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Leadership is extremely dynamic. Throughout history, it has been seen in different ways and much has been learned about it, but at the same time, it has become more complicated. This class has served to teach me, not only about leadership theories and research, but also of the complexity of putting one person in charge of leading other individuals. Leading can be anything: motivating, inspiring, distracting, focusing, getting a task done, bringing people together, and many other forms. The one thing that cannot be changed about leadership is that there will always be more than one person involved. People are what make leadership and groups, and that is why it is vital for leaders to go out there and learn from experience. There will always be different people and situations, and leaders must learn to deal with the many predicaments that could present themselves. Experience and perspective can also be learned from other leaders. Knowing what others have gone through can help one be a better leader purely by having different approaches and views towards an issue. In this class, we the students interviewed three people; a peer leader that is around the same level in life as me, a mentor leader that is a couple of years down the road, and an aspirational leader that is many years down the road and I look up to. I learned a lot from the people I interviewed, and I was able to apply the theory I learned in class to real situations. Dissecting others leadership also allowed me to dissect my own leadership and develop my personal leadership philosophy.

My peer leader was Claire Stewart, an Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) cadet. While she is doing very well now, Claire has had many struggles leading up to this point. Her mom served in the Navy and she really looks up to and is close to her. They have been through a lot together, facing financial problems as well as family problems, and I believe that is what has made them so close. In high school, Claire did a lot of Junior AFROTC events and she is currently dating a fellow AFROTC cadet that also did Junior AFROTC with her. In a way, her entire life revolves around the military, what with her mom having served and her boyfriend and closest friends being in AFROTC with her. I picked Claire because we are very similar: we are both currently sophomores, are on the same scholarship program, have held similar positions as cadets, are commuters, are very dedicated to the program, and hold jobs while in college. Despite all the similarities, we are also very different: she did more years of Junior AFROTC than me, I do not have any family in the military, or any high school friends that motivated me to join. She is also a female and I am a male. Due to our differences, yet being on the same path to become Air Force officers, it is interesting to get her perspective on how the process may differ due to gender and the different ways we approach the same problems. One of Northouse's leadership styles I would apply to her is Gender and Leadership (397). In the same positions we have held, we have acted differently and been treated differently. I would say that she was more directive and stricter in the positions than I was due to her extended experience in Junior AFROTC over me. While AFROTC looks for very directive, alpha style leadership, she was told that she was being too confident in her leadership, a sort of ironic moment. Her career choices are also affected by the fact that she is a female. On many occasions, she has said that she does not want to go for high commitment jobs because she wants to have a family, but if she were a male, she would go for those jobs. Gender and leadership address these issues of prejudice and gender differences and

they can be seen through Claire in real time. Being told to not be too confident in her leadership could have been due to her being seen as “too manly.” Claire’s unwillingness to compete for those higher commitment jobs due to wanting a family also touches on the commitment and motivation part of gender differences. Becoming a pilot in the Air Force brings on a ten-year service commitment. Wanting a family and wanting to be young when having that family conflicts with having the commitment and motivation to go into a career field such as being a pilot, and she feels that she must choose between one or the other.

The other leadership style I would apply to Claire is the Situational Approach’s directive leadership (Northouse 94). From her experiences commanding in military style leadership positions, she has become very aggressive in her leadership. Contrary to the notion that females are more nurturing and nicer than men in leadership, Claire taught me to hold my ground and stand up for myself against superiors when need be. This has definitely led to me being more aggressive with my leaders in speaking my truth, even if those leaders could get upset in some way; my voice is just as important as theirs, and just because they are in those leadership positions does not necessarily mean that they know more about the subject or are unable to have errors. Claire's view of leadership is that it is the job of the leader to always be viewed as a leader and hold everyone accountable for their actions, as well as the teams. She shows this philosophy as a subordinate by being very outspoken and holding her leaders accountable for what they do wrong.

My mentor leader interview was Juan Lopez. Currently, he holds the assistant manager position at my Discount Tire job. He has been working there for most of his adult life and is making a career out of it. We both graduated from the same high school and are both Mexican Americans. I chose him because the path he took is one that I could have potentially gone down and I wished to get some perspective from someone that has not necessarily been educated on leadership theory,

but instead earned their leadership position by rising through the ranks of the company. The path I am taking is that of becoming an officer in the military, which means I will never be in a position where I am not a leader, so learning from him about how perspectives may be different when the leader was once in the positions that they are now leading is something I could gain much from for my own career. One of the leadership styles I attribute to Juan is authentic leadership (Northouse 195). Juan recognizes everything that his subordinates are going through in their job, so he can really connect with them. He recognizes that he was once one of us, the workers, so he remains very humble, despite holding a higher position. Juan uses his past experiences to enhance his leadership. For example, Juan tells us about rules and understands that for lower level employees, those rules may be annoying because he has experienced it. He uses a lot of transparency and says things exactly how they are, stating that the rules may suck but he must enforce them because it is his job and he is not going to lose his job because of us. He connects with us through the fact that everyone needs a job rather than telling us that we must do things because he says so. In our interview, Juan also spoke of the importance of leading by example. Leaders must be willing to do what they want their subordinates to do. He also said that leaders need to understand that everyone is human, and they can all have good ideas just the same as the leader. Juan also said that leaders need to let go of their pride to listen to others' ideas and criticisms, and this really goes with the humility part of authentic leadership.

Another leadership style Juan strongly shows is that of Northouse's Situational Approach (93). He takes on different leadership styles based on what the situation calls for. Most of the time, he is very relaxed and conversates with us well, but when things get tense he will come out and be very directive if we are not performing to the level that we should be. This switch is what I really learned from him. The world is constantly demanding everyone to perform, even more so for

leaders, but he has really shown me that just because we must perform does not mean that we have to be tense all the time. Having a light mood and joking around a bit is just fine if the situation allows for it. Juan's switch mentality was really shown during our interview when he spoke of leaving things at the door and only dealing with business when it is business time. While he was talking about leaving things at the door in the context of when he is home, he also does that while at work, only picking up a strict leadership style when the job absolutely calls for it. I am not sure if his willingness to switch his behaviors is an attribute of his personality or of his experience. I imagine it is a product of how his personal leadership philosophy has developed as consequence of having gone through all lower positions. Knowing how it is having a leader that is always locked on or one that is locked off taught him when doing either is appropriate and when each one helps the subordinates more. Ultimately, he really cares about the team, only becoming directive when a team member requires it or when the team is not performing. The rest of the time, he makes sure it is known that he is doing things in the best interest of his workers, delegating and giving us freedom to do what we need to do, as well as supporting us by coming and having genuine conversations about how we are doing. I remember one instance when the boss asked him to do something and he said, "Hold on, I gotta take care of my boys," and he went to give us some food and checked up on how we were doing. While I do not believe he is aware of doing this, he really creates a brotherhood environment through situational awareness and authenticity. As a result, team dynamics are very good, and everyone is willing to help each other out.

My aspirational leader is Lieutenant Colonel Mathew R. Manning. He is currently the commander of the University of Houston's AFROTC detachment. While I have only known him for the current semester since he just assumed command this school year, he has made a great impact in my life. Some of his professional achievements have been graduating from Clemson

University in 2001 as a distinguished AFROTC graduate, becoming a fighter pilot, attending many leadership schools, and becoming an instructor pilot at the extremely competitive Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program (ENJJPT), just to name a few. Being a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force, he has not only had the training, but also the time to execute and refine his abilities as a leader. During our interview I learned that he did not originally want to join the military, but his father had served on the enlisted side and encouraged him to try the officer route. Lieutenant Colonel Manning wanted to make his father proud, so he tried it ended up making a career out of it. He regularly speaks about how he is a family-oriented man and really cares about people. The way he cares for people is almost irregular, because nobody really sees him talking very much, but from personal encounters with him, as well as from hearing other fellow cadets, he goes above and beyond what the normal commander would do to help their subordinates out with their careers. In our interview, one reason he gave for wanting to lead was to help others become their own individuals with their own lives. He has had an amazing career and could very well just sit back and ponder about the service he has given, but he stays active because he cares enough to help the next generation out. Unquestionably, the leadership styles I would apply to Lieutenant Colonel Manning are team leadership (Northouse 363) and the Behavioral Approach's Blake and Mouton's (9,9) Team Management (Northouse 77), which stresses being task and relationship oriented.

With all he has accomplished, it is obvious that Lieutenant Colonel Manning is very task oriented. At the same time, the way he interacts with others and the care he puts into connecting with people really shows how much he cares about relationships. Being a family man, I imagine that he also makes time for his family, staying very busy with balancing work, family, personal needs, and his cadets. When thinking of how busy he must be, the issue about how sustainable the 9,9 leadership style is, came to mind. When Lieutenant Colonel Manning is with the cadets or

other people, he is very energetic and willing to work and/or talk, but sometimes when I see him walking on his own, he seems to have a very tired way about him. Seeing him like that adds to the belief that he must be very busy, and it makes me think about how people burn out. Lieutenant Colonel Manning has been in his career for almost 20 years and is still going strong, so he gives me the hope that the team management style is sustainable, so long as someone has a “why” that acts as a rock-solid motivational foundation.

Team Leadership stresses sharing leadership as well as acting in the best interests of what the team currently needs. Lieutenant Colonel Manning strongly exhibits these principles through his willingness delegate and take other views into account, as well as helping his cadets with what they need. During our interview, he talked about the importance of the team, and because it is a team, responsibility must be shared. He goes even further to say that it is vital to have a balance of different perspectives, understand those different perspectives, and value their importance in bringing diversity. Then, use that diversity to address core issues, rather than arguing on the differences the perspectives have. Bringing the team together through diversity really complements the collaborating part of Team Leadership’s Internal Relational Leadership Actions; really trying to make the members of his team understand each other, while at the same time inviting more diversity of thought. Lieutenant Colonel Manning also does an excellent job of sharing relevant environmental information with the team. The AFROTC detachment is the local environment where all the team dynamics occur, but ultimately, the end goal of AFROTC is to prepare us for the environment which is the actual Air Force. He, being a fighter pilot and a high-ranking officer with many years of experience, uses his knowledge and connections to find out how the current selection processes for becoming a pilot are. He regularly has meetings with the cadets to talk about the opportunities they have and what they can do to increase their chances.

Furthermore, the people that personally go and talk to him about their concerns, he helps even more. In the local environment, the way he really shows his team leadership attributes is by allowing others to have a lot of input and control on how the cadet organization is run. Since he got here at the beginning of the year, Lieutenant Colonel Manning has been very transparent with there being many things that he does not agree with. He has implemented many changes but at the same time, has allowed many things to stay the same by permitting other instructors and upperclassmen cadets to continue leading and operating in the way they are accustomed to.

The final leadership style I apply to Lieutenant Colonel Manning is Path-Goal Theory (Northouse 115), which focuses on the leader helping followers achieve their goals. This definition goes with his willingness to help the cadets with their career. The leader behaviors of path-goal theory he uses are directive, supportive, and achievement-oriented leadership. Since his goal is to help us achieve our career goals, Lieutenant Colonel Manning does not really use participative leadership because even he cannot change the ways the Air Force selects individuals, so getting input from cadets would not really be beneficial. He uses supportive leadership by inviting others to talk with him, listening to them, and figuring out what obstacles they face as individuals on their career path. He then uses directive leadership because he tells cadets exactly what he needs them to do, how to do it, and the timeline the task must be completed in. While he is our commander and we have to do the things that he tells us to do, the fact that he is only being directive to make it easier for himself to be able to help us is something that I really admire and has affected me in a positive way. I have learned from it that the leader can use any tactic they want, so long as the end goal is helping the team members. Lieutenant Colonel Manning also exhibits a strong sense of being achievement oriented. When I ask him about his greatest failure, the one he provided was failing to become an instructor pilot for the F15, a fighter jet. Fighter jets are already extremely

competitive to earn a spot to fly, let alone to become an instructor for them. While he did become an instructor pilot later in his career, what he accredited this failure to was not pushing himself enough to become an instructor. He recalls how eye-opening of an experience it was to see how doors close when one does not push themselves enough. From that, he learned to be much more achievement-oriented in his personal life. Now, he combines his experience and desire to create a new generation of success to push his cadets to learn from his mistakes and strive for more because that is how opportunities are created. This has really shown me that it is the job of the leader, who will usually be older, to use their experiences to help followers become the best they can be.

Leadership in my life was never academic or methodical until I got to college. I can remember as early as middle school that my groups of friends would tend to follow me, so I started considering myself a natural leader. Of course, I knew nothing of what leadership was or of the importance of group dynamics, but it was the start of my belief in leadership. When high school came around, I ended up going to very far schools for my freshmen and sophomore years. I had to take the bus because my parents could not give me a ride, which meant that I was not able to stay for after school activities. The result was that I did not have many friends and was not part of organizations in school, but I was able to join the youth group at my church. The youth group oversaw planning and executing classes and events, but due to my junior status, I did not really hold any leadership. What I did learn was the importance of group dynamics. Also, since it was church, people would give testimonies that sometimes had a strong message, and I was able to learn of the power that speech had and that when given a platform, it is important to make something of that opportunity. Junior year of high school, I transferred to a school close to my house, so I was finally able to join school organizations. While I was in the front office signing up, the band director passed by and told me that I should join the band. I did not really know anything

about the school, so I agreed to be a tuba player. The school was very small, and the band program was in a very young stage, so by the time the first day of school rolled around, there were two tuba players and we were both new. I was a junior and the other guy was a freshman, so by seniority, I became the section leader of the tubas. It was not a position that I wanted, nor one that I believed I was prepared for. I knew nothing of tubas, knew nothing of leadership, and did not really have a passion for playing. Retention was a big factor so that first semester was just me trying to be nice to people so they could join my section and then teaching them practically everything I knew. During this time was also when I joined Junior ROTC and got to experience an introduction into how military leadership operated. By second semester, I had made some friends, gained some skill in music, and had become accustomed to the idea of having an official leadership position. Looking back now, my school did a terrible job of teaching leadership, partly because they never talked about leadership theory and because instructors did not really enforce rules. Everyone would skip and kids were very rowdy, so all that student leadership resorted to, both in band and Junior ROTC, was yelling at peer subordinates. This became my idea of leadership and although I may not have yelled as much as other people because I wanted retention, I did become a much louder leader. I also learned to argue with fellow members because they loved to argue, and I wanted to get things done. I did not yet have the mindset of patience and allowing other people to feel that they were being heard.

When senior year came, I had developed very good relationships with the band director and with my fellow peer leaders. I made my voice heard when I thought that things were not going right in the band, and my tuba section was doing well because we all got along and group dynamics were good. The band director noticed the effort I was giving, as well as how far I had progressed in my musical ability, so he made me a band captain a few months into the semester. In Junior

ROTC, I was also involved in things like speeches and going to elementary schools to teach students, so my confidence speaking in front of people increased. My spike in confidence led to me taking a much more directive leadership approach, and since I was band captain, I learned some of the managing things a leader does, such as organizing fundraisers. I was taking a much more methodical approach to leadership but was not considering things on a deeper level. Kids were still rowdy and argumentative, and I would allow myself to bicker along with them. The summer after senior year, I was an intern in an emergency room. Being around doctors and nurses, I did not have any leadership within the organization, but in a way, I was a leader to the patients. They were constantly in need of help and it was my job to be a servant leader. It was at that internship that I developed a real care for people and a patience for what others had to say. I learned to have empathy for those people that would come in in pain. My job did not only include simply talking to the patients, but also cleaning, touching, smelling, and helping with anything the doctors, nurses, or patients asked of me. Many people would not have been able to stomach the duties I had to perform, but I learned leadership attributes like humility, willingness to serve, and caring for others.

When I got to college, the first thing I did was contract with the Air Force, meaning that I would maintain a certain set of standards and serve a certain amount of years as an officer after graduation, and they would pay for my school. I see the situation as that I am getting paid to learn leadership abilities and maintain good grades. My first semester, I was very shy because I was not sure of how things operated, did not really know anyone, and I was scared that I could somehow lose my scholarship. Second semester was when I opened as a cadet and put myself out there to improve in any way I could. Leadership became fascinating to me and I knew that I did not know all that I could about it, thus I investigated getting the honors leadership minor. Since then, my

view of leadership has grown tremendously. The practice and poise I gain in AFROTC, combined with the theory learned from the leadership minor, give me the confidence that with practice and experience, I can grow to be a great leader one day.

The interviews that I conducted were great for many reasons. I was able to get many different perspectives on leadership, analyze them, and in doing so, analyze my own leadership style. Some of the common themes that I really took away from the interviews are how important the people are, the importance of reflection, the difference maturity makes, and the affect and responsibility that a leader has. All my interviews focused on how their family helped them, whether it was with getting to where they currently are or helping them cope with issues. In terms of leadership related to people, they all stressed the importance of the team and not focusing on oneself just because they are the leader. The leader can only lead because the team is there. Without people, there is no leadership, so it is the responsibility of the leader to help the team in any way they can. They also touched upon reflection; getting real with myself and really tackling the issues that I have as a person. Nobody will be as real with myself as me, and it is my job to become better, because if I cannot make myself better, how can I make others better. Reflecting also involves others. Letting go of one's pride and getting in a position where everybody will criticize and be brutally honest is something a leader must invite because others will always have a perspective the leader will not. An interesting topic that came up was integrity. When I asked what is something that a leader can never give up no matter what, Claire answered that the leader cannot sacrifice the team for their own gain, but Juan and Lieutenant Colonel Manning both simply answered with integrity. When I answered the questions myself, I did not simply answer integrity, even though I do see integrity as a very important quality in a leader. One of the Air Force's core values is integrity, so it is easy to see why Lieutenant Colonel Manning would answer in such a fashion, but

Discount Tire does not have a set list of core values that are drilled into employees' heads. This leads me to believe that experience and maturity do change a leader, even to a point that I may not currently be able to fully understand. There is no other reason I see as to why two very different leaders, both in profession and education, would answer the exact same response. Because of this, I know to respect the wisdom that comes with seniority, and to be patient with my leadership development. I will not know all the answers at first so all I can do is work with what I have and look at everyday as a learning opportunity.

The final lesson I learned from my interviews is the why of being a leader. A leader's job will always be harder than the followers because the leader must be able to do what the follower does while also leading them. All my interviewees admitted to the greater challenge of being a leader, but ultimately, a leader is the one with the ability to cause change. Leaders are the ones that leave a legacy, that help others, and that make a difference. My belief about leadership is that it is a higher calling and the interviews only reinforced that belief. The challenge is harder, but it is worth it. Leadership cannot have a set definition because situations will always change, thus flexibility is needed. Leaders can cause difference, and to make sure that difference is good, leaders must have integrity. Leaders are nothing without the team, thus the leader must do everything they can to help the followers with what they need at the time. Helping others will only lead to them returning the favor. From all that I have learned, my resulting personal leadership philosophy is as follows; Leadership is the concept that consists of integrity, flexibility, and prioritizing others needs over your own self-interests. The leaders must help the followers, who will in turn help the leader, who will in turn help the followers, starting a vicious cycle of unprecedented synergy.

My major, computer science is a very group focused profession. There are many different types of people that work in computer science and the issues of bad or good leadership are not

apparent, due to the diversity of different work groups. No common theme about having bad leaders can be found. The real issue facing computer science is that of ethics. Computers now hold a tremendous amount of power in the world. The potential available through computer science is something astonishing, but whether coders use that potential in a good or negative way is entirely dependent on the people that are writing those programs. The computer science community is ineffective at communicating the implications brought upon by its work (Gibney). Computer Scientists need to spend more time looking at the ethics of taking certain actions. Software has made it extremely easy for individuals to be able to cause a lot of damage. The leaders of those individuals must have the integrity to make sure what is being done with that power is ethical.

The career I am looking to enter is as an officer in the United States Military, specifically the Air Force. The Military has many issues surrounding leadership. Northouse states in Gender and Leadership that only 6.9% of military officers at brigadier general or rear admiral grade levels or higher are female (399). Claire talks about how she does not want to go for those high demand career options but let's say she did want to. The labyrinth Claire would have to go through to even be a contender for those high-level leadership positions would be an extremely difficult one as shown by the statistics. Putting gender aside, the military is not taking the right approach to selecting their highest-ranking officers (). Instead of focusing on the leadership and team attributes of promotion candidates, the military looks at how contenders have achieved as individuals throughout their career (). This leads to commanders who are not caring for their subordinates, making it a commonly heard case of commanders being fired due to bad leadership. The military could benefit from focusing more on how candidates are being selected for leadership positions, rather than resorting to fire bad leaders when they are already in those positions.

Another problem I see more specifically in the Air Force is how officers are bred in general, not just for those high-ranking leadership positions. In the military, to be a pilot one must also be an officer. While pilots hold the rank of officers, they do not lead anyone until many years have passed in their career, and even when they do start leading, the leadership is focused on other officer pilots. That means that pilots are not experiencing leading the enlisted. Because of the low leadership requirement of pilots, the Air Force is more likely to allow bad leaders through if it means they make great pilots. Then after years have gone by, the pool to pick high ranking officers is saturated with pilots who have no experience leading enlisted military members. This means that not only are leaders being picked for competence levels rather than leadership attributes, but high-level leadership positions are also being filled by individuals who do not have the experience of leading all types of members under their command. The challenge is a tough one, but if the Air Force could somehow find a way to balance their need for good pilots and need for good leaders, then there is much potential for greatness.

Leadership is a fascinating concept. Experience is what really defines a leader and using interviews to gain perspective and insights is a fantastic way to advance oneself as leader. While leadership is all about the team, a leader can either make or break a team. That is why leadership is so important. It does not matter the profession or the ability level, leadership will always be necessary to advance the interests of the group in the most efficient manner. I hope to continue to grow as a leader, and I will always make the effort to learn from my experiences, the experiences of others, and from leadership theory.

<https://taskandpurpose.com/military-toxic-leadership-problem>

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/opinion/commentary/2018/07/31/commentary-the-air-force-is-not-designed-to-produce-good-leaders/>

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