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Organizational Leadership and Development

Personal Leadership Development

I.   Leadership Roles and Personal Assessment

Over the years and throughout my education, I've had the opportunity to serve in a number

of different types of leadership roles and positions. These have spanned across supervisory roles

where I've had employees report to me, and others where I've been in a leadership role of an

organization or group. Some of these positions have been voted on by organizations with which

I've been involved and others I have been selected for and groomed for the role. Although I have

had roles as a leader, I do not believe it is a title that makes us leaders.

My current leadership role as Graduate Assistant of Business Operations with the

Department of Fitness and Recreation has provided me with the most supervisory experience and

leadership responsibility that I've had to date. In this role, I am responsible for supervising our

facility and 60+ undergraduate and graduate student staff over a variety of positions. Along with

supervision, I also lead student training, new employee onboarding, payroll, accounts payable

and receivable. Not only has this position pushed me to develop my leadership and supervisory

skills, but it has also taught me many new skills in areas that I did not previously have

experience.

As a supervisor of a large student staff, I believe it is important to develop relationships

with students and allow them to build trust with you. In my experience, a positive relationship

with employees goes a long way when it comes to having tasks completed and employees

holding themselves and others accountable. As a student myself, I do believe that school comes

first as many of the employees that work in our department are undergraduate students and there

are some graduate students. However, I also believe it is very important for them to learn time

management skills. Their jobs are important stepping stones for future careers after college and by holding them accountable and teaching them to manage their time, they are better prepared professionals entering the workplace.

When I began searching to discover my leadership skills, I decided to ask my students about their opinions of my qualities as a leader. Although I talked to many students over the course of a few days and at different times in the day, the answers that I received from them were very similar, which to me, means that I am fair and consistent in my leadership. From my students' perspective, I hold them accountable and have high expectations of them, however I am friendly in my approach, not overly aggressive. I find that to be a positive balance, as it is difficult to handle both the relationship aspect and their respect of you. They also described me as a "by the books" leader, as I do not like to break any rules, and described me as a good communicator, explaining that they always know what I am asking of them and that if they do not understand, I take the time to acknowledge that and help them. Finally, they told me that I am light hearted and do not take things too seriously. I feel that is accurate because I am able to laugh at myself.

In my past leadership roles, I have not had nearly as much responsibility and have overseen much smaller student staffs. In my previous position as Special Events Coordinator at the University of Florida Alumni Association, I oversaw a student staff of 8 event assistants. Prior to that, I oversaw a small gymnastics instructor staff at the North Central Florida YMCA. This was my first role as a supervisor where I learned the importance of holding employees accountable and the methods of leadership that promote the most productivity. I have also held executive board roles in a number of student organizations as well as leadership roles as a camp

or group counselor to children and high school aged students. All of these experiences, molded with my current position have helped me develop into the leader that I am today.

II.   Challenges

As history has shown us, all leaders will face a number of challenges and obstacles throughout their leadership journeys. The true key to success is how each leader tackles those obstacles and difficult situations that they encounter. Much the same, each position that I've held has brought a number of challenges and experiences from which I have learned. One of the greatest lessons that I have learned is how to be adaptable and flexible, because you never know what obstacles you will face. My current graduate assistant position has brought a number of new challenges as well as those challenges that exist across all positions and professions, regardless of the industry or personal experience.

At a macro level, learning to balance leadership responsibilities with a supervisory role has been challenging. To begin with, in any new position there is a learning curve, and personally, it has been difficult balancing learning new tasks with learning how to supervise such a large student staff. Both areas have been new territory for me, and it has been challenging trying to find the balance. Also, as a graduate student, I am leading students in our department that are the same age as me or may only be a couple of years younger. When I was working at UF, I actually had one student who was a couple of years older than me. Although my position commands authority, and my personal leadership skills determine the respect that I gain from students, age is always a large factor in the professional workplace. Unfortunately, professionals do not take younger individuals as seriously as those that have been in the workplace for a number of years and it is necessary to earn that respect. Further, it requires a lot of time to

develop those relationships with your employees when there is also a learning curve to the position and expectations. Although it has been a difficult balance, it is one that becomes easier with time and experience.

At a micro level, there are a number of challenges I have faced at Belmont and within the Department of Fitness and Recreation. Every two years, out department selects a new group of graduate assistants that complete the program together while spending the majority of their time running the department full-time. However, this year, many changes were made and were not addressed with us as a leadership team; rather they were presented to us as a normal staffing model. The new staffing model this year incorporated not only graduate assistants, but also graduate supervisors and did not provide very distinguished responsibilities between each of the roles. It seems to have brought many hard feelings and a disorganized, dysfunctional team. In any organization, leaders may face challenges when they are not able to select their team, and must learn to work together with those that are placed with them. Another responsibility of being a leader in an organization such as Belmont is realizing that you are always wearing all of your "hats." For example, as graduate assistants we receive many staff privileges; however we are also students and also leaders to our student staff. It is important to remember when attending any school function or even outside of work, that we are always wearing each of our hats and may encounter a student, or a fellow staff member or professor and it is important to keep it professional at all times. Lastly, an obstacle unique to our department is our access to facilities on and off campus. Our recreational facility on campus fit Belmont's community seven years ago, however as the community continues to grow so does our need for space. Although I believe we are very efficient with our space, a large challenge is trying to come up with creative and new ideas as ways to maximize our space and to keep students engaged and happy with our program

offerings. As a supervisor, when you are unhappy with a situation, you cannot show your frustration when communicating with employees or patrons, and that is something I have learned this year, to take messages from our supervisors and to properly portray them to our students and the community.

III.   Leadership Solution

As a young leader, I am proud of the skills and characteristics that I have developed thus far. The leadership qualities that my students described are those that I strive for and that I believe are important to any good leader. A mentor to me and one of my most inspirational teachers once quoted Louise Eldrich, "Things which do not grow and change are dead things." I believe that once we stop learning and growing and changing, we are no longer successful leaders or role models.

Based on the principles we discussed in class, as a young leader I am striving to become a transformational leader. Rather than a transactional leader, simply giving my students or employees the tools to do their jobs and get by, I want to inspire them to reach levels of personal development and those characteristics that will help them to lead successful lives and flourish in the workplace. As a transformational leader, I would like to be transforming others' lives to a higher level of expectation and maturity. Based on my current leadership qualities that my students have shared with me, I am beginning to utilize these tools and pushing them to higher expectations, accountability and responsibility. It is easy to be a transactional leader and to reinforce behaviors based on their performance through rewards and disciplinary action. However, I want those that I lead to follow me because they believe in the same results as I do, and those that will become the informed, educated decision makers one day.

Another principle we discussed in class are those of task and relationship orientation. After completing the assignment, I discovered (not with any surprise) that I am relationship oriented. (Talk about what it means to be relationship oriented). I realized quickly that this if oftentimes frowned upon, as it is believed relationship oriented individuals are not producing at the same results, and are more concerned with the people completing the tasks than the tasks themselves. However, I quickly realized this was not the case. When viewing the senior leadership of many organizations, these individuals would not have gotten to their positions without developing and maintaining those strong relationships and networks with other individuals. Although optimum performance and results are seen as the keys to success, those tools alone without people skills will not mold and balance a successful leader of an organization.