

Leadership

CSC424: Software Engineering II

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Throughout our lives we find people who impress and inspire us. Normally these people are leaders, and inspire us to become better people, leaders, or even simply improve as a leader. In my life, I have looked up to a number of people, but there are three people specifically I would like to talk about here. The first is my mother, the second is the boss I had while working in college, and the last is actually my teacher for this class. All three of these people have had a significant impact on how I view leadership and have inspired me to do my best as a leader and as a worker.

Starting with my mom, she showed me dedicated leadership over time. It takes a lot to stick with something to the end, and when you are talking about kids, that is a really long time. She had a lot of struggles to get past as a single mom, but she never gave up on trying to give me and my siblings the best she could. She kept us in a good school, helped us with homework assignments, and made sure we had everything we needed to grow up. She was by no means perfect, but she showed the perseverance that good leaders should have. She did not give up, she almost never lost her patience with us, and she never once told us no when we really needed help.

Another way my mom was a good leader was in her ability to designate tasks. Growing up in a single parent home is definitely challenging. There is never enough time to get everything done. My mom made sure to teach us on how to do household tasks so that she could assign them to us to take care of while she worked on something else. One of us would be responsible for laundry, another for sweeping and mopping, and another for picking up and vacuuming. We would rotate weeks on who took out trash, and she left it up to us to pick what other weekly tasks we wanted as long as we split them evenly. This seems like simple stuff but keeping the peace with three kids can be really challenging. When one of us wanted to do a different job, we had to come up with a fair trade with the other sibling and our mom would mediate to make sure it was fair. To me this is very important to keep up morale so everyone can stay reasonably happy, but also keep it fair so all the work does not end up being one person's responsibility.

Most importantly, my mom taught me the importance of compassion. Of course, as kids we would get hurt on occasion. When that happened, my mom would make sure we were well taken care of. She taught us that when one of us was sick, we had to pick up the slack they left when it came to chores, and to make sure to take care of them. The important part she pointed out is that we should be kind when someone is in a pickle because of something out of their control and help as best we can. The hope is that they would do the same for you if you got sick or hurt so that everything gets done and works like a well-oiled machine. It is not required they help you in return though so we should not expect them to do your chores next time just because you did theirs, but hopefully they would have compassion on you too if you were in a tight spot because of something out of your control.

Some of these examples may seem a little basic and of course using a parent as a good example of leadership may be a bit cliché, but I think a lot of these lessons my mom taught me are important when it comes to being a good leader. Every good leader I have ever known has been dedicated to their goals and wants to make sure to see them through to the end. I am sure that no one likes a worker that abandons their job let alone a leader that abandons their followers. A good leader also always has the ability to designate tasks reasonably. They cannot simply dump all the work onto their subordinates and expect things to be fair, but they also have to realize at some

point that they cannot do all the work alone forever. Any good leader needs to be compassionate. They do not need to be a pushover, but they need to understand when someone is truly struggling and needs a hand.

The next person I would like to talk about is my old boss. He taught me many important lessons about being a good leader in the workplace specifically. One of the most important things I think he taught me was communication. We all have our own struggles, but some of his biggest challenges came with age. His vision definitely was not what it used to be, so he often struggled with communication that involved reading. A lot of the time I had to handle things like mass messages, emails, data entry into scheduling systems, and other things like that. It was a bit like trial by fire at first, but it was not a bad experience. It also taught me that sometimes when I need to talk to someone, virtual is not always the best method. Being a younger person, I always saw email or other instant message methods of communication superior to phone calls, messages, or some in person encounters because they are generally more convenient and can be re-read for clarity if need be. Working with him gave me a living example of why some people miss out on jobs if they do not hand in a resume in person, or only follow up with an email instead of a phone call. It has nothing to do with efforts from the applicant, and more of the methods they use to communicate.

Another thing I learned under his leadership was a person's attitude can make all the difference. He always had a smile on his face, and a pleasant attitude. It would be the world's worst workday where absolutely everything that could go wrong, going wrong all at the same time. It would not faze this man. He would keep a positive tone and get to work knocking out what we could to fix things. He never once had a negative attitude about anything. It always made coming into work a pleasant experience. This was a major reason why this has been my favorite job to date, and it is still astounding how a leader's attitude can affect everyone else's mood.

One more thing I learned from my boss was how to incentivize employees when you cannot offer a raise. Since we were all student employees where I worked, they had a general policy that we could not get raises in our time working for them. Not a great incentive to do better than the minimum at work, but it was what it was. Since my boss wanted ways to encourage us to do our best and help us get further, he found some useful certifications that he could offer to us at the company's cost. They were not required for us to keep our employment, but they could help us get a few marginal raises and be eligible for higher paying jobs when we left. I thought this was a really creative solution when his hands were tied on getting employees raises, and found it particularly motivating myself.

I think these lessons of communication, positive attitude, and methods of non-monetary incentivization are key parts of being a good leader. Communication is of course always important no matter the role, but I believe it is even more important as a leader. A leader has to be able to communicate the important ideas and clarify things like requirements, design, testing, and documentation. A positive attitude is also something anyone in any role could always use, but it is an even more powerful tool for a leader. A leader can use a positive attitude to keep up morale among workers. I know a lot of people do not think of non-monetary incentivization as a good thing, especially because everyone could always use a raise. I think it is an important tool for leaders or those in middle management to help encourage workers when their hands are tied on

things like handing out raises. You can help give those under you a way to improve their skills or chance of being hired after they leave your group, even if you cannot give them the raise they may want.

On to the last person I would like to talk about, my professor for my senior capstone class. She has taught me a lot over the past year, and I am so grateful for the chance to learn from her. There are so many important lessons I have learned in her classes. Since I have to narrow it down, my top three picks that are relevant to leadership would have to be understanding your own strengths and weaknesses, not being afraid to ask questions, and staying organized.

Starting with understanding my own strengths and weaknesses. This in itself is a big weakness for me. I have always dreaded the interview question of list three of your strengths and three weaknesses. I tend to look down on myself and my capabilities so I can list a million and one weaknesses, then maybe one or two strengths on a good day. I have been working on this a lot, and from her class last semester, I can see how much more important this is. As a leader, it is necessary to understand what your strengths are so you can boost your own confidence to lead and understand your weaknesses so when you know when and how to ask for help. It is also important to know how to distinguish the two so that you know what you can personally work to improve on.

An important lesson everyone should learn, but especially leaders, is not being afraid to ask questions. Many people find it embarrassing to ask questions for fear of being perceived as dumb, and this is even more true for leaders that feel the pressure of being looked to for answers to everyone else's questions. It is important to understand there is no such thing as a dumb question, and there is absolutely no way to know everything. Even if people look to you for all the answers, you should never be able to admit when you do not know, but you should do your best after that to help them find the answer to their question.

Finally, the last of the three, it is always important to stay organized. Again, this is kind of a given for everyone, but it is very important for leaders. Organization makes life so much easier, but a leader has to be able to organize their work and keep all group documents organized as well. If they lose track of things, then the rest of the group suffers severely. They have to have the work divided between the group, keep documents organized, make sure everyone has everything they need, make sure their work still gets done, and a million other little things. If they cannot keep up on their work then the rest of the group could not have tools to do their job, not know what needs to be done, start doing duplicate work, and basically end up with all kinds of wasted time.

I am sure everyone can see how knowing your own strengths and weaknesses, not being afraid to ask questions, and staying organized is important in any role. I hope I was able to explain how all of these are even more important for leaders. Leaders need to know what their weaknesses are so they can work on self-improvement and assigning tasks and know what their strengths are to keep confidence and do tasks that are manageable with all of their other work. It is important for leaders to admit when they do not know something and be willing to ask questions to get answers they need. It is also important for leaders to know that they do not have to know everything as long as they know when and how to ask questions. It is also very important for

leaders to stay organized so they can keep their group on task and enable them to keep organized as well.