in-between. Although many factors influence leadership effectiveness, I believe a clearly communicated leadership philosophy and consistent leadership behavior are essential for creating a positive and productive work environment. I have had the opportunity and good fortune to serve in various positions of leadership and observe numerous others in these types of roles. Based on my experience, observations, study, and reflection, *I believe effective leadership requires strong values and beliefs; positive attitudes; clear expectations; a commitment to an organization's vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives; and caring for other people.*

Solid leadership originates with strong values and beliefs. Values and beliefs most important to me include integrity, respect, honesty, work ethic, and courage. Integrity is my highest value and requires doing what is right, personally and professionally, ethically and legally, and doing it consistently. Respect means treating people with consideration and appreciation, even when disagreements and conflicts arise. Honesty signifies telling the truth and being sincere, with both good news and bad. Work ethic represents meeting and exceeding one's obligations, while ensuring work is completed at a high level. Finally, courage exists when a leader faces challenges and adversity, accepting responsibility for addressing problems and correcting mistakes. These five values and beliefs serve as my moral compass and guide my interactions with others, both at work and in my personal life.

In addition to strong values and beliefs, great leadership requires positive attitudes about life and the ability of people to perform at a high level when they are given the proper tools, guidance, and encouragement. I strive to see the potential in people and their ideas, and I think critically about how things can be done well or done better, rather than why they will not work. Passion is a key aspect of having positive attitudes; passionate individuals pursue excellence in life and in work, and they enjoy and maintain a healthy balance between the two. Strong leaders have the ability to identify strengths in others and place them in positions and roles that will allow them to experience success. Success breeds further success, for both individuals and organizations.

My values, beliefs, and attitudes guide the way I live and work. Effective leadership also requires presenting clear expectations for others in the organization and holding them accountable for their actions and words. *I expect those I work with will exhibit respect for other people's time, opinions, and priorities. This includes things like being on time for meetings, responding to e-mails and phone calls, listening to what others have to say, appreciating the work of others, and considering the personal lives and families of co-workers. I also expect people to be upfront with each other, and not let things simmer or fester into bigger problems. Finally, I want those I work with to be each other's best advocates. In addition to recognizing the achievements of others, disagreements and conflicts sometimes will arise. Those involved should address unpleasant situations efficiently, but to the outside world, an organization (e.g., academic department) should be a team full of members who support each other.*

Next, a commitment to an organization's vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives is essential for a leader and members to work strategically and ensure the purpose of the organization is being fulfilled, appropriate methods are being utilized, and desired results are being achieved.

Developing and committing to shared vision, mission, and values requires a consideration of the organizational culture and an understanding of what the organization is seeking to achieve in the future. In an academic department, vision, mission, and values must be future-oriented, ambitious, collaborative, and encompass such things as student learning and teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and service to the department, university, discipline, and community.

Organizational goals and objectives should be linked clearly to the vision, mission, and values, and setting goals and objectives initially requires strong leadership skills in problem analysis, needs assessment, and identifying strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities for the organization. Goals and objectives can then be developed to show how the success of the organization will be pursued and measured. Throughout this process, communication (both oral and written) from the leader and among organizational members is imperative. Members must buy into, support, and act on the vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives, or success will be limited. Furthermore, strong leaders and organizations cannot be afraid of taking risks or failing. Being bold and diligent in the pursuit of success is the way remarkable things get accomplished.

Finally, another important aspect of outstanding leadership is caring for organizational members. Strong leaders understand they lead people and manage other things (e.g., schedules, budgets, classroom space, paperwork), and connecting with others (e.g., faculty, students, staff, community members) is the leader's responsibility. With this in mind, a caring leader will take the time to develop an understanding of the community and its cultural values; create strong interpersonal relationships; consider and appreciate quality of life; and further the professional development of organizational members. In addition, lending a helping hand; maintaining a sense of humor; and adopting a general philosophy of "work hard and have fun" are some of the things that distinguish truly great leaders from those who struggle or fail. Being visible, accessible, and open to listening, along with assisting others, knowing how to laugh (at yourself, in particular), and having fun both at and away from work are essential for building rapport and a spirit of cooperation. A great work environment requires leaders and members to nurture it every day.

In conclusion, effective leadership is guided by strong values and beliefs, positive attitudes, and clear expectations about how organizational members will treat and interact with each other. Strong leaders also make a collaborative commitment to an organization's vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives, and they express care and concern for others and the work environment. Leaders may need to ask others to make sacrifices and do things that might seem impossible. *If those in a position of leadership have communicated their philosophy, set and modeled a standard of behavior, kept people informed, inspired willingness and dedication, and looked after the interests of others, then a common vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives can be achieved, and challenges and difficulties can be overcome. Moreover, this process will lead to mutual trust and a stable foundation upon which long-term leadership and organizational effectiveness can be built.*