**EMCS2400**: Effective Leadership

Pre-Work Assignment: Leadership Philosophy and Practice

Brian Russel Davis, [brian\_davis@brown.edu](mailto:brian_davis@brown.edu)

*Based on your professional history and the challenges you've faced, what specific leadership competencies and qualities have you demonstrated? What are your signature strengths?*

*Document an incident in which you've demonstrated good leadership. Document another incident in which you have failed.*

*What do you need to learn to become a more effective leader? What competencies and knowledge must you acquire or enhance? What challenges do you face in your quest to become a more effective leader?*

*Choose an image of a historical figure or icon that represents your aspiration as a leader. Insert this image in your document and explain why you identify with the qualities it exemplifies.*

Grit, resilience, humility and persistence. For me these are not just qualities of a great leader, they are survival skills. In 2014 I watched stoically as the police choked [Eric Garner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Eric_Garner) to death near my birthplace in New York City. I didn’t shed a tear, not because his death had no effect, but because since my early twenties I had trained myself to temper my reactions to the horrors of White Supremacy by remaining silent. For me, being in Corporate America may be as strenuous as war. It’s hardened me and cultivated some animal instincts that are not always honorable. I am child of the 80’s and I entered the workforce in the the late 90’s. These are not times characterized as progressive in any sense. In 2017 I detailed some formative events from my time in Corporate America in an article called “[Fire Me, Please](https://medium.com/@HelloAxiom88/fire-me-please-5d7a2aeb559).” While the #BlackLivesMatters movement focuses on our dead bodies in the streets, there is a much bigger list of casualties; One filled with Black Men who were unjustly fired, lost their homes, suffer humiliation or simply worked themselves into illness without being noticed. We will never “hashtag” their names, but they exist. As we enter a time when talking about personal struggles through the lense of White Supremacy is not automatically rejected as reverse racism, any reflection on what leadership is to me cannot ignore this difficult truth. The people that hated my ancestors as young people, spat on them at lunch counters and fire bombed our churches, still exist. The youth of 1955, became the statesmen of 1995. Their ideas and norms run our corporations, city councils, they became the chief of police or made decisions for a school district. And much like the silent but violent CyberWar that rages under the cover of clandestine operations, people who harbor a culture of hatred for anyone who looks like me, do it quietly and quietly pass it on to their children. Some of them evolved fully or partially between then and now. And some of them have not.

These layers of culture and oppression inform my leadership in many ways and perhaps makes me slightly dualist in my approach to leadership and people management. As a survivor of racism and prejudice I have great empathy for people suffering from or struggling with any type of personal pain. As a result I have hired people who have taken advantage of my kindness and at times failed to properly negotiate salaries for new employees who were emerging from hard times. One of the icons I admire is [Chris Gardner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Gardner). His inspirational rags to riches story is a reflection of my work ethic and his triumph over his circumstances gives me hope. I am also inspired by the cerebral even-handedness of Former President Barack Obama. Many successful Black Men have ( as mentioned above ) neutered their emotions and find comfort in Spock-Like systematic logic. Like Obama one of my faults is I tend to overthink things, not because I believe everything can be solved with reason, but as a way of avoiding the dangers and stigma associated with showing ( Black ) emotion. As I approach 45, the practice of thinking through obstacles coupled with a non-reactive demeanor has earned me accolades as a leader. While others lose their heads in crisis situations as bullets whiz over our heads, I have trained myself to quickly strategize from a place of empathy without sacrificing intellect. I have learned to transform my trauma into a virtue.

My quest to become a better leader starts with self awareness and brutal self directed honesty. Acknowledging my struggles with racism and how it has affected me is the beginning of that. However I am determined to move beyond self help and self surgery. Hearing about the struggles of leaders as they wrestle with issues similar or dissimilar to mine adds to my leadership tools box, gives me perspective on how others have dealt with complex situations and creates a space for me to make different well informed choices beyond my experience as I integrate their ideas into my unique context. I still want to do something great with my life. Like Mr. Gardner I am in the “pursuit” of something ( not just happiness ) that will make the hard journey worth all the sacrifices along the way. As I grow as a person, I will also grow as a leader, and as I grow a leader I will also grow as a global citizen.

