# Introduction – A Personal Reflection

I can see many ways in which I have prepared for a leadership role in technology at a community college. In my position in the manufacturing industry, I managed other contractors on various corporate ERP projects. My collegiate teaching experience has provided me a unique and directly relevant blend of a view from the academic side of the college while bringing to the position solid technology experience and leadership education.

When I accepted a full-time faculty position at Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, it was a significant career change for me. However, I have always had a love of learning. Throughout my middle school and high school years, I was an active participant in The Boy Scouts of America where I accomplished the rank of Eagle with bronze, silver, and gold palms (palms are five merit badges each beyond those required for Eagle). It was through this experience that I began to realize how much I enjoyed teaching and mentoring. One of my responsibilities when I worked summers at a Boy Scout camp was to teach younger Scouts merit badges: instructing them on the requirements to achieve each specific merit badge and answering their questions. After I attained my Eagle, I became an Assistant Scout Master. Upon graduation from Indiana University in Kokomo, I began my career in information technology as a programmer. As my knowledge of technology increased, I attained a position in which I began leading and mentoring other programmers. I particularly enjoyed this aspect of my responsibilities.

# My Leadership Strengths

The Clifton Strengths assessment determined my top five strengths.

## Ideation

“People with strong Ideation talents are creative and appreciate originality. They relish freethinking experiences such as brainstorming and discussion groups. They have a natural capacity to consider issues from multiple perspectives. They revel in taking the world we all know and turning it around, so people can view it from a strangely enlightening angle. They think outside the box. They are fascinated by new ideas and concepts, which come to them easily. They love ideas because they can be profound, they can be novel, they can be clarifying, they can be contrary, and they can be bizarre. For all these reasons, they derive a jolt of energy whenever a new idea occurs to them. People with dynamic Ideation talents are spontaneously creative and bring new and fresh perspectives. They have a natural sense of innovation that defies conventional thinking. Their innovative approach to problems and projects can be a source of new and valuable ideas.” (Rath, Strengths Finder 2.0 (6th Edition) - Ideation, 2007)

## Connectedness

“Things happen for a reason. Those with strong Connectedness talents are sure of it. They have a powerful conviction that everyone is connected. While each person is responsible for his or her own judgments and actions, those with strong Connectedness believe everyone is part of something larger. This belief implies certain responsibilities. Their awareness of these responsibilities creates their value system. They are considerate, caring, and accepting. Certain of the unity of humankind, they build bridges for people of different cultures. They give others comfort that there is a purpose beyond everyday existence. Their faith is strong. It sustains them and their close friends in the face of life’s mysteries. People strong in the Connectedness theme build bridges between people and groups, showing them how to relate to and rely on each other. They help others find meaning in the unpredictability of the world around them, providing a sense of comfort and stability in the face of uncertainty. Putting it simply, their ability to ‘connect the dots’ from the past, present, and future can give others perspective, guidance, and hope.” (Rath, Strengths Finder 2.0 (6th Edition) - Connectedness, 2007)

## Belief

“People with strong Belief talents have enduring principles by which they live. These values vary from one person to another, but those with powerful Belief talents have deeply held ideals and a strong sense of purpose in their lives. These core values affect their behavior in many ways. Their sense of mission gives their lives meaning and direction; in their view, success is more than money and prestige. Their Belief talents give them direction, guiding them through temptations and distractions toward a consistent set of priorities. This consistency is the foundation for their relationships. Others view them as dependable and trustworthy. Their motivation, drive, and determination come from living their lives according to their values and beliefs. People with strong Belief talents are a wellspring of powerful drive and direction. They provide clarity, conviction, and stable values. Their unwavering foundational principles can raise the ethical standards of those around them.” (Rath, Strengths Finder 2.0 (6th Edition) - Belief, 2007)

## Context

“Perspective and background are important for people with strong Context talents. They value the retrospective viewpoint because they believe that is where the answers lie. They look back to understand the present. From the past, they can discern blueprints for direction. In addition, counterintuitively, they become wiser about the future because they can see its seeds sown in the past. People with strong Context may feel disoriented when they cannot see patterns stemming from prior events. Others may become impatient with them as they strive to understand the history of a given situation. However, in the end, this historical context gives them confidence in their decisions. Checking the rearview mirror is essential for safe driving. It keeps drivers up to date with what is happening behind them. In the same way, the genius of people with strong Context is their unique ability to understand the link between where they have come from and where they are going.” (Rath, Strengths Finder 2.0 (6th Edition) - Context, 2007)

## Input

“People with strong Input talents are inquisitive. They always want to know more. They crave information. They like to collect certain things, such as ideas, books, memorabilia, quotations, or facts. Whatever they collect, they do it because it interests them. They find many things interesting and have a natural curiosity. The world is exciting precisely because of its infinite variety and complexity. A few minutes of surfing the Internet may turn into hours once their curiosity takes off. They constantly acquire, compile, and file things away. Their pursuits keep their minds fresh. In addition, they know that one day some of the information or things they have gathered will prove valuable. People with strong Input talents bring tools that can facilitate growth and performance. They love to provide relevant and tangible help to others. Their resourcefulness and curiosity lead them to store knowledge that can be culled and shared.” (Rath, Strengths Finder 2.0 (6th Edition) - Input, 2007)

# My Continuing Education

Effective leaders, of course, are always continuing their own education in some manner, whether formal or informal. In the field of computer science, continuing education is especially critical as technology changes at an ever-increasing pace. There simply is no other discipline like computer science because technology is continually evolving. Education, field experiences, and certifications are critical to increase knowledge in technology and thus the ability to provide quality teaching to students. In addition to those opportunities, I also learn about new technologies through independent (outside-of-work) reading of current events by subscribing to RSS feeds about rising technologies and management styles as well as reading online articles such as from Forbes and blog posts from management leaders such as Michael Hyatt. I also read books such as *Motion Leadership: The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy* by Michael Fullan, *A Sense of Urgency* by John Kotter, *World without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech* by Franklin Foer, *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell, and *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything* by Joshua Foer. Finally, I particularly enjoy continuing to learn through attendance at events such as Grow with Google and most recent attendance of the CyberTech Midwest Conference.

# What Are Characteristics of Great Leaders?

Leadership should express a character of *authenticity*. Leaders should be able to reveal their hopes, fears, dreams, and failures. They honestly care to know the people they lead and want them to know themselves in the same way. They strip away the facade and reveal their true selves to their team. Great leaders make themselves *visible* throughout the organization. They build meaningful relationships with their peers, the people they lead, and their supervisors. Their reputations precede them in powerful and positive ways. Their leadership is *influential,* and, ideally, they can persuade their audience with just their words. They can make a case that others can understand and inspires people to action. They are able to explain not only what they want done but also why it is advantageous for the team to support their idea (Figliuolo, 2016). Moreover, as Simon Sinek says in his book *Start with Why - How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.” (Sinek, 2011) Great leaders tell *memorable* stories that inspire others. They teach easily attainable lessons that are memorable and contain measurable actions. Everyone enjoys listening to their stories not only because they are entertaining but also because they are full of excitement, laughter, inspiration, encouragement, and instruction in a manner that is educational. (Figliuolo, 2016) Benjamin Franklin once said “Tell me and I will forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn.” (unknown, n.d.). Great leaders are *compelling*. They stand out in crowds both large and small. People are drawn to them because they know how to connect with their followers. If a leader has these combined characteristics of being memorable, influential, and compelling then they have an overwhelming potential to drive teams into action. (Figliuolo, 2016)

Great leaders are *efficient* at getting tasks done. They are mindful of how they manage their time as well as how they invest their energy in their team members. They invest time wisely based upon where they will get the maximum results lasting long term for the time that they spend. These leaders are *innovative* by seeking solutions that are not obvious. They challenge existing ways of thinking and generate new ideas on a regular basis. They are *visionary* thinkers, and they perpetuate the organization beyond what ought to be the limitations of the organization. The future is something they think about quite frequently. They think strategically, considering as many possible scenarios, plans, and approaches for winning in the markets of tomorrow against their competitors. They seek council of the possible actions of others in the market. They are *thoughtful* when faced with a problem or a challenge, and they do not make rash decisions. They have the ability to modularize problems into smaller ones, understand true root causes, and generate solutions that solve the real issue at hand. Great leader’s *decision-making abilities are impeccable*. While they may not have all the information, but they have enough information to move forward, and after they think for a while and have considered the options, they take action. They are able to balance their judgment with risk and are willing to take calculated chances. They seek *fairness* when they are negotiating and they do not focus on winning for themselves, but they focus on winning for everyone. They realize that many negotiations are more about long-term relationships than they are about rising above their rivals to trample them out during an interaction. They are able to prioritize fairness over profit. Great leaders are *resilient*, and they embrace change. There are no shortages of challenges and failures are always a chance for them to learn from their mistakes. The great ones know how to pick themselves up when they have been knocked down and they carry on. They dust themselves off and summon strength from deep within to carry on the fight. (Figliuolo, 2016)

# Conclusion

At institutions of higher learning, as educators and community leaders, we are cultivating Indiana’s, the nation’s, and perhaps the world’s next workforce generation. We are in a knowledge era, an era in which information technology is a crucial part of achieving any measure of success. It is imperative that we strive together to build a new society with an improved work ethic, unlimited economic potential, and healthier values and mores. We can contribute to this goal by reaching our vision as we work together to change lives.

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