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Leadership 473 | Dr. Boss

Big Hairy Audacious Goal

The Making of a String Quartet

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# **Overview:**

Last year, I was given the great opportunity by Amazon to join them for a six month finance internship in Consumer Electronics. During the internship, I learned many new skills including but not limited to, how to use Excel, do extensive analysis, and use the data base language: SQL. I also learned how to handle stressful situations, deal with many different types of people, and most importantly the value of working very hard. When I was leaving Amazon to head back to school last fall, I had a one on one talk with the main college recruiter in a so called “exit interview”. During that “exit interview”, I was officially informed that I was given the inclined to be hired when I completed with school based on my performance during the past six months. In addition to this great news, I was also given some suggestions about what I could improve and work on during the rest of my time at school before I came back to work full time. The most important suggestion was to become a better leader, someone who would speak up more and help lead others. I immediately took this challenge to heart and when I came back to the UW Bothell, I actively worked on improving my leadership skills.

During winter quarter, I saw that I could take a spring Leadership class and quickly signed up. I must admit, during the first day of your Leadership class, I was very worried about how I was given an option to take an untraditional or traditional approach to learning. Despite my concerns, I decided to do the untraditional approach and work on a Big Harry Audacious Goal (BHAG) for the quarter. When I decided to do the BHAG project, I realized I wanted to do something I had always wanted to do but never attempted to in such a grand scale. I had always wanted to write a work of music; a string quartet. I now understand that the BHAG project has been a great learning tool about myself and how I handle goal setting. Since working on my project and writing this paper, I have also found that the BHAG project reminds me of the quote that my friend once introduced me to, “Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars…” (Palomino, 2013). Although I was unable to complete the project and was unsuccessful, I do not feel like I was unsuccessful as I did learn a lot about myself. My experiences have been recorded in the 10 leadership principles that I have learned during my project which I know will help me through my life and career.

# **Leadership Principle #1**

## *Provide a clear, concise statement of the direction of your project*

From the onset of the BHAG project, the class was directed to create a clear and concise statement on what the project. This document was about known as the BHAG Contract. In the contract, we were required to “Identify exactly what you want to do…” and “Spell out *why* you want to reach this goal”. At the time, I didn’t think too much about this step in the BHAG process. I went on to say that my project was to write “a string quartet with four individual movements in the classical/Romanic style”. However, when looking back at this step in the goal development process, I found it very interesting to me as I recalled that chapter 15 in the book Lincoln on Leadership, which the author, Donald Phillips, covered this topic and how important it was. That chapter describes how “Effective visions...are inspiring”, can empower people, and that they can “stand the test of time” (Phillips, 1992, p. 163). I realized that by creating a concise statement on the direction of my project, I was in essence inspiring and empowering myself. Although I was unable to complete the String Quartet, I learned how this step is a crucial part of creating a goal and how to help motivate not only myself but others for future goals and projects.

# **Leadership Principle #2**

## *When you preach your vision, don’t shoot too high*

Another aspect of writing a goal is truly understanding the scope and scale of it along with its time constraints. When I first thought of the idea of writing a string quartet for my BHAG, I truly thought I could accomplish the feat due to my years of playing the piano, numerous music theory lessons, the fact that I had written piano music before, and had friends who played stringed instruments including the violin, viola, and cello (all instruments that make up a string quartet). However, I found out that despite all these assets, I had underestimated how difficult the project would be. I soon found out that I was unable to combine multiple instruments into a single harmony and that I could not understand fully how the interments behaved. I found out that I set my goal too high given the skills that I had and time constraints.

Although this was disappointing to a large degree, I recalled that Lincoln was quoted as once saying to one of his law partners, “don’t shoot too high – aim lower and the common person will understand you” (Phillips, 1992, p. 165). I truly understand what Lincoln meant now. While setting goals, you must consider all aspects of the task at hand. From how long the project will take, to what current assets you have to make the goal happen, to even potential road blocks and unforeseen difficulties. I found that from via BHAG project, I tend to think large and am very ambitious and so are my goals. However, practicality must be taken into consideration when devising a goal. I recognize that when I leave school for the next stage of my life, that I will make an effort to be practical and not shoot too high or else I might not get the goal accomplished.

# **Leadership Principle #3**

## *You must seek and require access to reliable and up to date information*

As I found during this project, a string quartet is quite a massive undertaking and a lot of information is required to produce a quality piece of music. One of the ways I tried to tackle the goal was to have a lot of information available for me. In an effort to do this, I bought music notation software, numerous scores of famous string quartets from composers such as Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, and CDs of the scores. During this process, I only bought from reliable sources like Amazon.com who I knew would give me quality products. I also did extensive research on which software would help me notate my string quartet and settled on Sibelius 7. While reviewing the book, Lincoln on Leadership, I saw how one of the principles we read about was to gather accurate information. As Donald Phillips, author of Lincoln on Leadership, notes, “Lincoln was constantly seeking key intelligence… He needed accurate information, and the best way to obtain it was to go out and get it himself.” The author goes on to say how information is vital for making decisions and fulfilling the goals of an organization (Phillips, 1992, p. 21). Although my goal was on a way smaller scale, the principle remains constant. In order to achieve a goal, I found that one needs to gather accurate information and this information will help you reach your goal. Although I gathered a lot of accurate information, I found that I lacked much of the understanding of the four instruments and how they really worked which prevented me to completing the project.

# **Leadership Principle #4**

## *“Always be a student”*

Goals are among other things are learning processes. In order to learn, one must fill the role of becoming a student and opening your mind to change. Because of this, one of the leadership principles that I felt greatly applied towards my BHAG was one of David McCreary’s leadership principles which was, “always be a student” (McCreary, 2013). After reviewing my notes from class, I instantly noticed this leadership principle and knew what Mr. McCreary meant and how important it is for reaching and fulfilling a goal. College is always said to be a great learning experience, a place where people step outside their comfort zone and try something new. Looking back, I deeply relate to this principle because I feel that during my project, I was being a student of not only music, but also one of leadership.

By being a student, I was really able to explore and experiment which corresponds with learning. After reviewing my experience with my BHAG, I can truly say I learned a lot from this project about not only myself and how I work on projects/goals, but how to be more effective at achieving my goals and going outside of my comfort zone. In addition, I found that by doing the BHAG project, that audacious goals require one to not only embrace the mindset of learning but to also step outside of one’s comfort zone. By being a student, I was able to step outside my comfort zone in terms of both musicality and who I was. I had to embrace my goal and really create a plan to accomplish it. Despite being unable to successfully accomplish my goal, by being a student, I was able to gain a new respect for people who have the ability to create such works of art while still appreciating what I learned.

# **Leadership Principle #5**

## *“Write down your plan”*

Goal setting can be a difficult process with many complicated steps. One of the first steps is to have an idea for a goal and then draft what it is explicitly while not shooting too high. After doing that, conducting research about the goal and how to succeed can be a long and difficult process. Learning from the research and various successes and failures of the goal process can be a stressful time. If that was not enough, you also have to plan out how you will accomplish the goal in a clear and concise way. For this principle, I once again drew from David McCreary and his class discussion. The leadership principle is to “write down your plan” (McCreary, 2013). After working on the BHAG project, I feel that this step is necessary for any hope of success in the goal process. Although I was unable to successfully complete my goal, I believe that by setting up a plan helped me get farther than I otherwise would have gotten. Furthermore, by setting a plan up, it helped me stay focused and accomplish as much as possible. I learned that even when there is failure, a detailed plan allows one to see how to improve the process the next time when trying to create another goal. As I enter the next stage of my life, I will have many goals and I know that I will plan out each one to maximize my effort and know exactly what to do.

# **Leadership Principle #6**

## *Pursue your passions*

From class we have learned how great leaders are highly passionate about their projects and goals. I feel that my BHAG project was no different. I remember always being passionate about music and from a very young age idolizing composers like Beethoven and Mozart. When I developed my idea for the BHAG, I knew it was going to be about music. Since then and after reviewing the great leader presentations, I realized that this was another great leadership principle encompassed by the founder of Tesla and multi-billionaire Elon Musk: “pursue your passions” (Banerjee, Halstad, Resendez, & Swain, 2013). By pursing my passion, I was able to really focus and motivate myself to do my best on completing my goal. Although some aspects of the project were not successful, I know that if I keep on working on improving my skills musically, that this goal will one day be accomplished. I have learned from this project that pursuing your passions makes failed attempts learning points and that such unsuccessful attempts do not hinder your goal but actually strengthen my overall resolve.

# **Leadership Principle #7**

## *No substitute for hard work*

When planning and writing the string quartet, I stumbled across many difficulties and problems that hindered me while trying to complete my BHAG goal. From technical issues like my CD player not working and downloading the notation software, to the lack of sufficient knowledge in writing music for multiple and unique instruments. This is when I realized that writing a string quartet or any orchestral piece of music was just plain hard work. Again, when I was reviewing the great leader presentations, I realized that this was another leadership principle that Elon Musk personified and was congruent with my BHAG: there is “no substitute for hard work” (Banerjee, Halstad, Resendez, & Swain, 2013). This leadership principle is important to note because any goal that you set should be hard and difficult to achieve, especially a BHAG. I have found through class and this project that great leaders set high bars for goals in order to get the most out of their employees. When working on my string quartet, I realized that only hard work and determination would help me achieve what I set out to do. When I started writing, I found that progress was slow to a lack of understanding the instruments was writing music for. After reviewing my BHAG, I can see how only more hard work and time would allow me to accomplish my task.

# **Leadership Principle #8**

## *If you never try, you never succeed*

A BHAG requires tremendous an effort in order to be successful and completed. I know form this BHAG and other projects that I tend to overshoot the practically of many projects. However, just because a BHAG might be way too much to handle, it does not mean you should have never tried. In the book Lincoln on Leadership, Lincoln himself was quoted saying to one of his generals, “I say try… if we never try, we shall never succeed” (Phillips, 1992, p. 138). Over the last quarter I have put a lot of effort into trying to figure out how to write a string quartet and make it a successful endeavor. Although I failed in a sense, it was a great learning process because I really did try my best. Ironically, just because I tried, I feel that I might have learned even more than if everything went without a problem. I think this experience let me learn about myself on a deeper level and how I deal with setting goals and working through their processes. I have learned that even if you fail, you still gain a lot from doing your best.

# **Leadership Principle #9**

## *Never consider anything you write done until it is published*

When it came time for choosing a subject matter for my BHAG, I let my passion of music direct me into what I wanted to do. Because of this same passion, I had started playing piano when I was in high school and learned as much as possible as quickly as possible. In high school, I also read about composers and how they would work on their pieces. When I read about their lives, one reoccurring theme came up. This theme was that the composers would not consider their works done until competed or published. When reviewing the Lincoln on Leadership and Lincoln’s leadership principles, I was surprised to see Lincoln was the same way. One of his friends even said of Lincoln, “he never considered anything he had written to be finished until published” (Phillips, 1992, p. 147). I found that this leadership principle is important because it really allows one to be confident in their product. Even though I was unable to finish my string quartet, I will continue to work on completing it as it is a goal I still want to achieve and I won’t consider it done until it is published. I know that this idea will carry on with me even when I enter the workplace. Knowing when something is compete will help me look concise and knowable, prevent confusion, keep a consistent message, and keep making progress towards the goal.

# **Leadership Principle #10**

*Don’t lose confidence when you fail*

Although confidence usually takes a long time to build, it sadly can take a short time to fall apart. “Don’t lose confidence when you fail” might be one of the greatest leadership principles regarding goal setting. After learning all the other leadership principles that correlate to my BHAG, I believe that despite my failure, I will not lose confidence in my musical ability but rise to the occasion and really work on competing the string quartet. Failure can be a step towards progress and as author of Lincoln on Leadership noted, “The president viewed failures of his generals as mistakes, learning events, or steps in the right direction” (Phillips, 1992, p. 138). I believe that this leadership principle is crucial to really being innovative and maintaining your composure. I can see this principle helping me throughout life in many circumstances. From social, work related, personal, or any other type of failure, I will do my best to not lose confidence in myself and work hard to overcome any failures in my life.

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