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Communication Leadership Paper

Why I Value Communication

After focusing on business and minoring in communications for the first two years of my college experience, I admitted that my true interest and abilities lie in the field of communications. The study of communication appeals to me because I believe a true understanding of this topic makes me a better person. As I consider the roles I will play throughout my life, I recognize that understanding people and the way we communicate will make me a better spouse, mother, leader, and friend. The knowledge I obtain about interpreting motives will help me to navigate an ever-changing world and will make me a better member of society.

Career-wise, I recognize communications as a versatile degree that will aid me in any future capacity. I will be able to apply my education in communication to a wide range of jobs. This degree is substantial enough that, if I choose to, I could pursue my MBA after an undergraduate degree in communication studies. My ideal job would be in management consulting. While I need a sound understanding of business to do that, my ability to communicate will be equally as important. I look forward to this major and the lessons I will learn, which I believe will help me in every aspect of my future.

Implementing the communication skills I am learning about right now will aid me as I work with people in professional and social capacities. Being able to interpret what people are

trying to communicate and being effective in communicating my messages will make me a capable employee. These skills will help me to develop relationships with people and act as a leader in whatever role I play in the company.

Being a leader is a choice. Some are called to leadership roles, but everyone can decide to act as a leader for the people around them. I value the communication skills I have learned which give me the confidence to step into those leadership roles.

Principles of Leadership

In his book *The Promise of a Pencil*, Adam Braun shares how he navigated the formative years of his life. Though his life seemed to already be laid out in front of him, Adam derailed and took a journey that he explains was infinitely more fulfilling. Braun dedicated his life to an organization called Pencils of Promise, which he dreamt up and made a reality. This organization has built more than 550 schools around the globe, and while technically it is registered as a non-profit organization, Braun loves to say that they create massive profits, just not those of monetary value.

Throughout this story, Braun details experiences that he had, inspiration with which he was blessed, and lessons that he learned. Though recounting every principle contained in *The Promise of a Pencil* would, well, fill a book, below I will include three principles identified by Braun which encompass true leadership.

1. Walk with purpose:

Adam Braun introduced the principle of walking with purpose by sharing an intense story from one of his early days beginning Pencils of Promise in Southeast Asia. As he rode in a cab on his way to the airport, angry protestors filled

the streets and demanded that Braun get out of the cab. Despite Adam's efforts to stay in the safety of the vehicle, his scared driver forced him onto the street. While Adam stood, surrounded by people who were not welcoming to this American, he swallowed his fear and told himself to walk with purpose.

Adam walked confidently through that crowd, and they let him pass. Focusing on his purpose and visualizing his destination reassured Adam of his mission in the country, and motivated him to continue walking with purpose towards his end goal.

If we, as leaders, can keep our end goal in mind and walk with purpose, we not only will reach our destination faster, but those around us will begin to believe in us, despite whatever predispositions they had.

2. Focusing on creating joy in others' lives helps us find happiness in our own:

Adam Braun credits his sense of fulfillment to his endeavor to create joy in other peoples' lives. Braun began his career in the field of investment banking, but after years of work with Pencils of Promise, he stated that the "real value comes in investing in the well-being of others."

We see throughout his story that Adam Braun invests in the well-being of others by helping them establish joy in their lives. Joy is different from happiness, as joy denotes consistency. Leaders work to create a consistent state of happiness, or joy, for those around them.

3. Define yourself by what is on your mind, not by what is on your business card:

Adam Braun lived a successful life in the business world before he altered his course and began Pencils of Promise. Braun explains that this change was made

by recognizing the difference between what he thought about, and what he was doing. Though Braun felt that his life had been laid out in front of him, he admitted that he defined himself differently than that, and began making changes in his life to be true to himself.

This guidance given by Braun helps each reader to consider the difference between who they are, and who they work for. A good leader encourages individuals to utilize their unique skills and find what motivates them. There are many examples in history of leaders who convince people to believe in the same thing as them and force them to work towards a common goal, but when you have a group of people who genuinely desire the same things as you, the group can achieve greatness. Whereas an office often functions as a workforce, a group of similarly motivated people can function as a team.

What Constitutes an Effective Leader?

Adam Braun's story helped me to recognize the critical nature of intentional leadership in any endeavor. Braun's leadership efforts in the early stages of Pencils of Promise accelerated the growth of the project and rallied different forces together. Throughout his experiences, we see that Braun's focus on being purposeful, outward-looking, and genuinely motivated increases the efficiency of any project.

According to Adam Braun, an effective leader is someone who knows what they want and is willing to rally forces to work together towards achieving their common goal. There are multiple facets to leadership, and Braun describes them as he shares his own experience as a leader.

The leader first must have a picture of what they hope to achieve firmly in their mind to present it to potential teammates. The leader must consider the motivations of potential teammates and consider how to encourage each of them to join the force. Once the leader has motivated a group of individuals, they can effectively function as a team and work towards their common goal. The leader must be sure to hold their team accountable, work to consistently progress, and give praise whenever possible.

I believe a leader to be everything Adam Braun describes it to be, plus someone who provides a safe environment for growth. This does not mean that the leader is always cheery and sugary-sweet to teammates, but the teammates know that they are supported by the leader and that makes them feel safe.

I played competitive soccer on a national scale for most of my life. As team captain, I worked to motivate my teammates individually towards our common goal. My role as captain included identifying changes that needed to be made and speaking with teammates about their effort. I knew that each of these girls was working as hard as they thought they could, and telling them they needed to be doing more was a tricky conversation to approach. I established a relationship of trust with everyone on the team and praised their actions whenever possible. This safe environment permitted me to correct my teammates while maintaining the relationship of mutual respect.

Mantras

A mantra is a saying that can be constantly repeated and reminds you of a goal or objective. Throughout the sharing of his experiences, Braun identifies several mantras which helped him to progress and to eventually find his purpose in life.

1. Get out of your comfort zone:

Adam Braun began his book by sharing his well-planned career path. He had been working in the field since he was 16, gaining experience and creating opportunities. Though it was an indisputably difficult career path, Braun felt bored with his life. He knew exactly where he was and exactly what was next.

On a whim, Braun took a semester at sea to clear his mind. He intended to find God that semester and return to his life reinvigorated and ready to move forward. This journey resulted in a near-death experience and changed the course of Braun's life.

After this semester, Braun found himself back in his regular life and constantly itching for another adventure. He packed a bag and flew to South America, unsure of his plans. He ended up living in a mountain community for a month. His peaceful and healthy experience again altered the course of his life.

Braun's experiences out of his comfort zone shaped the person he became and influenced his future decisions by helping him to not fear the unknown. He constantly reminds himself to reach out of his comfort zone, lest he becomes too comfortable in the life he lives, and misses out on experiences he could have.

2. Big dreams start with small, unreasonable acts:

Braun explains that what is now a huge project of his making began as a small idea. In the early stages of its development, that idea became more real and Braun began to picture the scope of what he was creating. Braun was constantly faced with small tasks and had to remember to be motivated by his end goal.

The mantra Braun identifies, that big dreams start with small, unreasonable acts, helps to keep motivated through the seemingly minuscule tasks.

3. Humility over hubris:

Braun shared a story of an experience he had while working for a consulting firm while he was starting Pencils of Promise. He was assigned to work on a project that would take many hours just before a fund-raiser for Pencils of Promise. Braun rushed through his assignment, producing inaccurate figures and almost resulting in his termination at the company.

Reflecting on this experience, Braun recognized that he felt secure in his job since he had been there for many years producing good results. Though at the time he thought that mattered, he learned that we recreate our reputation every day.

4. Only one chance at a first impression:

Adam Braun goes into detail about his plans for spreading the word about Pencils of Promise. He explains that he needed three things in order before the project became too public. He wanted people to have something to be shocked about so that they felt the need to tell everyone; he wanted to have a beautiful and functional website running; and he wanted to have staff that was available to answer questions on the website and handle public interaction.

By waiting two years until these criteria were reality, Braun controlled the first impression of Pencils of Promise. He explained that following the public recognition of Pencils of Promise, he gave a closing speech at a big event. During the whole speech, his fly was down. He jokingly commented that he was glad that

wasn't people's first impression of Pencils of Promise. He handled the first impression intentionally and that resulted in public respect for the project.

My Leader

Many times in my life I have been blessed to be the beneficiary of powerful leaders around me. The greatest example of leadership in my life has been my dad. He led with confidence and love and had the unique capability to teach you a lesson while making you feel like the most capable person in the world. My dad recognized what motivated people, and was able to act in a way that made everyone feel as though they were the first thing on his mind.

Braun identified mantras throughout his book, the one that encapsulates my dad's mindset was the notion that we must have humility over hubris. My dad exemplified the difference between confidence and pride and helped those around him to see the fine line between the two. Every day, my dad recreated his reputation and re-established his character to those around him. There was not a day of his life that I did not receive special love and attention from my dad, though many times he had much more important things to do.

My dad grew up in a humble setting and made himself into who he is by getting out of his comfort zone and doing small, simple things. He made sure to teach his children that blessings rarely come without hard work, and that starting small builds up to huge success.

As I read Braun's book, I drew many parallels between him and my dad -- they even worked at the same company in Boston. Though my dad has since passed and I can't ask him, I am curious as to whether they knew each other. The things Adam Braun wrote

about leadership made me think of my dad and how well he applied these principles to his daily life.

As I continue trying to emulate my dad's character, I will focus on the mantras identified by Braun. I will focus on humility, work ethic, and pushing myself out of my comfort zone. I am grateful for the experiences and insights shared by Adam Braun, and for the example of my dad.