

History of Leadership

My experience in a formal leadership position is limited to church and ministry; I have not had the opportunity to be a leader in my scientific research vocation. Most of my leadership positions were as a small group leader, mainly for university students and young adults. My responsibilities were to connect with the people in the small group, prepare/lead the Bible studies, and help plan various events for the groups. I served in this role for about 3-4 years altogether. When I took on this role, I didn't receive much training or guidance so I figured out my own style of leading as the years went on. I made many mistakes as I was learning more about discipling others, and at the end of it I became jaded when the church community fell apart due to internal strife. I haven't taken up a leadership role since then, and I have just focused on growing in God. I believe that I was too focused on serving others without being replenished and grounded in Christ, leading me to run my spiritual tank empty for a long time. The mentorship group that is required in this class is the first time being in any "leadership/mentor" role since 2020.

Current Self-Assessment

From the Maxwell Leadership assessment,¹ I have learned that in the past I have established myself as a Level 1 Positional Leader, but I have not mastered being a Level 2 relational leader.

I have a desire to build relationships with the people I do ministry with, and in the beginning I was much more intentional about trying to go deep with my fellow team members.

¹ Maxwell, *The 5 Levels of Leadership*, 1-34.

However, I hit relational burn out very fast and I have lost the energy to keep deeply connecting with others. Although I don't view my leadership as purely positional and I value others, I have also struggled to learn how to have healthy ministry-relationships. In a church setting, I think I also blurred the lines between a ministry relationship and a family relationship. My natural tendency is to focus on the softer side of leadership in a ministry context, but when I had to make a hard decision as a small group leader and confront someone who was being spiritually abusive to another small group member, the community distanced itself from me because they believed that I was not displaying grace. The disappointment of losing support because the community could not handle difficulty and transparency was my breaking point as a leader. I didn't have the energy or morale to recover, and since my leadership role was ending anyway I walked away from leadership for a while.

I have changed a lot since my last leadership role, and my experiences have made me more intimidated to pursue relational leadership. I know that it is an essential part of leadership, so I have avoided any sort of leadership roles until I made peace with the negative feelings of the past. As I am healing and looking forward, I understand that I must approach ministry relationships differently than I would approach my relationships with my closest friends. It was a mistake trying to view people as if they were family, because the relationship is not one of unconditional love. Ministry and work leadership must ultimately be focused on a goal and relationships need a balance of care and candor in order to be healthy and successful. I also recognize that my values were not aligned with that of my previous church community, and I want to be a leader in a place where discipline and accountability are present. A church or ministry without proper accountability is dysfunctional, and it cannot fully thrive.

Strengths and Leadership Style

Just like Maxwell, I believe that I am more naturally inclined towards soft leadership skills. I do not struggle with valuing others or being possessive/oppressive with my leadership position. I'm not as concerned with needing a leadership position to have a sense of accomplishment, and I am more focused on achieving the goal. From feedback in my previous work and ministry experiences, I do not struggle with likability and I'm a very approachable person. I'm not hard on people and I have a lot of patience when dealing with others. I like to come alongside people when doing tasks, because I don't believe a leader should sit on a pedestal and lead without example. As a result, I believe that I have a gentler people-oriented leadership style.

Critique from Others and Areas of Improvement

After asking my closest friends and people who have seen me in a leadership context, I have been able to identify some recurring blind spots in my soul and leadership:

Communication

- Validating Others' Experiences: When someone shares something that is mildly or moderately difficult, instead of affirming them I sometimes tell people that it could be worse in an attempt to make them feel better. This can make people feel dismissed when they may just want affirmation for what they are going through.
- Giving Others Compliments and Affirmation: I am not good at affirming people for specific things they are good at, and I prefer much more general compliments. As a leader, I should be better at recognizing the talents of others and reminding them that they

are seen for their talents. This way, people would feel appreciated and empowered under my leadership.

- **Checking In with Others:** I'm not naturally good at following up with others when they share something with me, because I assume that they would want space. Even in contexts of leadership, I need to be more proactive about following up with people in general for all sorts of things instead of just assuming everyone is on the same page or is okay without my help. I also need to be better at following up with people that I am serving in my ministry to show that they are heard, and that I have been thinking about/praying for them.
- **Showing Gratitude:** I have gotten better with this over the years, but I still struggle to show gratitude for others when they pick up the slack for me because I feel guilty that I was not able to do it myself. I need to understand my own limitations and show proper gratitude and humility when I need others to make up for my shortcomings.

Self-Doubt: I have struggled to believe that God can do big things through me, but I have always believed that God can do anything through others. I want to empower others to have great faith in God but my own self-doubt makes me a hypocrite. To better empower others and develop them, I must first work on and address my own identity issues.

Engagement During Small Group Facilitation: During the small group sessions, some members have shared that I could improve the discussion by asking more questions to the people who share to take the group deeper. Some have also shared that sometimes they feel that during the prayer times, people derail from the focus of the week and talk about unrelated things. They wish

that I was better at focusing the group on praying for the topic and not getting distracted. I do agree that its easier for me to teach people than it is for people to draw out deeper discussion from people.

Summary

Maxwell claims that to grow through Level 2, I need to connect with myself.² After the critique and self-assessment, I realize that I need to focus on my Self Image (doubt) and Self Improvement (communication and facilitation techniques). I must also overcome my negative past experiences, use them as a learning opportunity, and stop being intimidated by building new relationships in my next leadership opportunity.

Bibliography

Maxwell, J. C. *The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximize Your Potential*. New York, NY: Center Street, 2011.

² Maxwell, *The 5 Levels of Leadership*, 126-127.