

Jamie Lee – Leadership Reflection

I believe that five characteristics make up a good leader: empathy, effective communication skills, experience, self-awareness and the ability to motivate others.

Although all five of these characteristics are equally important in effective leadership, I believe that empathy is the most important. Empathy is the ability to take on another's perspective, to understand, feel and respond to their experiences. If a team member approaches a leader with input or complaints, it is important to be able to take a step back and comprehend the statement in their shoes. It is always much easier said than done and comes with time, as although one may believe that they are able to place themselves in someone else's perspective, often times it is their own perception of the other's perspective. A high level of empathy is also a key proponent of a sense of morality, so in instances when a leader has to make decisions and navigate a difficult situation (whether it is personal, dyadic or in a group setting), will prove very useful.

Good communication skills are important in any aspect of life, but especially in team settings. This not only applies to leadership, but having clear and transparent communication minimizes misunderstandings, distrust and confusion between team members. Being able to clearly convey one's expectations, messages and feelings reduces uncertainty. However, communication is a two-way street and involves proper listening as well. This is another aspect in which empathy plays a large role in. While empathy provides the proper level of internal understanding of the message, the message itself has to be first be interpreted and heard correctly by the listener. Even when listening to poorly worded messages, being able to understand, comprehend and pick out the crux of the message helps a good leader choose their next steps.

Experience is something that is understood as important but sometimes looked over. Having experience in the field one is leading in provides a level of understanding that cannot be learned by just observation. Having experience also increases the level of trust that team members have, as they are able to trust that you understand their position and make decisions while taking that into account.

Having a variety of experiences is also extremely important, as it provides new perspectives and lanes of understanding. "Range" by David Epstein (book detailing why people who come from a variety of disciplines often fare better than their peers) explains this very well, and while this may seem to apply more to team members and employees, I believe it to be equally as important for leaders. Being able to take an interdisciplinary approach and having experience with doing so means that one is also able to have more points of reference to be empathetic.

Self-awareness is more important for the leader themselves rather than in "leading". Having good self-awareness allows a leader to assess their actions and the effects it has on others, providing an opportunity for reflection and improvement. What I tend to see with leadership and management is that there are set times and opportunities to provide feedback to management, and obviously it is important to have a consistent stream of feedback. However, being self-aware makes the process of taking in feedback and changing behaviors much easier, as the feedback becomes internally motivated. Internal motivation is much more effective than external means.

And this leads me into the last characteristic of effective and good leaders, which is the ability to instill motivation in other people. Being able to create a sense of purpose and have actions become internally motivated increases morale and satisfaction, which increases cooperation. Unfortunately, this is also a characteristic often seen in cult leaders, which can be avoided with a high level of empathy (as mentioned previously). This also encompasses communication skills, as it is difficult to instill motivation in others with bad communication.

There are other characteristics that make up a good leader that I haven't discussed, such as being calm in complex situations. As for myself, I believe that some qualities that I possess are a decent level of self-awareness and recognition of what is my own perception (regarding the ability to shift perspectives). I also think I have pretty good communication skills (in the sense that I am able to clearly convey needed information). However, I would like to work on my language skills as I am not very good at conveying abstract things and ideas through words. I would like for this to improve with time.