

Marlee Bryant

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UH 208

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Leadership Interview and Reflection

Part I - Please provide the following information and ask each question below.

Person's name: Terry Bryant

Organization/affiliation/company person works for: Alabama Medicaid Agency

Person's role with the organization/organization: Deputy Commissioner and Chief Financial Officer

Length of time the person has served in their role/capacity: Has worked at the company for 24.5 years, in this role for 7 years

Part II - Questions to ask/answer:

What is/are your greatest strength(s)? Greatest weakness(es)?

Strengths: Supporting employees, defended employees against negativity from others when it was warranted.

(About Weaknesses) That's always a hard question to answer because you know you have a bunch of them but you don't want to admit them.

Weaknesses: Timeliness, arriving to work late but staying late as well.

What do you consider to be your most significant accomplishment or achievement?

Creating an annual budget for an agency with 6 billion dollar annual expenditures, the Medicaid agency requires the most amount of money from the state federal fund so balancing this money is

important for not only those using Medicaid but also for those other government agencies that people depend on.

Have you ever failed at something? What did you learn from that experience?

In a mathematical formula while creating the budget the first time I made a small mistake which created a problem within the funding of the budget. This taught me diligence and being detail-oriented in double and triple checking the numbers.

What are the most important values a leader should have and demonstrate?

Honesty, because if the people that work for you and the people you work for can't believe in what you say then you lose credibility.

What is the difference between a Leader and a Manager?

A leader is somebody that people want to emulate and a manager is a person who just dictates and isn't giving people inspiration to want to follow them and emulate them.

How do you get others to accept/support your ideas?

You have to encourage the people that work for you to believe they are part of the solution and they have input in the decisions, because they feel like they are part of the team not just showing up to work to get payed. The success of the team reflects on them as a personal success.

How do you provide feedback to others? Why is this important?

I meet with the managers that report directly to me in a weekly meeting and I report to them things that I learn from those above me and allow them ample time to inform me what their problems and successes are, basically two-way communication. This prevents myself and others from feeling like they are in a vacuum where they can't learn and grow and just stay stagnant.

How important is transparency as a leader? Or, is it important?

It's important but you have to realize sometimes for reasons beyond your control you can't be completely transparent.

How do you incorporate ethics into your leadership style and decision-making?

Working for a state government agency ethics is of the utmost importance. You can't do something that might be questionable and not expect everyone around you to replicate this bad behavior. You have to lead by example.

Do you invite team members into the decision-making process?

Absolutely. I have different sections that work under me and I know generally what they do, but if I didn't have the supervisor over that group providing me with input I wouldn't know the specifics.

Describe a time you took on a leadership role when you did not have the title of a leader?

How, or did, this prepare you for future leadership opportunities?

When I was coming up through the ranks we were trying to enhance our funding, and the state government budget would be matched 2-to-1 by federal government dollars. We had to come up with a way to increase the budget, so we wanted to create a hospital tax. I went all across the state convincing hospitals to participate in this. I won the Extra Mile Award for the agency's top employee endeavor. The fact that I was able to travel the state and get to know hospital administrators helped me learn about leadership, negotiation, and the effect that the Medicaid program has across Alabama.

Can you explain your communication style? How do you ensure you're communicating in the most effective manner?

I have an open-door policy. Anybody above or below me who needs to talk, I try to accommodate them at the time that they need to talk. This gives the people I'm working with the

opportunity to express their opinions and me to share mine likewise. When I had an employee with an attitude in the office I called him in and let him know that he did not have to like me but he did need to do what I told him to do so long as its moral, ethical, and legal.

How do you approach and mediate conflict among members of a team?

You have to bring in the people involved together and separately so that you can hear both sides of the story and then mediate whatever it is they are in conflict about. You need to ensure open, honest communication and good listening.

How do you motivate your team?

When you work with the government, motivating your team can be very difficult because you can't offer rewards, raises, or time-off because this is all set by the law and regulations. You have to support your people in other ways, like assisting them in getting promotions when they deserve it. Expressing gratitude is very important.

What is the most difficult part of being a leader?

Trying to make all sides happy and providing the services that your agency needed to provide while staying within the state's laws and regulations.

What motivates you to be a leader?

Of course there are always financial incentives, but I always liked leading even in contexts that didn't involve money, like being the president of the softball league. I like to be part of the decision-making process.

How do you lead through change and times of transition?

You have to be flexible. Usually in the state government every 4 years you have a whole new team you are working for after new governors and commissioners are elected. You have to let

your team know that they need to play with the cards they are dealt, because sometimes the leaderships would shift policies and you just need to accept this.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

To succeed and drive forward but to not let your goals and expectations exceed what you could do morally, ethically and legally. I use this as a test for my actions every day. For example, I was offered tickets to the sugar bowl and to a large reception with the university president and team members. Although I am a huge Alabama fan, before I accepted this I checked with the ethics office to make sure it was legal, moral, and ethical for me to accept it, which was then approved.

Part III - Reflection Component

Please use 12 pt. font, 1" margins, paragraph formatting, and double spacing. *There is no length restriction to the reflection component for this assignment.* Please answer each point thoughtfully and fully.

- **How and why did you decide to interview the specific individual chosen for this interview?**

I was originally planning to interview a leader within my field of study, but due to scheduling conflicts I had to alter my plans. I have heard from leaders within Computer Science before in classes, at events, and during interviews. For this reason, I thought it would be intriguing to hear about leadership within a different field, and from someone who I have known closely for my entire life, my Dad.

Despite having a lot of knowledge about my Dad's personality and life outside of work, he has never spoken with me very much about his experiences at work. As he answered these questions about his approach to leadership in his career, I realized so many of the concepts he mentioned, like honesty, flexibility, and communication,

I could recognize in his leadership style as a father. From this I began to understand that developing the mindset and practices of a good leader does not simply apply to the context of traditional leadership; this mentality affects your actions and relationships across all areas of your life. The importance of developing good leadership skills is broad, as it can reflect on all aspects of your life in a positive way.

- **What were your biggest takeaways from this assignment? Did any of their answers come as a surprise to you?**

This interview helped me to realize that leadership does not have to be viewed as intimidating and unattainable. The path to leadership is one which can be forged by hard work, like my dad's willingness to travel all over the state to convince hospitals to participate in a new tax plan, making genuine connections, like he did with co-workers even prior to being in a leadership role, and understanding the significance of the work you are doing, like when he recognized how the creation of his budget plan affected all Alabamians, especially those most in need. Developing positive leadership qualities is about learning from your own experience and the experience of others and treating the people you are leading how you would want to be treated in their position.

I was surprised that to the question about transparency my father acknowledged that there are situations where total transparency is not possible, especially given that he noted honesty as being a very important quality of a leader. From this I can see that for every aspect in leadership there is a necessary balance between what you would like to do and what is best for the situation, and managing this balance is in itself an important quality for a leader to develop.

- **How can you apply what you learned from this interview in your own life, personally and professionally?**

Like my Dad, I strive to one day be a leader in my field. In the book *Barking up the Wrong Tree*, there was a chapter which debated whether becoming an expert or networking is a better path to success, but from my Dad's experience I can see how both are vital. By being a hard and diligent worker as well as a genuine and friendly colleague, you allow others to see your value and personality. Moreover I realized that the idea of hard work does not necessarily mean perfect work, since my dad admitted to making a simple mistake which caused major consequences in one of the budgets. Instead of trying to strive for perfection at all times, I should instead focus on putting in my personal best and acknowledging and learning from mistakes to facilitate growth.

- **Did you find this interview assignment to be valuable and relevant?**

This assignment helped me to see a very practical example of all of the leadership skills I have been learning in this course. Although my dad has likely never encountered the majority of the content we have covered, his leadership style reflected many of the skills we have learned. This shows me that the best way to become a good leader is not by following some checklist of good practices, but by learning and developing as you go based on your own experience and the experience of others. This assignment provided a platform for doing this, by allowing me to discuss important and thought-provoking questions with someone who has spent years attaining this wisdom.

