

Leadership and Critical Thinking

The Perspective of a Student Leader

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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June 2026

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Abstract

In the modern world, leaders are everywhere. From student leaders, to bosses, to government officials, people hear about, or interact with, leaders often. For this reason, it is important for those in leadership positions to continue to improve their leadership skills, so they can meet the needs of the people they lead. There are many qualities of a good leader, including accountability, a clear vision, and the ability to encourage others. Another quality of a good leader is critical thinking: the ability to think for oneself and encourage followers to think for themselves. I believe that critical thinking is an important skill that many people struggle with. For my project, I will examine several leadership qualities, but I will put more focus on critical thinking. I will also apply what I learn about leadership to my own experiences.

My thesis will be a leadership portfolio divided into three sections. The first section will be a literature review, summarizing five books about leadership. In my next section, I will connect what I have learned from section one to my own leadership experiences. These experiences include Destination Western Peer Advisor, Campus Ambassador, Discover Leadership mentor, and Multicultural Representatives mentor. Finally, in the last section, I will combine everything I have learned in the first two

sections, to determine what qualities make a good leader. For the third section, I will put more focus on the importance of critical thinking.

Introduction

Leadership is found everywhere in our society. Everything from our schedules for work, to the laws we follow, to how much money we pay in taxes is determined by leaders. The modern world is always changing. People are constantly developing new technology. People shift their focus from one social cause to another. We are faced with wars, poverty, and natural disasters. Leaders are the ones called to navigate the changes in the world and come up with the solutions for the problems that present themselves (Shotton, 2011). In this ever-changing world, effective leadership is more important than ever.

Effective leadership is important, but what does it look like? If you ask someone what a leader is, you will probably get an answer like, “a leader is someone who guides their group towards a goal.” However, leadership is harder to define, and often people can’t provide a definition when asked (Burchard, 2003). According to The Student Leadership Guide, leadership is a process by which leaders and collaborators work together to reach a common goal (Burchard, 2003). In other words, if people are going to work together to reach a common goal, leadership is necessary. In order to have effective leadership, we need to be able to define leadership, and understand what makes a good leader, and that is exactly what this thesis tries to do.

Leadership is complex. There are many qualities that make up a good leader. When asked what qualities make a good leader, most people probably think of things like communication, responsibility, and initiative. However, one of the most important leadership qualities is the ability to think critically. A person who can think critically can think for themselves. They can solve problems. They can analyze a situation, use the information they already have, know what new information they need, gather the new information, and make an informed decision based on what they've learned. Critical thinking is certainly not the only important leadership quality, but it is one of the most important, and often it is overlooked.

This thesis seeks to understand what effective leadership means, and what qualities make a good leader. The first section will summarize the main points in five leadership texts. In the second section, I will share some of my own leadership experiences as a student leader and apply them to some of the points covered in the texts. Finally, I've come up with what I believe are the most important leadership qualities, based on my own experiences, as well as the leadership texts. There will also be a focus on critical thinking throughout the three sections, but special attention will be given to this quality in the final section. Also, I only have experiences as a student leader, so this thesis focuses heavily on student leadership. However, student leaders of today will be the leaders fixing the world's

problems in the future. My hope is that any leader can learn something valuable from this thesis, no matter how small.

Section #1: Summaries of Leadership Texts

There are many leadership texts out there. Some try to find the most important leadership qualities. Others share leadership experiences from the author's own life. All of the texts try to determine what makes a great leader, or what skills every leader should have. However, they don't all say the same thing. This section focuses specifically on five texts. Out of all of the texts I found, these five were the best. They were well organized, and easy to follow. Their advice was practical, and the authors provided great examples from their own lives.

Liftoff Leadership

This book was written by a female pilot, who later became a businesswoman. She would also travel around and consult with leaders of organizations. In her book, she highlights ten principles that she believes are important for leadership. She provides examples from her own life, as well as examples she has heard from others, to help explain the principles.

Vision

The first principle she talks about is vision. A group's vision is the group's end goal (Shotton, 2011). As a leader, you must have an idea of where your group is headed. Your vision is your group's purpose (Shotton,

2011). To come up with a vision, ask yourself who you want to be, and what you want to work towards.

Your vision should be clear and concise. You want others to be able to have enough information to understand your vision, but you also want it to be short enough that your group can remember it (Shotton, 2011). It can be helpful to create a vision statement. For example, Walt Disney's vision statement was, "To make people happy." Kennedy had a vision of sending people to space. Your vision is what will motivate your group members (Shotton, 2011).

Altruism

Leaders aren't here to serve themselves; they are here to serve others (Shotton, 2011). Serving others is not easy. Often, it requires personal sacrifice. Leaders should be making decisions that benefit those around them. Sometimes that means paying their workers more. However, something like raising the wages of the salaries of others could cut into your own salary. Raising the wages benefits those around you, but it will mean you have to make a personal sacrifice.

The author provides an example of altruism in her own father (Shotton, 2011). He was a physician. During the day, he would work his shift at the office. However, when he was off work, he would make house

calls. He did this for patients who could not afford to go to the hospital. He was sacrificing his time to do something to help others. However, he also was getting paid little to nothing to make the house calls, since he knew the patients could not afford it.

Courage

Everyone has fears. It's part of life, even for leaders (Shotton, 2011). Courage is about facing your fears (Shotton, 2011). Some common fears for leaders include failure and abandonment. You will never know when you must face a fear. Fears come on suddenly, when least expected. In order to have courage, one must practice courage (Shotton, 2011). People aren't born courageous. However, there are some circumstances that a child could have experienced that could help them be more courageous in adulthood (Shotton, 2011). If a child had a harder life growing up, they may be more courageous. If a child was taught to get back up when they fell, they would probably be more courageous.

Accountability

Accountability means taking responsibility for your own actions (Shotton, 2011). Often, people will blame others when things go wrong. However, this doesn't help anyone. Instead, you should own up to your failures. If you make a mistake, learn from it, and do better next time

(Shotton, 2011) . Leaders should be accountable themselves, but they should also promote accountability in those they lead (Shotton, 2011). The author provides an example of a Toyota CEO admitting that his cars had problems on live television (Shotton, 2011). He owned up to his mistakes in front of everyone, but now he can learn from them, and work to make better cars.

Possibility

This is similar to vision. Possibility is about looking into the future. As a leader, you must know where you want your group to go, and you must strive for that goal (Shotton, 2011). Possibility is what allows leaders to push towards, and reach their goals, despite the odds. Leaders must look at the facts, but they must also keep pushing, even though it seems like they may fail.

Resolution

Resolution means finishing what you start (Shotton, 2011). If you start a project, don't abandon it, finish it. So often, leaders will start a project and really work towards finishing it for a few weeks. Then, they will come up with a new idea, and move onto that (Shotton, 2011). That leaves your group members lost and confused. They can lose motivation in the organization, and trust in you as a leader. It is important to finish what you

start, because it helps you reach your goals, but it also helps keep up the morale of your team (Shotton, 2011).

Faith

Leaders will struggle; it is inevitable. When things get hard, you need something to fall back on. Faith is believing that everything happens for a reason, that things are bigger than you and your organization, and that there is a higher power above you (Shotton, 2011). Faith does not just have to mean religion, but that is what it does mean for many people. The author provides an example of a time the stock market crashed, and she thought that all was lost, and that she would not be able to rebuild (Shotton, 2011). Then she heard a message from a preacher on television one day. That message gave her hope, even though she wasn't religious. Faith gives you hope, and something to cling to when things seem like they're falling apart (Shotton, 2011).

Integrity

Integrity is about building trust. If people are going to work together as a team, they must be able to trust one another (Shotton, 2011). Most importantly, they must be able to trust their leader. It is the leader's job to keep the team together. If the leader cannot be trusted, the team will begin to fall apart (Shotton, 2011). A key part of integrity is honesty. Leaders must be able to tell the truth, and they must encourage their teammates to

do the same, even if the truth is difficult (Shotton, 2011). When leaders are open and honest with their team, this can increase their integrity: they are more trustworthy. This can also help cut back on drama within the team, because when there is integrity within the team, there are no secrets whispered behind a team member's back (Shotton, 2011). Integrity is important, because it helps build trust among teammates.

Balance

An efficient team must be balanced. To have a balanced team, everyone must know their roles and tasks (Shotton, 2011). Each person's duties should be clearly defined. Each person should be doing their share of the work. No one should be doing too much or too little. If the leader notices that something is off balance, it is their duty to address it (Shotton, 2011). For example, if one person is doing too much work, and another person is doing too little, the leader must talk to those people and possibly reassign duties. A leader must also have balance in their own life, to ensure their team can have balance (Shotton, 2011). This includes balance in their physical, emotional, and mental health. This might look like getting enough sleep, or seeking out therapy when they're struggling mentally. Balance is important, because it creates efficiency, and ensures the team won't fall apart.

Awe

Awe refers to the wonder of the world. Awe can come from many things, including nature, human behavior, and organizational accomplishments (Shotton, 2011). For example, someone may experience awe when they see the beauty of the sunset over the ocean, or when a person creates an amazing invention, or when an organization goes above and beyond their monthly goal. Awe is important, because it can be motivating (Shotton, 2011). When things aren't going well, whether it be divisions in a team, or a loss in profits, it can be easy to want to give up. Awe reminds a person that there are great things in the world. It keeps them going, because it can give them something to work towards. When a person remembers the wonder of the world, it can make them want to strive for bigger and better things (Shotton, 2011).

Rationale for Choosing this Book

I chose this book because it is well organized. The principles highlighted in the book are clearly outlined, and easy to follow. The author also uses examples from her own life, to make her advice easier to understand. She also uses examples from the lives of others, to make these principles more relatable to the average reader. Her advice is practical, and easy to carry out in everyday life.

The Student Leadership Guide

The Student Leadership Guide is a book of practical leadership advice for students. The book consists of six practical steps that student leaders can take when leading their group. These steps can take a group from the very beginning, when they just have an idea of what their group should be, to the point when the group achieves their goal. Throughout the book, the author provides practical tips, explanations, and examples, in order to make these six steps easier to carry out. Below is a description of each step, in the order that it should be taken.

Envision

In order for a leader to begin leading, they must first have a vision (Burchard, 2003). They must have an idea of why they are creating their team. Essentially, they are asking the question: what is the purpose of my team? A vision should be clear and concise, but it must have enough detail to clearly communicate the team's purpose (Burchard, 2003). The vision must be easy for people to understand, so they know what they are getting into when they become a part of the team. Furthermore, the vision must also reflect the values of the team (Burchard, 2003). This could be the values of those who will join the team, or those who the team will serve. If people's values aren't reflected by the team's vision, they will have no

interest in supporting the team, and the team will not be able to adequately serve. A team's vision provides direction for the team.

Enlist

During this step, leaders are getting other people to join them. Leaders must be able to clearly communicate their vision, in order to get others to join them (Burchard, 2003). People want to follow a leader with a motivating vision that reflects their values. When creating a vision, leaders should involve others, so that they can learn the values of those around them (Burchard, 2003). A leader may have to revise their vision once they have shared it with others. This is an important step, because a leader must have people join them, or else they have no one to lead (Burchard, 2003).

Embody

People want to follow leaders that are credible. They want to know that you will reflect the values of the vision that you have shared with them (Burchard, 2003). People also want to know that leaders have the skills to achieve their vision. For this reason, it is important that you embody your vision (Burchard, 2003). Be a role model. Let others see that you are living out your vision. Be consistent. Leaders should live out the values of their vision even when others are not around. Be a servant, let others know that you are here for them, not yourself. It is important for leaders to know

themselves: they should know their values, and they should know whether they have the skills to live out their vision. Leaders should embody the values of their vision, in order to get others to follow them (Burchard, 2003).

Empower

People want to be part of the process; they don't just want to follow orders. When a leader empowers others, they are allowing them to become an active member of the decision-making process (Burchard, 2003). This gives people more freedom within the group. It gives them a voice, so that they feel as though their ideas are heard and valued (Burchard, 2003). When a leader wants to empower others, they should be there to listen to what others have to say. Empowerment is important within a team, because it gives team members a chance to voice their opinions, and feel as though they have a role in the group.

Evaluate

Leaders must be able to determine whether their group is achieving their vision. To do this, a leader should evaluate their group's progress (Burchard, 2003). They should determine how much their group has accomplished. While evaluating the group's progress, it is important to also evaluate the vision. Once progress has been evaluated, the leader may have

to evaluate their vision, especially if the group is going in a different direction than the vision (Burchard, 2003). While leaders are in the evaluation step, they should also evaluate their group members, to see how well they are doing. When evaluating group members, it is important to provide feedback, so that they know what they are doing well, and what they need to improve (Burchard, 2003). Evaluation is an important part of the leadership process, because it helps determine the success of the group.

Encourage

Encouragement is similar to empowerment. When leaders encourage others, they motivate them to become part of the process (Burchard, 2003), they help group members become more involved. A leader can give encouragement in many ways: a kind word, praise, or a promotion (Burchard, 2003). When people feel encouraged, they feel like an active member of the team. When people do well, it is important to acknowledge it, so that the person feels as though they are making progress in supporting the group. Encouragement can even help create more leaders (Burchard, 2003). Encouragement makes people feel as though they are a valuable part of the group.

Rationale for Choosing this Book

I chose this book, because it is geared toward students. Since this project focuses on student leadership, it was important to use a text that had advice specifically for students. Also, this book is well organized. The practices highlighted are clearly outlined, and easy to follow. The advice in this book is practical, and easy for students to carry out in their everyday lives. The author also provides examples that make these practices more understandable. This book has great advice for student leaders.

Reality Based Leadership

The author's focus for this book is on changing the strategies that people use when leading. She has found that leaders are frustrated now more than ever, because their teammates are checked out emotionally, there is so much drama in the team, and the team is not producing good results (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). After talking to many leaders from many types of leadership settings, the author has developed a strategy that she calls reality-based leadership. Her new strategy focuses on avoiding drama, restoring sanity to the workplace, and producing results rather than excuses (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). She believes that leaders need to stop using strategies that no longer work. There is no set format for this book. It is just a collection of tips and strategies to help people become better

leaders. Below, I have highlighted some of the most important points from the text.

Suffering is Optional

In every situation, people have a choice. They may not have a choice to leave the situation, but they can choose how they respond to it (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). People can either seek to improve their situation or be a victim. For example, maybe a team member decides they don't want to do their share of the work, so it falls on another team member. That other team member can either just do the work, and then they don't have to think about it anymore, and they can just move on, or they can complain about it, and create drama within the team. If the person chooses to just do the work, they are trying to improve their situation, but if the person chooses to complain, they are becoming the victim. In situations like this, suffering is optional. People have the choice to solve the problem, and move on (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Responding to the Facts

If a leader's teammates bring them a problem, the leader should first get the full story. They should then work to discern the facts of the story (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). It is important to know what the actual situation is. Once the leader knows the facts, they should respond to the

facts, just the facts (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). If someone made a mistake, the leader should not blame them or pass judgement. If there is a problem between two teammates, the leader should not try to side with one or the other. Instead, the leader should work to fix the mistake or solve the problem. When leaders simply respond to the facts, they cut out the drama within their team (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Delegate Tasks

It is the leader's job to assign roles and tasks for their team members. As such, it is important to not just assign tasks randomly. A leader should look at the skills and strengths of each team member. They should then assign each team member a role based on their skills (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). If a leader just randomly assigns roles, the duties of those roles will not be carried out. People cannot fill a role that is not in their skill set. In order to best utilize the skills of each team member, leaders should assign roles based on the team's strengths (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Leadership Principals

It is important for leaders to lead, not manage (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders guide their groups and ensure that everyone in the group is an active participant. Managers on the other hand, just make sure that

group members are getting things done. Below are six leadership principals that the author has come up with to help people lead and not manage.

Resist the urge to add more value: leaders do not have to be the ones doing everything. People want to be active participants, but if the leader takes over and does everything, group members will take a step back (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). People want to know that their leaders have confidence in them, so leaders should not do everything for their group members. Instead, they should teach group members to do things on their own (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Coach the person in front of you: leaders should never miss an opportunity to coach their teammates (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Coaching is important if leaders are going to help their group do things on their own. If a person comes to the leader with a problem, the leader should work through that problem with them (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). This will help people learn to change their circumstances and empower them to solve their own problems. Leaders should teach their group members, not just do things for them.

Work on confidence first: confidence comes before competence. People cannot improve their skills until they have confidence in their abilities (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). They need to know that they can do it. Leaders should focus on building the confidence of their team. They can

do this through encouragement, praise, and patient correction (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Once team members feel confident, they can work on improving their skills.

Focus less on logistics, and more on hearts and minds:

don't always feel as though you are the only one who can do things. Leaders should be guiding their groups (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). In order to do this effectively, it is important to see group members as human beings. Be there for your group members. Listen to them and their needs. It is important to focus on moving the group forward, but it is also important to support those who are struggling (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Allow others to fully step into their role: let others do their job. There is a reason leaders lead groups, not just themselves. Leaders cannot do everything, though sometimes they might want to. Once a leader assigns a role, the leader should leave that role to the person to whom it was assigned (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). It is important that people have someone to go to with questions, but the leader does not need to step in every time.

Avoid emotional blackmail: people aren't always going to like the way the leader does things. Sometimes people will be upset by the way the leader does things, especially if it is difficult, or if there is a drastic change (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). They may come to the leader with

complaints, or they may want to bargain with the leader. Leaders should listen to these complaints, but not do anything with them (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should accept feedback, but they should not let their team members try to bargain with them. Rather, the leader should listen to the complaints, and then move on, and do things normally.

Core Leadership Competencies

Below are three leadership competencies. These are things that the author believes leaders should work on, in order to become a good leader.

Respond to adversity: adversity is unavoidable. At some point in time, everyone will face some sort of adversity (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should be the example for their team. When they face adversity, leaders should respond appropriately (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Responding to adversity will take courage. Leaders must fully examine the situation and take note of all of the facts. Once they have the facts, the leader can then make a decision. If the decision seems difficult but necessary, the leader should move forward courageously, and make the difficult decision (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Have the will to succeed despite the facts: sometimes things seem impossible. In every situation, leaders should know the facts. They should review all of the facts, to gain a better understanding of what they

are dealing with (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). When the leader fully understands the situation, they can work towards finding solutions. Sometimes the facts indicate that no solution can be found. In these situations, leaders must show the determination to succeed (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). They must work to find a solution, despite the fact that it seems like there can be no solution.

Work on resolving conflict quickly: conflict is unavoidable. Just like with adversity, at some point in time, the team will experience conflict (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). If conflict drags out, it can slow progress towards the team's goal. Leaders should focus on resolving conflict quickly (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). They should as always look at the facts of the situation and then work with their team to find solutions. The faster the team resolves the conflict, the faster the team can move on.

Mistakes to Avoid

Below are three mistakes that the author believes leaders should avoid. Often when leaders make these mistakes, it can create conflict and drama within their team. Conflict is inevitable, but avoiding these mistakes can help teams work more effectively, with less drama.

Lying: leaders will often lie to their team. Sometimes leaders may have to change the way things are done. This could mean changing roles,

changing strategies, or even deadlines. Leaders often worry about how their team will react to these changes, so they might lie to their team (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). However, this does not help the situation, it only makes it worse when the team finds out about the changes. Instead, the leader should be fully transparent. They should explain the changes thoroughly, and then move forward (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should address any concerns the team may have, but they should also be sure to highlight the benefits of the changes.

Reasoning with anger: people cannot reason with anger. People will often get frustrated or angry. They cannot be reasoned with in that state (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should listen to their concerns but then give them a chance to cool off. Once the person has had a chance to calm down, the leader can come back, and work through their concerns with them (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders can respond to anger with scripted responses, such as “You’ve given me a lot to think about.” If the angry person does not calm down, then the leader can use a response like, “You can either keep up with the team, or you can leave.” Reasoning with anger is impossible. Give the person time to calm down, before working through their concerns.

Dropping Support: continue to provide support for your team. When leaders have to make changes, they will often support their team

through those changes. However, once the team has made it through the transition, leaders will often drop their support (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). This can cause the team to falter and lose direction. Instead, leaders should continue to provide support even after the changes.

Limiting Beliefs

Society holds several beliefs that the author believes will limit a person's ability to lead effectively. Below, seven of these beliefs are highlighted. The author believes that in order to effectively lead, leaders must let go of these beliefs.

Everyone's opinion counts. Often, leaders believe that they need to listen to everyone's opinions. Democracy is great for government, but it does not work for every setting (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should avoid listening to opinions just to be inclusive. Instead, they should listen to the opinions of experts and leave everyone else out of it (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). The leaders only need to hear the information that will help them make decisions.

Great results can only come from perfect plans. Plans won't be perfect; they will always come with risks. It would be a waste of time to try and create a plan with absolutely no risks (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Instead, leaders should seek to gather all of the information that they can

and move forward with their plans (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). They should acknowledge the risks and be prepared to adapt. If a plan is not implemented, it cannot produce any results, good or bad.

Accountability for failure leads to loss of credibility. At some point, everyone will experience failure. The important thing is that when people experience failure, they learn from it. Admitting when you are wrong can help you grow (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). In fact, it can also lead to more credibility. When a person admits when they are wrong, they are being honest with those around them. This shows those around them that the person is trustworthy. Leaders especially should be able to admit when they are wrong (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). It sets a good example for their team, but it also helps them build trust.

There is no I in team. Sometimes the team needs to move forward and just get things done. The leader should be able to evaluate the team's progress and determine the team's next steps. However, individuals within the team must be able to evaluate themselves as well (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Furthermore, strong team members should be rewarded. This helps let them know that they are on the right track, but it also helps set an example for the rest of the team.

Don't bring a problem without coming with a solution. Not everyone has the answers. It is okay to admit that you don't know

something (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should allow team members to bring problems to the table, and admit that they don't have a solution (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). From there, the team can work together to solve the problem.

There is no such thing as a stupid question. Some questions are pointless (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Some questions do not have answers. Typically, questions that start with why, who, and when, when referring to human behavior are pointless. These questions just waste people's time, because they aren't focused on moving the team forward (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should direct their team members away from these questions.

When in a downturn, it is best to wait for clarity before moving forward. Not making a decision is a decision (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Sometimes, you will not have all of the answers. In these times, you simply have to use the information that you do have. When faced with a situation like this, leaders should use the information they have to make a decision and move forward. However, leaders should also be prepared to adapt if things go wrong (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Rationale for Choosing this Book

I chose this book, because a lot of the author's advice has to do with critical thinking. The author focuses a lot of her advice on problem solving, and thinking through problems. Furthermore, the author also provides tips and suggestions for helping teammates think more critically. While harsh, the advice in this book is also practical. The author's advice focuses more on moving the team forward, and less on the feelings of individual people. For a leader, this is important. It is important to see group members as human beings, but if the leader is constantly focused on feelings, they won't be focused on moving the group forward.

The Student Leadership Competencies Guide

This is another leadership book that is geared toward students. The book is divided into eight leadership areas that leaders should work to develop. Within these areas, there are several competencies that leaders can work on. The author provides several examples throughout the book, to make these competencies more understandable. Below are brief descriptions of each of the eight areas for leaders to develop.

Research and Reasoning

Leaders have to work with lots of information when they lead. They must be able to handle this information properly (Seemiller, 2013). When a

leader needs to make a decision, they must know what information they need. If they need more information, leaders must know how to gather the necessary information. This could mean talking to their group, reaching out to experts, reading books, or doing an internet search (Seemiller, 2013). Once leaders have the information they need, they must know how to analyze that information. If it is good information, they can use it. If not, they should ignore it. Once leaders have their information, they must be able to use it to make a well thought out decision.

Self-Understanding

Leaders must know themselves. They must know what they value, and what they are passionate about. Leaders cannot create an effective vision, if they don't know themselves (Seemiller, 2013). In order to lead effectively, leaders must know their strengths and weaknesses. This will help them understand what skills they bring to the table, what skills they need to work on, and what skills they simply do not have (Seemiller, 2013). This will help them when assigning roles to their group members. If leaders do not know themselves, they will be unable to help move the group forward (Seemiller, 2013).

Interpersonal Interactions

All leaders work with others, and they must be able to do this effectively (Seemiller, 2013). Conflict is inevitable. When conflict comes up within a team, leaders must effectively manage that conflict. Leaders should be able to set boundaries with their team members, but they may also have to help team members set boundaries with each other (Seemiller, 2013). Also, it is the job of the leader to evaluate their team. They must determine what team members are doing well, and what they need to improve. Leaders must be able to provide constructive feedback, in order for team members to grow.

Group Dynamics

Leaders will always be working with a group. It is important for the group to work together, and if there are problems within the group, it is the leader's job to hold the group together (Seemiller, 2013). When conflicts and problems arise, the leader should work with the group to come up with a solution. Also, it is important to ensure that the whole group has a chance to participate. People want to be active members of the group. As such, leaders should ensure that every voice in the group is heard (Seemiller, 2013).

Civic Responsibility

Leaders should consider how their group will affect the outside world. Their group is just one of many groups in the world. As such, the actions and decisions of one group could have effects on other groups (Seemiller, 2013). When making decisions, leaders should seek to benefit as many people as possible. Also, their decisions should cause little to no harm. It is the leader's job to help their group effectively be a part of the rest of the world.

Communication

Leaders must be able to clearly communicate their ideas. If they cannot do this, there will be chaos. A lack of communication can lead to lack of understanding, lack of direction, and lack of progress (Seemiller, 2013). People will not understand their roles. The group will not know what they are supposed to be doing, so they will be working without direction, and that will mean the group will not move forward. There are many types of communication, including verbal communication, written communication, and body language (Seemiller, 2013). Leaders must be able to grow their communication in all areas.

Strategic planning

Leaders must have goals for their group, that way members have direction (Seemiller, 2013). There must be a reason for the group to exist. The group should also have clearly outlined values, and these values should be known to all group members (Seemiller, 2013). Leaders should start with creating a vision, but they should also be able to set goals that will help the group reach the vision. Once goals have been set, leaders should develop plans for reaching the goals. These plans should be clear, and easy to follow.

Personal Behavior

How do you as a leader behave? Personal behavior is about assessing your performance (Seemiller, 2013). Leaders should be able to assess how well they are doing. They must be able to learn and grow, but in order to do this, leaders must understand what areas they need to grow in. In order to assess themselves, leaders can talk to others (Seemiller, 2013). A good leader will be able to accept feedback from others, so that they can begin to grow. Furthermore, leaders must be self-starters. However, once they start something, a leader should be able to finish it.

Rationale for Choosing this Book

I chose this book, because it is geared toward students. Like with some of the other texts used for this project, this book is well formatted, and easy to follow. The advice in this book is practical, and easy for anyone, not just students, to carry out. Furthermore, this book has a lot of great advice for critical thinking, especially in the research and reasoning section, and in the strategic planning section. When thinking critically, people must have plenty of information. They must be able to gather more information and analyze the information they already have. Strategy, plans, and decision making also require critical thinking.

Turn the Ship Around

This book is about a Navy officer, who was assigned a new ship. He had never run this type of ship before, and he didn't know how everything worked. The people on board his ship were only able to follow orders. Unknowingly, the officer gave a command that was impossible to follow. Those on board the ship did not question the command. That is when the officer worked to develop a new leadership strategy, so that those on board would be able to let him know if something else went wrong.

This book focuses on the author's new leadership strategy. He knew that if people were going to become more active in running the ship, they

had to be able to think for themselves. Thinking for themselves meant that the people would have to be given some control. However, the author quickly realized that in order to give control to those below him, clarity and competence were also needed. This book has some great information about critical thinking, because of its focus on getting people to think for themselves.

Control

In order to get a group to think for themselves, the leader must first give them more control (Covey & Marquet, 2013). The group members must become active members of the decision-making process. Leaders can help guide their group, but it is important that they resist the urge to provide solutions (Covey & Marquet, 2013). Leaders should find out how their organization makes decisions, and work to change things if necessary, so that group members are able to have a hand in the decision-making process.

There are strategies that can help leaders give their group members control. One of these strategies is the “I intend to” method. With this method, group members tell the leader what they intend to do (Covey & Marquet, 2013). It can start with the leader asking, “What do you intend to do?,” and then the person would respond, “I intend to...” Eventually, the goal would be to have team members just come up to the leader and tell

them what they intend to do. This strategy is good, because it gets team members to make decisions on their own, and the leader will know what those decisions are. It is also helpful to eliminate top-down monitoring systems. People need to be trusted to do their jobs. If there are any problems, the leader can address them individually with team members (Covey & Marquet, 2013).

When a leader gives control to those below them, thinking out loud can also be helpful (Covey & Marquet, 2013). This will ensure that leaders and their group members know each other's plans. It can help increase communication within the group. Thinking out loud will also help group members think through the decisions they are making (Covey & Marquet, 2013). When a decision needs to be made quickly, the leader should just make it. However, afterwards, they should ask their group why they made that decision. This can help the group better prepare for future decision making.

Competence

People must have the ability to get the job done. Competence means ensuring that people have the skills needed to do their job (Covey & Marquet, 2013). When preparing people for their roles, technical training should be provided. Throughout the training, people must be told when they make a mistake. From there, the person will be able to correct their

mistakes, and do better next time (Covey & Marquet, 2013). It is important that group members are able to accept feedback. This is the only way they will be able to learn and grow. When training people, it is important to certify, not brief. When people are certified, they are thoroughly trained (Covey & Marquet, 2013). They learn all of the necessary information to get the job done. When someone is briefed, the trainer goes over everything very quickly. This won't really teach a person anything. Group members need to have the skills to fill their roles, before they can think for themselves.

Clarity

Clarity is about having all of the necessary information to get the job done (Covey & Marquet, 2013). When presenting this information, it is important to present it in an engaging way. This will help people better retain the information. When group members are working, the leader should let them know when they are on the right track (Covey & Marquet, 2013). This can help build confidence, but it will also help the person learn, because once they know they've done something right, they can work on improving other skills. Furthermore, the leader is not always right. It is important to encourage group members to question the leader, so that when the leader inevitably does something wrong, their team can make them aware of it (Covey & Marquet, 2013). It is also important to specify

goals, not methods. Let people know what they need to do, not how to do it. That way, if the person finds a method of achieving their goal that is more efficient, they will be able to use that method (Covey & Marquet, 2013).

Rationale for Choosing this Book

This is the only book that I was able to find that was solely about critical thinking, and for this reason I chose to use it in my project, even though I am not interested in military leadership. The book focuses on getting team members to think for themselves, which is the main focus of critical thinking. Furthermore, the book provides strategies that can help leaders encourage critical thinking within their group.

Section #2: My Experiences

During my time at Western Oregon University, I have held several leadership positions, the main ones being Campus Ambassador, Destination Western Peer Advisor, Multicultural Representatives Mentor, and Discover Leadership Mentor. Each of these experiences looked a little different, even though with each one I was supporting students. In order to successfully fill each of these roles, I had to use some of the advice found throughout the leadership texts I used in this project. Below, I have described each Leadership experience and highlighted some of the leadership strategies I used while filling each role.

Campus Ambassador

At Western Oregon University, Campus Ambassadors are the tour guides for the school. Our job is to give tours to prospective students. Each week, we would each have a tour slot that families of incoming students could sign up for. Sometimes, middle and high schools would come to the school, and we would give them tours, or hold panels where students could ask questions. During admissions events, such as preview day, we would give tours, and help with check-in.

As a Campus Ambassador, it is important that I have the tour route memorized. I must also memorize information about each building, as well as the school as a whole. Since my whole job is giving tours and answering questions, I must be able to effectively deliver information to those interested in the school. It is my job to do my best to sell the school.

Communication

The whole job of a campus ambassador is giving tours and panels. For this reason, communication is perhaps one of the most important skills for this position. I have to be able to communicate things in a way that those taking my tours, or listening to my panels, can understand. As this position involves a lot of speaking to others, the focus is mainly on verbal communication.

When I am communicating, everything must be clear and engaging. I must be able to present the information in a way that others can understand. The information must also be accurate and up to date. When giving tours and panels, it is also important for Campus Ambassadors to be aware of their audience. Sometimes, we are giving tours to middle schoolers, and they may not need the same information as high schoolers, or incoming transfer students. Middle schoolers also need the information presented differently, so that they can understand it. It is important that

I'm giving the appropriate information for my audience, and that the information is easy to understand.

Integrity

As a Campus Ambassador, I am trying to sell the school. My goal as a tour guide is to make perspective students feel that they want to spend the next few years of their life at Western. As such, it is important for me to be open and honest with those who come to see the school. I should be presenting the school in a positive light, but it is important that I am sharing an authentic version of myself, so that people have an idea of what their experience could be like at Western. When I give tours, I try to work in stories of my past experiences at the school, so that incoming students will have an idea of what the school is like.

Embodiment

This leadership skill is similar to integrity, but no less important. When perspective students come for tours, they absolutely want to hear about our own personal experiences with the school. However, they also really want to get a feel for what the school is really like, to determine whether they actually want to attend. That is what this leadership skill is about: giving students a feel for the school, by embodying the values of the school (Burchard, 2003).

As a tour guide, it is important to show that I actually care about the school, and am really invested in my education, along with the school's values. This will help students determine if the school is right for them. This looks like embodying the school's mission, vision, and values. For example, the school values community. They strive to create a place where everyone feels that they belong. I could speak about this on tours, so that incoming students have an idea of what the school values. However, I can also take it further and talk about how I've found a place where I belong at WOU. Embodying the values of the school helps ensure that students can really know if Western is right for them.

Critical Thinking

As a tour guide, it is expected that I already know all of the information that I will be sharing. However, it is inevitable that I will forget something, or that someone will ask a question that I do not have an answer to. That is where critical thinking comes in. I have to be able to think critically, to come up with the information that I forgot, or an answer to a question that I don't know. It is essential that I know what resources are available to me, so that I can find the information for the person who asked. Furthermore, if I really cannot find an answer, I should be able to refer the person to someone who can give them an answer.

There is another aspect of critical thinking for this position. When we give tours, we have a set route that we follow. However, sometimes there are multiple tour groups giving tours at the same time. This means that sometimes the routes may change slightly. As a tour guide, I must be able to think critically about making any necessary route adjustments, so that those on the tour can have the best possible experience. Sometimes, tour groups will run into each other, but our goal is to do our best to ensure that does not happen. That is why critical thinking is so important: we must think critically while giving the tour to hopefully minimize any issues that may occur.

Destination Western Peer Advisor

Destination Western is an orientation program for incoming students. Incoming students move onto campus two weeks before Pack Welcome Week, and spend the time taking mock math and writing classes, participating in social events, and participating in college readiness workshops. This program is designed to help students to adjust to college. Peer Advisors are there to lead students to class, host events, and sit in the halls during class in case of emergency. We are the ones that students come to with problems.

As a Destination Western Peer Advisor, I had to help plan and host events. When students had any questions, I had to be able to answer them or direct them to someone who could. When students had a problem, I had to help them solve it. If there was ever a crisis, I had to respond appropriately and let those above me know what happened. I had to know information about the school and communicate that information to the students I worked with.

Altruism

Destination Western is hard. It is perhaps the hardest student leadership position on campus. It is mentally and emotionally draining, and often physically exhausting. For this reason, it takes a very selfless person to do this position well. Often, we as DW PAs must put the needs of our students before our exhaustion. This sometimes can even look like waking up in the night to respond to crisis situations.

Students will be coming to Western from many different backgrounds. Some have medical needs that must be attended to. Others have mental health issues, and so college is a huge adjustment for them. Still others come from very close families and so end up experiencing homesickness. Regardless of the situation, it is important that we put the students first. We must be able to get through whatever they're going through, but we should also respond with kindness and compassion.

Initiative

Destination Western is a large program. Those in charge are constantly running around, dealing with various situations, trying to ensure that the program runs smoothly. However, things inevitably come up that we as student leaders must be able to handle. When these problems do arise, it is important for DW PAs to be proactive. We cannot just sit around and wait for others to help us solve the problems. Instead, we must come up with a solution or bring the problem to someone with the ability to solve it.

Empower

As Destination Western Peer Advisors, our goal is to help students adjust to college. As I have previously mentioned, students are going to be coming from many different backgrounds, so they'll have many different needs, and they will be at various levels of adjustment to college life. Our goal as peer advisors is to give them the tools they need to succeed. During the program, it is absolutely okay for students to rely on the peer advisors. However, our goal is to slowly transition them to college life. We want them to have access to the resources they need to be successful students. In other words, we are empowering them to take charge of their own education.

Communication

As a Destination Western Peer Advisor, communication is important. It is important that I am able to effectively communicate information to the students. All information must be presented clearly and accurately, so that everyone can understand. This comes in multiple forms. First, we must be able to communicate instructions for the program. Students must have a clear understanding of where they are supposed to be, and when. However, it goes beyond instructions. We want students to have the tools to succeed in college. This means that we must be able to accurately communicate information about resources at Western, so that students have what they need to be successful.

However, there is another aspect of communication. We must be able to communicate with one another as student leaders. It is essential that everyone is on the same page, so that the program can run smoothly. We must be able to effectively plan activities with each other. Also, when problems inevitably come up, we must be able to communicate with one another, in order to come up with a solution.

Critical Thinking

For Destination Western, critical thinking comes in the form of problem solving. Problems will inevitably come up. Things don't always

happen according to plan. Sometimes students find themselves in a crisis situation. In any case, we as student leaders must be able to think critically about these problems. We must know what resources are available to us. We must know what steps to take depending on the situations that arise. If we don't know what to do, we must be able to think through the problem to come up with a solution or bring someone else who can help us figure it out. It is important that problems get solved in a timely manner, so that things do not start breaking down within the program.

Multicultural Representative Mentor

The Multicultural Representatives (MCR) program is designed to provide freshmen with an upper-class-men mentor. This mentor would be there to help guide them through their first year of college. If the students had any questions, they could come to their mentors. Mentors met regularly with students, to see how they were doing. Also, the program would host two events each term for the students to participate in. Mentors would help out with those events.

As a mentor, I had to be there to support students. When students had questions, I had to answer them or direct them to someone who could. I also had to share my experiences with my mentees and provide advice that would help with their success. When I met with my mentees, I focused

mainly on having conversations with them, so that I could see how they were doing, and what they needed from me.

Interpersonal Interactions

As an MCR mentor, I must be able to work one on one with my mentees, or with my mentees as a group. Sometimes, meetings with my mentees were just one on one meetings, where I was just checking in with them. These meetings just involved a conversation with my mentees, to see how they were doing. If they were struggling, I would help them work out a plan for success. This would also be the time where I could offer information about resources to support them.

However, sometimes, I had to meet with my mentees as a group. It was my job to facilitate the meetings. I had to ensure that the meetings stayed on track, but it was also important to keep them lighthearted and fun. Sometimes, we would be doing activities as a group, and so it was my job to ensure that those activities ran smoothly. When conflict within the group came up during meetings, it was my job to help the group work through that conflict.

Integrity

As a mentor, it was important that I be open and honest with my students. This helped them relate to me. I had to show them that I was a student

going through the same things they were going through. I had to share my experiences with them. It was important to be professional, but the students needed to know what I had truly experienced at Western. That was one of the things that helped me build a connection with them. I was able to share my experiences, and my students were able to relate to me, and feel that I was a resource available to them for support.

Empower

Starting college is difficult. Students struggle to find classes, and must adjust to living alone, and taking care of themselves. However, another struggle that students often have is getting involved and finding community. As an MCR mentor, part of my job was to help students find their community. We were there to not only be a friend to the students, but also to provide advice on how they could make friends and find their place at Western. Essentially, we were empowering them to get involved and make the most of their college experience.

Empowerment is about ownership. It is about giving others the support they need to stand up for themselves, do things on their own, and in many cases even take the lead (Burchard, 2003). College is different from high school in that college students are responsible for their own education. Their professors will not remind them to do their homework, if they need help, they must ask for it, and they must make their own

schedules. As an MCR mentor, it was our job to help students learn to take ownership of their education. We had to help them feel empowered, so that they had the tools and resources they needed to be successful. We also worked to ensure that they knew how to use those resources, and that they felt confident to stand up for themselves when they needed help. Our job was to make sure that students were able to be responsible for their own education.

Communication

As an MCR mentor, communication mostly involved communicating with the students. We were required to meet with our students at least once a month. I met with my students twice a month: once as a group, and once individually. When we had group meetings, it gave my students a chance to interact with one another, to learn from each other's experiences, and to form friendships. As a mentor, I had to clearly communicate expectations, and when students asked questions, I had to give clear responses. I also helped bring the group together, so that the students felt more connected.

For the one-on-one meetings, communication was mostly about clarity. I had to ensure that when my students came to me with questions, my responses were clear and easy to follow. Furthermore, it was important that I communicated things such as when and where we were meeting, and if they had something come up where they couldn't meet, I had to ensure

that we were able to figure things out, so that we would still be able to meet. Also, I wanted to be their friend, and be there for them when they needed support, but I also had to be professional.

Finally, we had to write biweekly reports explaining how things were going. This meant that written communication was also important for this position. I had to be sure to use proper spelling and grammar and maintain a professional tone. However, I also had to make sure that my responses were clear and easy to follow, that way the leaders of the program were able to know how things were going for the group as a whole, and with each individual student.

Critical Thinking

Students had all kinds of questions. Often, they were about resources on campus, and I was able to easily answer them. However, there were times that they asked questions that I didn't have the answer to. At these times, it was important that I was able to use critical thinking to find the answers. At times, that meant that I needed to do some research to find the answer or direct the student to someone who could give them an answer. However, sometimes students asked for advice. At these times, critical thinking was more about being able to think through their question carefully to provide an answer that would actually help the student.

A big part of the position was also about ensuring that students felt seen, heard, and supported. Meetings could just be the mentor talking to the students for an hour or so, but we were encouraged to plan engaging meetings that would give our students a chance to have fun, and bond with one another. This meant that I had to use critical thinking to plan meetings. This involved actually coming up with what to do for the meeting, because I wanted to ensure that the meeting was engaging. However, it also involved actually planning the meeting. I had to think through the plan carefully and ensure that I got all of the details figured out, so that there was no confusion.

Discover Leadership Mentor

Discover leadership is a program designed to help students grow their Leadership skills. During the program, students met once a week, for several weeks. Each week focused on a different leadership skill, and the leaders of the program would lead an activity that would help illustrate each skill. During the program, students met with their mentors, to ask questions, and hear what it is like to be a leader. The students had to do a leadership project, and present it in front of the class, so mentors helped guide them through the project.

This was probably the most unique role, out of the four described here. My sole focus as a mentor was leadership. My goal was to provide my students with leadership advice. I listened to their interests and tried to give the best advice that I could give, to help them reach their leadership goals.

Mission

The group's mission is their purpose. It is essentially what the group is working towards (Shotton, 2011). As Discover Leadership Mentors, our mission was to create more leaders. We were students who already had experience in leadership roles. For example, I had already been a Destination Western Peer Advisor when I started mentoring Discover Leadership students. As a mentor, it was my job to use my past experiences to help create more leaders. I would share my skills with my mentees, give them advice that I'd learned through past challenges as a leader, and share stories of my past leadership experiences. During the entire program, my focus was always on furthering the mission.

Mission was essential for the Discover Leadership program. We had a very specific goal: create more leaders, and we only had about two months to accomplish that goal. For this reason, we as mentors had to remain focused on furthering our mission at all times

Encourage

Leadership is not easy. It can often take people quite a while to break out of their shell. For instance, when I was in middle school, I had very bad social anxiety. It wasn't until I took a leadership class that I finally felt comfortable taking on leadership roles, giving presentations, or even simply talking to others. It is definitely not just me, there are many others who take a while to feel comfortable in a leadership position. As a mentor with the objective of creating more leaders, it was important for me to encourage others to step up and lead.

Encouragement can come in many forms (Burchard, 2003). The simplest form of encouragement was simply pushing my mentees to lead. If we did an activity during the program, and I saw that one of my mentees was not participating, I would gently push them to take part in the activity. Encouragement also comes from praise. When I saw a student doing something well, I made sure to mention it to them, one so they could keep doing that thing, but also to help boost their confidence. Finally, encouragement can also come from constructive criticism. If I saw an area where one of my mentees could improve, I made sure to point it out to them, and encourage them to work on it. Then when they improved, I made sure to let them know. As a leader, it is important to encourage

others, because it lets them know what they're doing well, and helps boost their confidence.

Evaluate

When a leader evaluates those that follow them, they are assessing how well the person is doing in the area that they are leading them in (Burchard, 2003). As a Discover Leadership mentor, this was extremely important. In order for anyone to grow, they must receive feedback; however, for someone learning how to be a leader, this is even more true. When I evaluated my mentees, I would take note of what they were doing well, and what they needed to improve on. As they worked on the areas that needed improvement, I would follow up with them to let them know how much progress they were making.

I met with my mentees once each week at our whole group meeting, and twice outside of the class. At each meeting during the class, I would let my mentees know what they did well that day, as well as what they could improve on in the future. At the two meetings outside the class I went more in depth, giving them an overview of how well they were doing in the program as a whole. Every time I gave them feedback about how they could improve, I always made sure to include something they did well, that way they felt more confident and knew they were on the right track. It was

essential that I evaluate my mentees, that way they had an idea of how they could improve in the future.

Communication

For Discover Leadership, communication came in two forms. First, the simplest and most obvious form was simply communicating with my students. This was mainly through verbal communication, with the occasional written message either to the group chat, or to my students individually. During the class meetings, I had to keep the group together and ensure that we stayed on task. When we did an activity, I had to ensure that I explained it well. If students asked a question, I needed to make sure I answered it in a way that was easy for them to understand, and when I gave them advice or feedback, I had to ensure that it was clear and easy to follow.

As someone tasked with helping create more leaders, part of my job was also to teach my mentees good communication skills. I was certainly able to give them specific advice on how to communicate well. For instance, I could tell them that when explaining something to someone they are leading, their explanation should be clear and concise to make their explanation easier to understand. However, most of their learning in this area came from watching me. As their mentor, I was someone they looked up to, and so they would follow my example. If I exhibited good

communication skills, my mentees would pick up on them and use the same skills. It was important for me to have good communication skills so that my mentees could understand what I was trying to say and learn from me, but also because they were looking to follow my example.

Critical Thinking

As with communication, critical thinking as a Discover Leadership mentor also had two aspects. I had to use critical thinking as a leader, but I also had to teach my mentees to use critical thinking. A large part of my role was simply giving my students advice in a specific area, in this case leadership. I had experience as a student leader, and my job was to share what I'd learned from that experience. This involved critical thinking, as I had to choose what advice was most important to give, and whether some experiences would be beneficial to share with one student, but not another. Furthermore, sometimes a mentee would ask me a question that I did not know the answer to. I would then have to find the answer, help them find the answer, or point them in the direction of someone who had the answer. This too involved critical thinking.

As critical thinking is an essential leadership skill, it was also important that I teach my mentees how to think critically. If given a problem, they needed to be able to think through it carefully and come up with a solution. Sometimes as leaders, we are faced with difficult decisions.

My mentees needed to be able to understand how to think through a decision, weigh their options, and make the best decision. Furthermore, leaders don't know everything. Inevitably, there will come a time where a leader does not understand something or lacks a key piece of information. When this happens, they must be able to find that information either by research or reaching out for help. All three of these require critical thinking and therefore are important for my students to learn.

Critical thinking is a difficult skill to learn. As someone with leadership experience, I was able to share my past experiences with my students, however that only goes so far. When teaching critical thinking skills, I found that practice worked the best. Throughout the course of the program, my mentees had lots of opportunities to practice critical thinking. I would give them feedback on what they did well, and where they could improve, and when they made a mistake, I would talk them through what went wrong, and what they could do if they faced a similar situation in the future. Letting them think through their mistakes gave them an opportunity to notice areas that needed improvement on their own and come up with solutions themselves. Critical thinking is an essential leadership skill, but often it is difficult to teach.

Section #3: The Most Important Leadership Traits

Throughout this paper, I have discussed several leadership texts, each by a different author. These books discussed topics such as what leadership looks like, what makes a good leader, and what leadership skills are most important. However, each author's views on leadership are different, and sometimes conflicting. In this section, I will tie everything together and share the ten leadership traits that after reading these texts, I believe to be the most important. Some of these are qualities that make a good leader, while others are skills that good leaders should develop. They are not in any particular order, as I believe that all of these traits are equally valuable. However, I will place extra emphasis on critical thinking, as I believe that it is a highly important, and often overlooked leadership skill.

Communication

Every single leadership role involves communication. Thus, communication is an important leadership skill. If a leader says that they are a good communicator, they are essentially saying that they can clearly express ideas, and ensure that all group members can understand all

important information related to the group (Seemiller, 2013). Leaders must be able to explain things well, so that their group members can understand. Leaders should also be able to deliver important information, such as plans and roles, in a timely manner (Seemiller, 2013). If something changes, the leader should provide updates. Communication comes in many forms, and each form falls into one of two categories: written communication and verbal communication (Seemiller, 2013). Forms of written communication include emails, reports, and messages, such as a message in a group chat. The following are examples of verbal communication: giving a presentation, group facilitation, giving directions, and communicating group roles and procedures.

Good communication is what keeps the group together. A leader should be able to communicate all roles, plans, procedures, and any other important information (Seemiller, 2013). If they are not able to successfully do this, the group is at risk of falling apart. Each group member must have a clear understanding of their role, otherwise tasks may be left undone, or a group member may end up doing someone else's tasks. If plans are not communicated, the group has no direction, and if important information is not communicated, group members may end up feeling lost and confused. The leader must ensure that everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing and when, that way the group is able to move forward with their goals.

Finally, conflict is inevitable. Leaders and group members can seek to avoid conflict, but at some point, the group will likely face some form of conflict (Seemiller, 2013). When this happens, the leader must be able to properly resolve it, and communication is essential for this. If the conflict involves the whole group, the leader must be able to discuss it with the whole group and come up with a plan to move forward. However, sometimes the conflict is just with one or two group members. If this happens, the leader must be able to pull the individual aside, and resolve the conflict with them (Seemiller, 2013). Communication is essential, because the leader must be able to talk through the issues with those involved, as well as communicate group expectations, and help the group work through the conflict.

Integrity

A leader with integrity is someone whose values align with their actions (Shotton, 2011). For instance, they do not claim to value accountability and then refuse to own up to their mistakes. Leaders who show integrity are open and honest, and they do the right thing even when no one is watching. Leaders who actually live out their values are leaders with integrity.

Trust is extremely important within a team. Group members must be able to trust each other, but more importantly, they must be able to trust their leader, and integrity builds trust (Shotton, 2011). Life isn't easy, and everyone is bound to face challenges at some point. Sometimes plans change, or emergencies come up. During these times, it is important that group members are able to count on their leaders for guidance, or even just as someone they can come to to share their struggles. If a group member sees their leader actually living out their values, they see that their leader is actually making an effort to lead well.

Another huge part of integrity is honesty. Leaders must always be honest with their group, even when it is difficult (Shotton, 2011). For example, if the leader makes a mistake, they should be honest with their group about it. However, there is another aspect to honesty. When the leader is relaying information to the group, they should always tell the truth. For example, if a plan changes, or if there will be possible cuts to the team, the leader should be transparent with their group. It is not always easy to tell the truth. If a leader has to share a difficult decision with the group, there may be a fear of backlash. However, even when it is not easy, the leader must be honest. This helps build trust within the group.

Finally, a leader should always be themselves. This helps build integrity. It is much harder for a leader to build trust and integrity if they

are attempting to be someone they are not (Shotton, 2011). Leaders should let their group know their values and then live them. Areas of weakness are opportunities for growth, no one is perfect. If leaders ask for feedback in these areas instead of trying to hide them, they will grow as a leader, and so too will their integrity. People want to follow leaders who are actually living out their values.

Mission/Vision

A mission is a short explanation of why the group was created (Seemiller, 2013). Essentially the reason for your group's existence. It is the group's purpose, and what they are working toward. The vision is basically the same thing as the mission: the purpose of the group, although often the vision is simply an idea that someone has (Shotton, 2011), it isn't necessarily a formalized statement. Without a mission or vision, there would be no group.

A mission should be clear and concise (Seemiller, 2013). However, it must also be detailed enough to be meaningful. The mission should simply outline the group's purpose, and their values. The mission could also include a description of how the group will achieve their purpose. For example, the mission of Discover Leadership is to create more leaders. It may also include that they do this through a six-week class focused on

providing hands-on experiences, and opportunities to grow essential leadership skills. This would highlight the purpose and values of Discover Leadership in a short easy to memorize statement. A mission should not be longer than a few sentences to a paragraph. This is because it should be easy to read and memorize so that everyone can know and understand the mission.

Once a mission has been established, there should also be goals for reaching the mission (Seemiller, 2013). This further defines the group's purpose and lets members know what they are working towards. It also establishes roles and gives the group direction. Also, once the group meets these goals, they will know they have reached their mission. Furthermore, there should also be plans for how to reach each goal. If the goals are broken into smaller goals or plans, they will be more attainable. It will also give each member a specific plan for each day, that way they have a clearer idea of what they should be doing. As they meet these smaller goals, and eventually the larger goals, the group will know they have achieved their mission.

Finally, people want to follow a visionary leader. It is often said that humans are creatures of habit, and with habit also comes structure. A visionary leader is someone who has a plan. They have an idea of what the group is working towards and how to achieve the group goals (Burchard,

2003). This means they have a plan of action, which will give the group members structure, and a clear idea of what they should be doing and when. Furthermore, people want to feel like they have purpose. They want to work towards something. A visionary leader can give them something to work towards. People want to be a part of a group that has a reason for existing.

Initiative

A leader who shows initiative is someone who is a self-starter (Shotton, 2011). If they have a goal, they begin to work towards that goal. If they see something that needs to be done, they do it, or delegate that task to someone else in their group. They do not wait for others to tell them what to do. The leader should be the one who sets the example. They should be the one who starts working towards their goal. While a leader should rely on their group to get things done, they should not rely on their group to tell them what to do.

It is natural to ask for help. No one has all of the answers, not even the leader. However, leaders must also be independent. They cannot simply wait around for others to come help them (Shotton, 2011). Others may not even realize that the leader needs help, yet on a deeper level, it should be the leader who recognizes that they need help. A leader should

know when they need help, and when they recognize that they are struggling, they should reach out to someone.

Initiative is extremely important: leaders must be able to start things on their own without waiting for others to tell them what to do. However, initiative also requires follow through (Shotton, 2011). Follow-through is important for everyone, but especially a leader. For example, if a leader starts a new project, and they've prepared their group and come up with a plan, they should finish that project. It may not be easy, in fact it will almost always be difficult, yet the leader should still push through the challenges and finish what they've started. If there is a legitimate reason why the project cannot be finished, the leader should come before their group and explain that reason. A leader who finishes what they've started is more reliable, and people want to follow a leader they can count on.

Leaders should be able to see a need, and fill it (Shotton, 2011). For example, someone may notice that there are a lot of homeless people in their community. They may then start a nonprofit organization that will provide food and shelter to the homeless. In terms of student leadership, someone may be really interested in chess, but while Western does have a board game club, there is not one specifically focused on chess. The student may then start a club dedicated to chess. A Destination Western Peer Advisor may see a new student sitting alone at breakfast, so they may go

talk to that student. These are just a few examples of how a leader could see a need and fill it. Leaders must be self-starters, and when they see a need around them, they must step up, take the lead, and fulfill that need.

Altruism

Leaders aren't here for themselves, they are here to serve others (Shotton, 2011). A destination Western Peer Advisor is there to help new students adjust to college. Destination Western Cohort Leads are there to help new students adjust to college, but they are also there to make sure the other peer advisors in their cohort feel supported and are able to lead. Campus Ambassadors are there to give students a glimpse of what it would be like to come to Western. As we can see from these examples, the job of a leader is to serve, and be there for others. It is entirely possible to enjoy leadership positions, and leaders may be rewarded for their work with money or some other reward. But our focus as leaders should always be on others.

Leaders should lead with kindness and compassion. As leaders we should be focused on serving others (Shotton, 2011), their desire should not be for power and control. In leadership there is a term for this: servant leadership. Servant leadership is a type of leadership that focuses solely on others (Shotton, 2011). Servant leaders always ask how they can put others

first. They do not seek to control others. Rather they seek to guide others and improve their lives. Servant leaders are kind and compassionate. They listen to others' needs and seek to fill those needs. If they must criticize others, it is done with the intention of helping them grow.

It is not always easy to focus on others. Everyone has their own hopes, dreams, and desires. Sometimes our desires conflict with those we are leading (Shotton, 2011). For example, a DW PA may wish to go to their room and rest, but there may be a new student who is in need of someone to talk to. It can be easy to simply say "I will talk to you tomorrow; I am going to rest right now." However, this would not be putting others first. Obviously, leaders need rest. They need time to themselves, and sometimes they must put their own needs first, that way they have enough strength left to help others, but there should be a balance, because they must prioritize others (Shotton, 2011).

Finally, altruism involves some level of self-sacrifice (Shotton, 2011). When we think of self-sacrifice, we often think of giving up a large amount of our time or money, or even risking our lives for another. However, it is often much smaller than that. For example, a peer advisor may need to comfort a homesick student, when all they want is to return to their room for the night. This is self-sacrifice, although on a much smaller scale. As previously mentioned, it is not easy to focus on others. In fact, it can often

be difficult. However, yes, it is the right thing to do, but the reward is also worth it. While there were times where I had to go to bed late, because I had to help a new student, watching that student thrive was a wonderful reward for my loss of sleep. When we as leaders serve others, and those that we serve thrive, it makes every sacrifice we've made worth it.

Accountability

Accountability means taking responsibility for one's actions (Shotton, 2011). If someone with accountability made a mistake, they would own up to it and ask what they could do to fix it. If there was a problem within the group, instead of blaming others for the problem, someone with accountability would work to come up with a solution. Someone with accountability would also welcome and accept both positive and negative feedback, and learn from it (Shotton, 2011). Also, if someone with accountability said they would do something, they would actually do it, or maybe even ask others to hold them accountable if they don't do it (Shotton, 2011).

Leaders should be accountable for their own actions. It sets a good example for others, but it makes them more trustworthy, because group members will know they have a leader they can count on (Shotton, 2011). However, the leader should also promote accountability within their group.

Group members should be asked to own up to their mistakes and accept and learn from both positive and negative feedback. This creates a positive team environment, but it also helps ensure that people are actually doing their work, and doing it well (Shotton, 2011). Also, it gives team members a chance to learn and grow.

Mistakes should be used as a learning opportunity. No one is perfect, at some point, everyone is bound to make a mistake. It is important to let these mistakes happen; leaders should let their group members fail. However, they should also be learning from their failures (Shotton, 2011). When someone makes a mistake, they should own up to it. This helps group members recognize when they mess up and hopefully learn what not to do in the future. Furthermore, leaders should walk the person through fixing their mistake (Shotton, 2011). They should not simply fix the mistake. Rather, they should guide the person through fixing it, allowing them to do most of the work. This is how people learn.

Feedback is important. People should own up to their mistakes, but sometimes, people don't know when they've made a mistake until someone tells them (Shotton, 2011). Positive feedback is great, because it lets people know what they've done well, and also boosts their confidence. However, people learn best from negative feedback, because it lets them know where they can improve (Shotton, 2011). Leaders should let people know when

they're making mistakes if the person does not catch them on their own. This is essential for the person to be able to grow. Group members should be encouraged to accept negative feedback and learn from it.

Courage

As much as we don't like it, fear is a normal part of human life. From little things like spiders, all the way to fear of the ocean, or fear of speaking in front of others, everyone has something they're afraid of. This is even true for leaders. Though they may seem brave and fearless, leaders too have fears (Shotton, 2011). What is important is not that leaders are not afraid, but that they face their fears. A courageous leader is a leader who faces their fears (Shotton, 2011).

Since leaders are humans, they will likely experience fear as a leader at some point. One common fear for leaders is failure (Shotton, 2011). Leaders want to do the right thing and serve others. They may feel that if they fail, they are letting those that follow them down, or simply that they are a bad leader for not getting everything right. Leaders also often fear abandonment (Shotton, 2011). They may feel that no one will want to follow them, or as they gain followers, they may be afraid that people will suddenly stop following them. Fear is inevitable, so it is important that

leaders are able to face their fears. The following are some steps that leaders can follow to help them build courage.

Identify Your Fears: In order to face your fears, you must first admit that there is something you are afraid of (Shotton, 2011). This is not easy, because we often hide our fears either because we don't want others to notice them, or because we do not wish to face them. However, if we are going to face our fears, we must admit that we're afraid and know what we're afraid of.

Assess What You Need and Gather Resources: Once you know what you're afraid of, you must figure out what you need to face your fears. There are plenty of resources available, you just need to figure out what works best for you. Some examples of resources include mentors, guided practice, and books and articles in your specific area (Shotton, 2011). Figure out what will best prepare you to face your fears.

Do a few Dry Runs: Before actually facing your fears, doing a few practice runs can be helpful (Shotton, 2011). This will give you a chance to prepare in a low stress situation, where you can have multiple chances to improve. For example, if you are afraid of public speaking, it may be helpful to practice with a mentor before actually giving a speech in front of a crowd.

Face Your Fears: Once you've had time to look to others for help and practice facing your fears, it's time to actually face your fears (Shotton, 2011). Make sure you are calm and relaxed. Then go out, and do the best you can (Shotton, 2011). It's okay if it doesn't go perfectly the first time.

Learn From Your Mistakes: Once you've actually faced your fears, take time to evaluate. Ask yourself what went well, and what you need to improve for next time (Shotton, 2011). Maybe even ask others if you aren't sure. Learn from your mistakes and make a plan for how you will improve in the future.

Encourage/Empower

People want to be a part of something. They want to feel as though they are working toward something bigger than themselves. One way leaders can help people feel as though they are a part of something bigger is to encourage and empower their followers (Burchard, 2003).

Encouragement and empowerment are very similar. They are both about lifting people up. When a leader encourages one of their followers, they are letting them know what they are doing well and giving them confidence to keep going (Burchard, 2003). When a leader empowers a follower, they are giving them the confidence they need to keep going, but also to reach

further and further out of their comfort zone, and to be more independent, and more involved in how things are run (Burchard, 2003).

People need encouragement. It helps them keep going when they're struggling, and it gives them confidence (Burchard, 2003). Leaders must encourage their followers. When they notice that someone is doing something well, the leader should let that person know. If a person is struggling, the leader should encourage that person to keep going. When people are told they are doing well, they are more likely to continue on the right track, and keep improving (Burchard, 2003). Negative feedback is important, because it lets people know where they can improve. However, positive feedback is also important, because it gives people confidence.

In order to empower their followers, leaders must give them opportunities to get involved (Burchard, 2003). If the leader must make a decision, as long as that decision is not an urgent decision the leader should involve their followers in the decision-making process (Burchard, 2003). The leader should make sure everyone's voice is heard. The opinions of the group should be considered. Also, if someone is doing well, they should be given a higher position within the group. This incentivizes hard work and ensures that those who are doing well can succeed.

Leaders should also encourage participation from everyone in the group. If a leader is involving everyone in the decision-making process, and

they notice that someone is not participating, they should ask for that person's opinion (Burchard, 2003). While the leader should listen to everyone in their group, and consider all opinions, they should focus mostly on getting those who don't often participate to speak. This ensures that everyone is being empowered.

Self-Awareness

In order to lead effectively, leaders must have some self-awareness. Self-awareness refers to how well a person knows themselves (Seemiller, 2013). In order to lead others, leaders must be able to understand themselves. They need to know their strengths and weaknesses, so that they know what they're capable of. They need to know their limits, so that when they need to, they are able to reach out to others for help. A leader who is self-aware knows what they are good at, and what they need to improve on so that they can know where they may need to rely more on their group (Seemiller, 2013).

A leader must know their strengths and weaknesses. This will help them know what skills they bring to the table, what skills they can improve, and where they must rely on their group (Seemiller, 2013). For example, if a leader is great at communicating they will be able to promote this within their group, but if they are not great at accepting criticism, they will need to

work on that to improve as a leader. Furthermore, if that leader is also not great with social media, that could be an area where they need to rely on their group. Leaders must also know what they value, that way their leadership can reflect their values.

A leader's vision should reflect their values (Seemiller, 2013). For example, let's say a person values helping others. If they start and organization that ends up dumping harmful chemicals in the water, their organization would be directly in conflict with their values. This is a large example, but there are many examples that are much smaller. If a person really values making sure that everyone's voice is heard, but then they start a one-sided political club on campus that does not respect everyone's views, their values would be in conflict with their club. A leader must know their values, and ensure that their vision aligns with their values, because they will be a better leader if their leadership reflects their values. People will have a clear direction, and they will feel as though they are actually working toward something (Seemiller, 2013).

Finally, a leader who is self-aware is always growing (Seemiller, 2013). They know what they are not good at, and they seek to improve. Yes, everyone is not perfect, and we will not all be good at everything, but we can still improve the things we are not good at. A self-aware leader recognizes this, and works to improve their weaknesses. Furthermore, they

also see feedback as a learning opportunity. They accept and welcome negative feedback, because it will help them learn and grow.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is an essential skill. However, while critical thinking is something that is often talked about, many people overlook just how important it actually is, and people who can actually think critically are becoming fewer and fewer. Critical thinking refers to the ability to think for oneself (Covey & Marquet, 2013). People who can think critically are able to carefully think through problems to come up with a well-thought-out solution. They are able to determine what information they need and then gather that information. Those with the ability to think critically are able to do things on their own without constantly deferring to someone above them. Critical thinking is important for both leaders and followers.

Critical Thinking for Leaders

The leader is the decision maker. As we will discuss in the next two parts of the critical thinking section, it is perfectly acceptable, and in fact encouraged, to involve group members in the decision-making process (Covey & Marquet, 2013). However, the leader has the final say (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). They must be able to think through decisions carefully, in order to choose the best option for the group. If there is a problem, the

leader must be able to carefully think through it in order to come up with the best solution.

Leaders do not know everything. There will be times when they need more information to make a decision or solve a problem. At these times, the leader will need to be able to find that information, without simply waiting around for someone to give it to them (Seemiller, 2013). They will first need to identify what information they still need. Then they will need to go out and gather that information, often sifting through irrelevant information in order to find what they need. They must be able to determine what information will help them, and what information is false or irrelevant. Once they have gathered information, they must use it to make an informed decision or come up with a solution to their problem.

Leaders must also be able to delegate tasks. They are not able to do everything on their own, which is why they have other group members. It is the leader's job to create and assign roles within their group (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). In order to do this, the leader must assess their group members' strengths and weaknesses, to give each group member the role that would be the best fit for them. Once each group member has been given a role, the leader can then assign tasks to each person. It is important that the leader understands that their group members must be allowed to

perform their tasks on their own. After all, this was the reason the person was given the task (Winget & Wakeman, 2010).

Critical Thinking for Followers

Critical thinking is not only important for leaders. Followers must also be able to think critically (Covey & Marquet, 2013). It is the job of the leader to promote critical thinking within their group. They should coach their members, helping them work through problems rather than simply solving them themselves (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). Leaders should also give group members opportunities to do things on their own. This is how people learn and grow in their roles.

People must be allowed to fully step into their roles. As a leader, it can be easy to want to manage everything. This often leads to the leader taking over in an attempt to do everything on their own. However, the whole reason they have additional group members is so that they do not have to do everything (Winget & Wakeman, 2010). People will not be able to think for themselves if they are not able to perform their assigned duties with independence. For this reason, it is essential that leaders take a step back and allow their group members to do things on their own.

Leaders can also promote critical thinking within their group by involving them in the decision-making process (Covey & Marquet, 2013).

As long as the decision is not urgent, the leader should work through the decision with their group. They should have group members consider all options carefully and have them weigh the pros and cons of each. Also, problems, as long as they are not urgent, present additional opportunities to further critical thinking. Leaders should work through problems with their group, guiding them as they come up with a solution.

In order for group members to grow their critical thinking skills, they must have some control. They must be given opportunities to perform tasks and solve problems on their own. However, before the leader can give their group members control, they must ensure that their group has all of the training they need, and that they are competent in their roles.

Clarity Competence and Control

When a leader gives their group members control, they are simply allowing them to do things on their own, with little supervision (Covey & Marquet, 2013). In order to do this, the leader should allow their members to fully step into their role and also be involved in the decision-making process. The leader should eliminate top-down monitoring systems. They may need to determine their organization's process for making decisions, that way they can change it so that followers can help make decisions (Covey & Marquet, 2013). Furthermore, group members should be encouraged to think out loud using the "I intend to" method. This basically

means that group members must state what they are going to do before they do it, which will give them opportunities to notice errors and receive feedback (Covey & Marquet, 2013). It also makes sure everyone is on the same page about what is going on within the group.

In order for group members to have control, they must also have clarity and competence. Clarity just means that group members have all of the information they need to perform their tasks (Covey & Marquet, 2013). As a leader, you have a lot of knowledge. You should pass that knowledge onto your group, that way they have what they need to succeed in their role. Also, if a person is doing well, it is important to recognize them right away, that way they are on the right track. It is also important to make the end goal clear, that way people know what they are trying to do, and what they are working towards (Covey & Marquet, 2013). People should also be encouraged to ask questions, not just blindly obey orders (Covey & Marquet, 2013). The leader is not always right. Sometimes the only way they know they are wrong is when someone questions them. If a leader makes a poor decision, and they are not questioned, that decision could have unexpected and potentially harmful consequences.

If someone is competent, it means that they have the skills needed to perform their role (Covey & Marquet, 2013). In order to achieve competence, training should be engaging. Instead of briefing, the leader

should certify (Covey & Marquet, 2013). It is important to ensure that group members actually know what they are doing. Leaders should also focus on improvement, not just avoiding errors. People can learn anytime, not just in training. Also, people may have different methods for completing tasks other than the ones specified in training. Sometimes they may even have methods that work better. For this reason, leaders should specify the end goal, but not the methods that should be used (Covey & Marquet, 2013). This allows people to experiment and try new things, and possibly even discover methods that work much better.

Critical thinking is essential for both leaders and followers. Leaders are the decision makers, so they must be able to carefully think through decisions. However, if group members are able to think for themselves, they will be able to do things on their own without constant supervision. Yet in order for group members to do things on their own, they also need clarity and competence.

Final Thoughts

There are many qualities that make a good leader. The ones I discussed in the previous section are simply the ones that I believe are most important. That does not however discount the qualities that others believe are most important, and it is not just these ten qualities that make a good leader. As we can see from the first section of this discussion, many people have tried to compile lists of what they believe are the most important leadership qualities, and each person's list is different.

It is also important to understand that leadership takes practice. People do not become good leaders overnight. Leaders spend years learning and growing. They often fail many times along the way, but when they accept feedback from others they improve. It is the experiences along the way that make them great leaders. Yet it is important to understand that even after years of experience, leaders are still not perfect. They will still have times where they fail and that is okay.

I would now like to leave one final note about critical thinking, for I have placed a lot of emphasis on it throughout this discussion. I believe that critical thinking is important now more than ever. We have access to so much information, and we must be able to determine what information is true and relevant to us. Furthermore, as we become more reliant on

technology, we must not lose the ability to think for ourselves and solve problems on our own.

In our ever-changing world, good leaders have never been more important. Leaders influence everyone. They can be found in almost every part of our lives – from teachers, to the government, to managers at work. Leaders are people that tell us what to do, but they are also people that we look up to for advice. For this reason, it is important that leaders lead well. Leaders are human, and therefore not perfect, but they should always strive to be a positive example for those that look up to them.

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