Personal Philosophy of Leadership

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As professional counselors we are given the responsibility of gatekeeper. As counselor educators we lead in a different manner. When I consider leadership and my view of leadership, I consider how I lead as a clinical supervisor and how I manage my private practice. I think the way I lead in those areas of my life is also how I will lead in academia. Until I read Chang et al (2012), I really had never thought about my leadership approach being a particular style. However, I now consider my leadership approach as a mixture of Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) and Chi Sigma Iota – Servant Leadership. I firmly believe that the way leaders and members of groups interact can build up or tear down a person’s performance, satisfaction and fulfillment. Therefore, as a Christian, I am committed to following Jesus’ leadership style. That leadership style required me to lead by being a servant (Mark 10:43-45 ESV).

I arrived at this belief from two main influences, both of which stem from my childhood. First, I grew up as a minister’s kid. My father was in the position of supporting the pastor of the church. I would go with my father early to the church to help him open the church and then I would stay late and help him close the church. I watched him interact with the members, the staff, and the pastor. I saw how he would resolve church member conflicts. Many times, I would ask why he would be kind to those who were being so rude and disrespectful to him and to others. His response was, “you can get more with honey than with vinegar.” I saw him move from a church-staff position to lead an independent non-profit ministry. I have seen him work with this same mantra. Second is my faith. Christians are to live as Christ lived. The Bible teaches us throughout the New Testament that Jesus was first a servant to all with whom He came into contact. From this servant position He became a true leader. This leadership style was woven into my teachings through church, church leaders, and my parents. It has continued as I study God’s teachings on my own.

My beliefs have been further shaped as I grew in my knowledge throughout my master’s degree Program in Liberty’s Counseling program. I recall one of my professors telling us to remember to keep one ear on our client and one ear on what God is directing us to say in the session. This teaching was early in my education and I have not forgotten it, though sadly I have forgotten the professor’s name. It continued when I received my training to become a Supervisor in the state of Texas. As I supervised my first intern, I remembered my hesitations of not wanting to cause her an issue. I wanted to do everything just right. I spoke with my dad and he reminded me to just speak with her as a client and meet her where she was, as I did my clients – the LMX model. What great advice! Since then I have helped three interns get their license and helped another submit her paperwork. Finally, in the Liberty PhD program, most professors have used the servant-leadership model. The professors truly care about their students. I desire to be that kind of professors, one from whom a student walks away knowing they are important and a professor cares about them. I expect the best, but I care. I have seen that model demonstrated repeatedly at Liberty University. It is a leadership style I truly desire to replicate in my teaching, counseling, and mentoring interns.

When I began to supervise interns my goal was to help them develop into counselors who had a true desire to help their clients make long-lasting changes. In the past, I had been on the side of sitting on the couch. I had therapists who ridiculed and talked down because they felt as though their way was better than mine. Some felt they needed to go back into my childhood instead of starting where I was. It made me not want to return to therapy. Instead I self-medicated and spent many years suffering in a trauma that could have been solved had a therapist truly cared. For this reason, when I supervise interns and we discuss topics the intern finds difficult, we really discuss their issues with the topics and how our discussion comes across to them and how our discussion might affect them returning.

As I have worked with supervisors who will one day become counselors, I have realized how much I miss teaching. I find myself wondering, if I can help one or two, what might possibly happen with a class?

In the post-secondary, a good leader become even more important. Post-secondary students usually have a greater desire to be in the class and program. That requires the leader/teacher to be prepared for the responsibilities of leading. Students depend on their leaders to guide them on the right track and in the right direction. If the leader fails in any area, they not only fail themselves, but also the student. It is similar to my supervisees; they are expecting me to meet certain requirements. If I do not meet those requirements, it costs them their license. If I don’t meet certain requirements for my students, it could cost them their licenses, hours, or graduation.

**Impact and Influence**

Since receiving my Texas LPC in 2012, I have worked with over 500 clients. I have an average of 10 to 20 who will return from time to time for check-in sessions or just to give me an update and check in on me. I have had one client who told me his psychiatrist only refers clients to me and that the psychiatrist gives me high marks. Another therapist’s office typically refers to me when they are over-booked. Currently my schedule is consistently full. I am a part of the Continental Who’s Who in Counseling. I am a member of the International Counseling Association. I have received many good marks from OnTrack EAP. I have worked with about 10+ interns since receiving my supervision license in Texas.

I am waiting to hear from some that want to work with me after they receive their LPC-I from Texas. One of my interns is going to join my staff when she receives her LPC from the state. Our goal is to use her influence as a school counselor and our combined connections with the Behavioral School Specialist to begin group counseling for Medicaid students, which is her passion. My interns have learned to take time and pray before making any decisions when working with me. We have discussed many times the joy of patience in times of turmoil.

During my PhD studies I have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Edwards for two semesters in supervision. It has been a joy to learn faculty supervision, which is a different skill from supervising interns. Dr. Edwards has taught me that I employ the southern style of over explaining, which is something I have tried to work on when giving feedback. We have had good laughs about how the leadership is different, but I believe I have learned how to find the right pace which is primary in the graduate level. I believe the students have picked up on me finding the pace as well.

**Future Aspirations**

In order to continue growing and developing as a leader it is important to a person to learn from those who are greater and have more experience. For example, Liberty provided training for tele-health for the master’s students. While I do not need this training, per se, the Louisiana Licensing Board requires some form of training. My thought is I experience this training, observe what the students that I am helping teach are experiencing, and to learn from those who have a PhD how to be comfortable speaking in front of a large group since this is something with which I struggle. I watched the webinar. It was a great refresher and also helped in the areas where I needed help.

I am most interested in learning about teaching and learning in post-secondary education for several reasons. First, students desire to be in post-secondary education and are working toward their career path. Second and most important, I am considering a change or slight adjustment in the counseling profession. If I can teach counselors to see counseling a little differently, to experience it as a passion, live for the joy of spending life doing what they really enjoy, and in the process help someone improve their life, that is a good day and a good life. If they can remember counselors cannot change people. Only people can change themselves. However, the counselor with passion can be a part of the process they minute them are invited by the client to join them in the journey. The counselor with passion will consider the invitation a joy and a privilege.

The changes I hope to inspire is for counselors who have been in the field a long time and have forgotten why they began to dream again the reason they first became counselors. Each started down this path for a reason. Most started because they cared about people and saw a way to help. I remember when God called me on this path. I argued for several five years before surrendering. Supervision, the teaching internship and the supervision internship have reminded me why I began my path. The master’s level students can help renew the dream in all of us. Or, at least they should.

My future goals and aspirations are to go in the direction that God leads me. That’s the easy answer. I have a nonprofit that works in human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault. I really want to research pornography and its connection to these areas. I’m already connected with Dr. Reismann and her team with some of this research. Depending on how my dissertation develops, I may go deeper in that area since that seems to be open. Those are the directions with regards to research. I see myself teaching full time with a college or University as God leads. As far as my current practice, it will go to tele-health if I move forward in teaching. Or with the Coronavirus, it may close. I trust God as He opened it. It is His.

References

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ESV: Study Bible : English standard version. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles.