

Leadership Philosophy: Be a Good Person

I define leadership as, “an ethical, collaborative process between followers and leaders; through communication, mutual respect, and empathy, leaders learn the best ways to inspire their followers to work toward a common goal.” This definition of leadership stems from my own simple, yet powerful leadership philosophy - above all else, be a good person and treat your team well. This is a fundamental belief about humanity, about the kind of person I strive to be, so it comes naturally to me as a leader who is adaptable and can adopt different styles as needed but who grounds herself in trauma-informed principles.

I’ve always been a leader taking on supporting, mentoring roles. I knew I wanted to be in a leadership role in my career, but when I was thrust into a leadership role much earlier than I wanted to be and should have been, I struggled and doubted my abilities. Was I really meant to be a leader? Was I caring for my team? I had no training, nor had I developed the vocabulary to describe my leadership styles, struggles, or successes. I just tried to be the kind of leader I would have wanted - compassionate, reasonable, fair, and direct in communicating the good and the bad. Eventually, through professional development, self-reflection, and PhD coursework, I developed into the confident, competent leader I am today, and I can describe the kind of leader I am..

I am an authentic leader because I’m honest about my shortcomings. I admit my mistakes, and I’m not afraid to lean on experts on my team and ask for help. I encourage those behaviors in my team, too. I’m a situational leader because I realize I can’t just be the kind of leader I would want; I need to be the kind of leader my team needs. Sometimes that means I need to change my style depending on the situation or the needs of the individual employee. Ultimately, I must adopt a style that helps my team members develop and achieve their goals. I’m a team leader because I invite and encourage members of my team to participate in the work and in the decision-making. I’m also a servant leader because I put the wellbeing of my team above all else. I also jump in and help, and I never expect my team members to do something I wouldn’t do. I’m also an adaptive leader, and I pivot my style to meet the changing needs of my team and our environment. Although it seems like it’s hard for me to put myself into one leadership style, through my studies, I’ve come to realize that all of these follower-centric styles work together to create trust and respect and a culture of caring, and without realizing it, I’ve spent my leadership career leaning into a trauma-informed leadership style, which is the kind of leader I ultimately believe I am.

This trauma-informed leadership style not only works well for people who come into my team with varying degrees of personal and professional trauma which may be causing a deep distrust, but it also works for people who do not feel they’re suffering from trauma. I see trauma-informed leadership as mapping nicely to Maslow’s basic hierarchy of needs which allows everyone to flourish.

Maslow's Hierarchy	Trauma-Informed Leadership
Safety and security	Psychological and physical safety for follower
Love and belonging	Trust
Self-esteem	Followers develop confidence in self and abilities through a trusting, safe environment where the follower is encouraged to heal
Self-actualization	Empowerment to achieve career goals

I build trust and self-esteem among my employees by listening to them, not just hearing them and waiting for my turn to speak. I empathize with them and treat them with respect and compassion. I nurture an environment that is safe to be vulnerable and admit mistakes and shortcomings and ask for help and that is also safe for us to collectively raise concerns. I also work to create an environment in which we acknowledge struggles and the real impacts they're having on us and our barriers to success while also focusing on solutions and finding the opportunity in the chaos. This environment places our well being above everything else, and it shows that taking care of each other comes first.

While I believe this leadership style comes naturally to me, I also realize that like anything in life, it takes work to continue to be this kind of person. That work involves caring for my own physical and mental health so I can help others. And that work also involves professional development and being a lifelong learner so I can continue to gain more knowledge about myself, my industry, and humanity. I also reflect on myself and my actions, and I seek mutually beneficial relationships with mentors and mentees.

Clearly, I live my leadership philosophy of being a good person through offering my team support and emotional safety. I do this while still having high expectations because the mutual trust and respect that is built through this leadership style as well as the support I offer my team to develop encourage high performance. This leadership style allows me to be a futures thinker who always looks ahead for opportunity while never losing sight of the present and ensuring the journey into the future will positively impact my team.