

Leadership

CSC 424 Software Design

Joshua McGehee

April 21, 2021

When defining what leadership, there exists a textbook definition, however, everyone has their own personal interpretation of the subject. Dictionaries often state that leadership is the act of moving a group of people towards a common goal. To me personally, leadership is a bit more in depth than that.. As a store manager and a full time student, leadership is a skill that I had to employ at the workplace to motivate my employees not only when I was on premise, but even if I was absent. Being able to not only inspire work ethic, but creativity and independence is vital to me when discussing leadership. There is a clear cut difference between being a “boss” and being a true leader, and while I may have some experience with leadership, I still have much to learn. There have been several people who aided me along my journey to where I am now, each displaying their own distinct flavor of leadership skills and techniques. In this paper, I will highlight three individuals who left a lasting impression on me as an employee and as a leader: my father, Joe McGehee, an old manager, Ryan Gordon, and my current district manager, Danny Williams.

I like to think that my work ethic originated with my father, Joe McGehee. As a retired veteran who served in both the Navy and the Army, I quickly learned growing up that the hard way may not be the best way, but it sure does build character. I was raised on the premise that “if you weren’t 10 minutes early, you were late.” There were many instances where me and him clashed , but in the end, I can gladly say that *most* of his lessons were true. He taught me to set my standards as high as possible and to prepare for the worst while hoping for the best, that way you’ll always find some sort of success in your actions. Hard work was just that, hard, but the end result was always rewarding and even if I failed, I wasn’t a failure, I simply found another method that didn’t work. I was taught the fine line between having fun and getting work done over the years. All of these skills impacted me in ways I never thought they would as a kid. Looking back now, I realize how naive I was and how valuable these teachings were. They were the foundation of the person I am today. These lessons were powerful enough that I would strive to maintain them even when he wasn’t around and failure to do so led me creating plans and methods that would keep me on the right path moving forward.

As a manager today, an important aspect of a leader is the ability to lead yourself. After all, how would you be capable of holding someone else accountable or inspiring them if you can’t hold yourself to the same standard? The teachings from my father led me to a core belief that I follow every single day: if I can’t do it myself, I don’t have any right to expect it from someone else. This keeps me on a path of bettering myself continuously while inspiring those around me to follow and better themselves as well. It was around this time that I had developed an incredible sense of competition, not only with other individuals, but with myself. I always strive to be the best I’ve ever been and better than I ever will be, it’s kept me on a steady trajectory of self improvement that I then use to pass information, skills, and techniques to those around me.

I have had a total of four managers before I stepped into the role of store manager myself. Of those four, Ryan Gordon was the most memorable. My previous managers were, for lack of a better word, awful. I will never forget the first day I met him, as he pulled me to the side and very bluntly asked me where I wanted to go in the company. To this, I responded that I wanted to move as far as possible, and he promised me that as long as I put the effort in, he would take me to where I wanted to go. Initially, I shrugged it off, as I was burnt out after how terrible previous management treated me. My curiosity, however, kept me glued in my position, at least for a little bit. In the span of about a year and a half, I moved through the ranks of the store faster than ever anticipated. From zero to hero, I took over the store as Ryan moved into a higher volume store. With this being my first true experience of management and being held with the responsibility of leading an entire team to success, I pulled very heavily from the skills that I had been taught by not only my father, but by my now co-worker, Ryan.

Over the years I worked for Ryan, several very valuable skills were injected into my management style, with one of the most prevalent being a friendly environment. While this seems like a no brainer, there was a certain method of implementing it into a workplace. Laying clear guidelines and expectations allows for the principle of accountability. When there is no second guessing what is expected, failure either means a lack of time or the conscious decision to ignore. I also learned the concept of what we called “separation of church and state” in the workplace. This concept was the same as stating “I can be your manager, or I can be your friend, the choice is yours.” I am a firm believer that being able to take your employees seriously on the flip of a dime is crucial, and vice versa. Managers shouldn’t be viewed as bosses, and instead be viewed as leaders and guides willing to assist the growing process. Helping your employees not only understand but grow from situations is vital to healthy growth of upcoming leaders.

Throughout my training, there were several instances where I was given creative freedom with aspects of running a store, from creating schedules that worked with all of the employees schedules, merchandising, and giving constructive conversations. I was taught that any situation, except for employee termination, can be turned into a positive, character building lesson. Sometimes, correctives must be written, but ensuring that the employee in question is aware of their actions and the consequences that follow is vital. Like mentioned before, nobody wants to be the “bad boss,” so finding new ways of having these tough conversations is important to the development of not only my management style, but the growth of the employee. Even to this day, Ryan serves as my right hand for advice and pep talks. I learned a ton from him, but this experience was only a stepping stone in reaching my potential. We’ve become great friends since I took leadership over a store and while our management styles are similar, they are still different enough to take new ideas and techniques from each other. Having an open mind and being flexible with management styles is a core characteristic to me and how I manage. It keeps me on my toes and ready to try new things and not to be afraid of venturing into an unknown territory of leadership.

Danny Williams, my current district manager and my direct supervisor, took everything I had previously thought about management and flipped it on its head. He was the one to inform me that my hard work paid off and that I would be taking over the store after Ryan left. It has been nearly a year now that I've worked directly underneath Danny and we're steady on the path of district manager training and preparing me for the next level of leadership. All of the skills I learned before suddenly became an amalgamation of ever-changing techniques as I was now faced with the next level of being a true leader. In the position of district manager, simply being a good leader was not enough anymore. Being a leader in person is entirely different in the focus of a single store, but once you factor in five, ten, even fifteen stores, one has to adapt and be able to apply all of these skills from afar. No longer are the days of daily face-to-face interactions where you can openly discuss issues and expectations, much less convey emotion and proper work ethic. This all has to be done remotely now.

Currently, learning to not only inspire a single team, but a multitude of them has been a challenge and a half. At this point, you have to inspire other store leaders to inspire their employees. Also, when factoring in the fact that I hold a manager position at the age 22, many of the older store managers tend not to take me seriously. Hence, Danny has begun teaching me the concept of buy in and how to get it amongst my peers and my employees. Any boss could simply delegate a task to a team and get it done, however, a leader with buy in normally has employees doing tasks not because they've been told to do so, but because they *want* to. Inspiring those older and with technically more experience is a daunting one to say the least, but not impossible. Establishing common ground with my peers is the first step and creating solid lines of communication is just as important.

There isn't much more to say on my personal leadership skills as I outlined a vast majority of them in this paper and I'm continuing to learn every day. Since I've been in a position of management for around 2 years (1 as an assistant manager, 1 as a full blown manager), two of my previous employees are set to take over their own stores within the month. These were relevant developments so I figured I would include them here. Payton Mills and Isaac White are their names and I just felt the need to express how incredibly proud of them I am for reaching this level. Even though we're technically in the same position, I'll continue my hardest to inspire them and lead them even further than they've already come.

In conclusion, there are many individuals who forged me into the leader I am today over the years, but the three mentioned here are crucial to me developing the skills needed for me to be where I currently stand. The definition of leadership may differ from person to person, but to me it means being the individual you wish for your peers and your team to be. It means being confident, inspiring, and genuine all while promoting a healthy and growth-oriented workplace.