

Developing a Leadership Philosophy

Lee Jones

Leadership, in my view, is the ability to marshal resources, build a collective vision, and develop creative ways to move a group of people to accomplish a common set of goals. In order to do these things, it is essential to have a leadership philosophy that is clearly articulated and well known among members of the organization.

A leadership philosophy is a well-defined statement about the assumptions on which the leader provides daily direction to and for the organization. Developing and publishing this philosophy makes it possible for colleagues to have a thorough and comprehensive view of what drives the leader's thinking in a variety of decision-making points. It also provides people with a glimpse of what the leader values and how he or she seeks to manifest that commitment in leading the organization.

Let me present my own leadership philosophy as an example.

My Leadership Philosophy

Effective leadership requires a clear understanding, the ability to adapt, and a proactive vision. My leadership capacities are constantly evolving through my willingness to learn from those who participate in the vision and to grow and develop. Leadership, to be effective, must have *constancy of purpose* and be willing to manage the competing dynamics of organizational culture.

I have always believed that effective leadership commands thoughtful planning, open communication, and efficient use of resources. The effective leader is one who has a clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities of all those who constitute the organization. Effective leaders understand that each person working on behalf of the organization has unique talents that contribute to the production of organizational outcomes.

My philosophy of leadership is based on Stephen Covey's idea of principle-centered leadership. As a leader and a follower, my mission is to create an environment in which all constituents can participate in successfully fulfilling the organization's mission through the use of their human potential. I will help them reach peak performance as employees by effectively matching their job tasks with their job skills, by making sure they participate in cross-functional work teams that aim to advance a chain of trust and

establish confidence in all facets of organizational operations, and by anticipating and advancing employees' opportunities for personal, professional, career, and organizational development. I will also aim to develop clear communication channels—which ultimately will contribute to group and job effectiveness.

A Philosophy in Action

As a leader, my goal is to make sure that everyone I work with is aware of my philosophy. This tells them that I am open to their ideas and to my changing, and it gives them some guidelines about what I consider most important. As a result, I think that the people I lead feel they are able to increase their sphere of influence, take part of the ownership, and understand the direction that the organization is headed, and this increases their effectiveness and satisfaction.

Developing a leadership philosophy can be challenging. It requires self-awareness, something I came to appreciate first at a CCL program. In 1996, I attended an intensive week-long leadership course with twenty-three other people from across the country. (I was the only one from higher education.) When I was given the results of a performance survey filled out by co-workers (superiors, peers, and subordinates) and the evaluations of other program participants and staff, it came as a shock to me that I was not always clear about what I thought leadership was and how it should be practiced. The feedback specialist who worked with me urged me to develop a leadership philosophy. It took me six months to reflect on the new knowledge I had about myself before I could develop one. It was difficult to do, given the immediate demands I was constantly facing, but in the long run I have found it invaluable.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *One of the goals of Leadership in Action is to help our readers focus on, and exchange ideas about, issues of practical importance to leaders. If you have such an issue that you would like to raise, or if you have a response to this or a subsequent column, write it out (in no more than five hundred words) and send it to me at the address given in the masthead.*

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