My Education of Leadership

There have been many leaders who have influenced my life, some good and some bad. It is easy to think of historically great leaders, but it is the people I have worked with over the years who have actually impacted my life. One of those people of influence was my previous boss Lee Byers. He was not an extremely rich or powerful man, not someone who will be remembered through a history book, but the methods of leadership he practiced will stick with me.

The first time I met Lee was during my working interview as an SUU scoreboard technician. I had heard about the job through a friend in the Communications Department, and asked Lee if I could still apply despite my lack of technical knowledge. Since he knew I did not have much experience, he took the time to go over the basics of the equipment and the goals of the team. As I took my first turn on the game camera, Lee watched over my shoulder and gave me helpful critique. Once the game was over he let me know I was hired, going over his expectations of the crew for the season.

I believe this kind of interaction is important because it establishes the relationship between employee and superior. Lee established trust by teaching me instead of just expecting me to catch onto something new. The other important part of this first introduction is that though he was nice, he still retained authority by giving me constructive criticism and telling me what he expected. After the first two games, Lee allowed his more experienced students to take over as game managers. He allowed them full control over the cameras and streaming, only periodically stepping in with advice. This created students with the knowledge to run a functioning broadcast team, while still maintaining a high quality product. That job taught me a lot about teamwork, as well as teaching me some things about leadership.

Many managers I have worked with have lacked the balance between authority and a good relationships. They have either become friends or enemies, both of which limit productivity in employees. The first because it throws expected standards out the window to excuses and lack of motivation. The second because fear does not promote inspiration but fosters resentment toward superiors and eventually the company. Too friendly, and managers produce a stagnant workplace since employees know they can get away with minimal effort. Too strict, and they eliminate loyalty and instead produce a hostile environment. I try really hard to balance the two concepts in my own leadership.

What I have learned is that different positions make this balance difficult, because different styles are more effective in some positions than others. Despite wanting to balance friendship and authority, sometimes a heavy establishment of authority is necessary. My experience lifeguarding has taught me that. Respect, especially with fourteen year olds at scout camp, needed to be earned quickly and forcefully. Safety was the priority, so I relied on fear tactics to get the kids to listen. The unfortunate side effect of this method was obtaining the reputation of being “dictatorial.” Sometimes gender roles are unfair. A strong male is considered intelligent and respectable while the same in a female is considered overbearing. Because of this common social stigma, and my habit of falling back on authoritarianism, I need to be conscious of who I am leading and when to soften my attitude.

To be brutally honest to myself, I think I often perform roles of a leader without taking the title so I can do things without the responsibility of failure. One of my biggest problems is self-doubt. I may want to be in charge, but I am so worried about making a mistake that I never take the leap forward into the uncomfortable, scary process of learning. This doubt also makes it difficult for me to keep a positive attitude, which is one of the areas I scored low on during our leadership assessment tests.

The tests we took during our leadership week turned out to be quite useful to me. Because I knew some of my weaknesses going into the group project, I had better control of them. I knew my communication with the group needed improvement, so I tried really hard to communicate my ideas and opinions to the group. I also knew after taking the leadership style test that I am much more task oriented than relationship oriented. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is where I think the “dictatorial” term comes from. I would rather have something done right and on time than make a new friend. (Robins & Hunsaker, 2009)

The test also gave me some positive results back. My ethics and seek for improvement are what I believe drive me toward success. I want things done correctly and to the best of my ability, but I can always find something to do better the next time. Improvement is necessary for success because change is needed for a business to grow. Programs are often successful in subsequent events because improvements have been implemented.

As I have come to find, my leadership skills need a lot of improvement. The only way to do this is through practice; therefore, I need to suck it up, push away the self-doubt, and learn. This is where role models help. Without leaders like Lee Byers, or any others who inspire, I would not know the outcomes of good leadership. Because I saw what a balance between a good relationship and authority can do for a working environment, I want the ability to create a similar situation. The difference between a manager and a leader is the ability to inspire. There are many managers in the world who succeed by controlling quality and coping with change, but the leaders are at the forefront of change (Kotter, 1990). They inspire employees to do their best and follow the same vision. I have seen effective management. I have been inspired by effective leadership. I want to inspire.

Works Cited

Robins, Stephen, R. and Phillip L. Hunsaker. *Training in Interpersonal Skills: TIPS for Managing People at Work.* 5th ed. (2009) Pearson Prentice Hall.

Kotter, J.P. (1990). What Leaders Really Do. *Harvard Business Review*, 103-111.