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### Personal Philosophy of Leadership

My personal philosophy of leadership and power has been formed by many factors throughout my life. From my being in Workout all four years of my college career, to my mother and her leadership positions and style, there have been various influences that have helped to shape my approach to leadership and power. Although there are two paths that I feel called to once I graduate, those being pursuing theater in an arts leadership position or pursuing an academic advising role, I feel that both of these routes require very similar leadership styles even if they may seem very different. Through discovering my vocations and values that I hold dear, my philosophy of leadership is one of servant leadership using a mixture of the effeminate style and the Republican style.

Servant leadership has always been promoted in a Christian environment, but it was never fully explained to me either in my home or in my Christian school setting (or even practiced in some cases). Statements like “the first shall be last and the last shall be first” were used in the context of sharing toys or doing chores, but were never really used in teaching leadership styles. However as I got older and had more experience with responsibility, it became clear that there was a way to put what I was taught into an actual style of leadership.

Servant leadership is a leadership style that focuses on the needs of others. As Bethany VanBenschoten says in her article, a servant leader actively listens, develops trust and relationships within their community while also utilizing persuasion to guide people towards their goals. To be a good leader one needs to be committed to the growth of others, to want everyone to thrive and flourish. Using the example of Jesus, he was a leader who put himself in the position of a servant multiple times. He washed the disciples' feet, when it was far below his station to do so. He spent time with people who were outcast or were oppressed in their society, and advocated for them. He encouraged his followers to care for people who are disenfranchised, and I believe that using the style of a servant leader is necessary for the way I conceptualize leadership as a whole.

But what does that mean in terms of style? By this I mean in actual tangible ideas and not just repeating Christian values and phrases *ad nauseam*. In my belief, this leadership style ties into the effeminate style. While in *Eloquence in an Electronic Age* Jamieson focuses on how well the effeminate style works in the medium of television, I would argue that this style is essential to servant leadership and the interpersonal relationships that are necessary for it. This is not me saying that women make inherently better servant leaders (or are better at serving), but I am saying that a less combative style is entwined in servant leadership.

This style prioritizes connection over victory, as is found in the Fireside Chats of FDR (Jamieson, 1990). The best advocates are ones who empower others to speak, who pour into the communities around them and support them. The conversational nature and the emphasis on storytelling of the effeminate style allows for coalition building, as well as development of trust and points of connection between the leader and those they are serving.

Being a servant leader does not mean that persuasion or appearing a certain way is impossible or immoral. That is where Robert Harriman's Republican style comes into play. It may seem contradictory at first, as this style focuses so heavily on the power of the orator used for a servant. The Republican style is dependent on its audience, and a good servant leader is focused on the people they are serving. The Republican style values things like common virtue, transparency, and compromise because it is dependent on the audience's reaction.

Servant leadership depends on the reactions of the people one is serving, and as such crafting a persona that is able to connect to others and maintain humility while also being able to take charge and make decisions is necessary. This doesn't mean that a leader needs to lie about who they are, or on the flip side, always be transparent about everything. What this does mean is that servant leaders need to make themselves vulnerable and have discernment about the things that they say and the way they portray themselves. It is a delicate balancing act that is required of the leader.

But in order to be a good servant leader one must also have credibility and ethos, which is another key to the Republican style. The ethos of the orator comes from their rhetorical virtue and their practical wisdom. Being a servant leader is important, but if a leader doesn't have the ethos to back it up, they may come off as condescending or ultimately uncaring. Such leaders could be perceived as not actually caring about the communities they serve or their issues, and seen as only acting this way to make them feel good about themselves. If a leader's persona lacks ethos, the whole thing falls apart. This is not saying that a leader needs to be fake, but that the leader needs to communicate and hold themselves in a way that will get their message across, and be a trustworthy leader. "The difficulties of tending to many audiences require a personality simultaneously stable and flexible" (Harriman, 1995). Being able to read the audience and know

what tactics to use helps one be a more effective communicator, and ultimately to become a better leader.

Both the Republican style and the Effeminate style place a lot of value on storytelling. Whether that's self-disclosing part of one's own story to bring them closer to the audience, or using the stories of others to help frame the values that one holds, storytelling is essential to both styles. Being a servant leader also follows this. A key part of empathizing and uplifting others is being able to hear their stories and take them to heart, and then lead from that place of understanding. Without understanding a person, it is impossible to know what motivates them and what they need to be successful. Without that, a leader just imposes their own view on their team of what works and what doesn't, often indiscriminately. The danger here is that team members will become disconnected, disillusioned, and even disappointed when this happens. A leader who listens to people's stories has the best chance to understand their team and modulate or personalize their approach to leading each person, as well as the team as a whole, to create a cohesive community.

Moving on to my personal life and vocation (self-disclosure, if you will): in order to fully understand what has shaped and formed my personal philosophy of leadership, I must first describe Workout, which is the theater group at Wheaton College. It is a committed group of students who hold the responsibilities of putting on Arena Theater's shows. Students come from all years, majors, and backgrounds to form a cohesive group. Workout students build every part of these shows, as well as act in them. Upperclassmen take responsibility to take leadership positions in various parts of this, such as being a crew head or the stage manager, of which I have done both. More than that, it is a community where our responsibility is to care for each other and serve each other and the theater community in total. We realize that there are no "stars"

among us; rather, we all work together to form the beautiful constellation that is a theater production.

Our professors guide us in praying together, working together, and spending time together in ways that build community each and every day. While some may be on stage performing and others are building sets, position is irrelevant in Workout, in that each person has intrinsic value and their role is important. This doesn't mean that people don't have specific jobs or roles that they have to fulfill well; on the contrary, performing or doing one's job well helps to build the community. Rather, this means that we are all connected with one another and need one another to put on a production successfully.

Being in workout at Wheaton has contributed to my development both as a person and as a leader in tremendous ways over the last four years. Now as a Senior, there is a lot more responsibility given to us. It is our job to take care of the space and the people in it, and we serve the theater in a variety of ways. One example of this is we all assigned ourselves one room in the theater that would be under our care, to make sure it stayed tidy as well as available to be used by our theater. Another responsibility we have is to plan events for all of Workout, and as a senior class we have hosted events for individual classes starting when we were sophomores and continuing onward.

When I consider my four years at Wheaton College, I can say that of all experiences, being in Workout has really helped me understand servant leadership. Growing up Christian, I was always taught that we should strive to serve others, but Workout has allowed me to both see people I look up to embody this practice, and allow me to try it out for myself. Instead of people who are (for lack of a better term) "under" the seniors in terms of hierarchy taking on the brunt

of the work and reporting upwards in a top-down style, it is the leaders who take on these responsibilities and tasks.

In addition to what I have learned through Workout about leadership, my mother, Dr. Lynn Swaner, has a large influence in how I move through the world today. She is a scholar and a strategist who has two decades of experience with executive leadership in both nonprofits and educational institutions (Cardus, 2024). She has done a lot of work on how leadership, relationships, and flourishing happens in school and in education. Although she has not always held a senior position in an organization, she has always written extensively on her research and shared her findings at various conferences over the years. One of the things that I really took from my mother's experience is that, even though she has a doctorate in education from Teachers College/Columbia University, she did not stop there. At the age of 48, she returned to school to earn a Diploma in Strategy and Innovation from the University of Oxford's business school, which required her to travel to Oxford four times for a week, each for classes, plus writing papers and taking exams in between those weeks.

When I interviewed her and asked her why she decided to pursue this additional degree, she explained it wasn't because she needed it for a job, a promotion, or a new leadership role. Instead she explained, "I went back to do this diploma because I really wanted to keep learning. I wanted to add a new lens to my leadership, and although I had a degree in organization and leadership, I didn't have anything on the business side. This diploma really challenged me and helped me to keep growing at a time in my career when it would've been easy to keep coasting and rest on my laurels, so to speak." This deep love of learning and emphasis on continuing to grow as a leader is something that I have appreciated and learned from my mother. It would be

easy to view leadership as a character trait or something that is fixed or innate, but I've learned from my mother that this is something that a person continues to develop over a lifetime.

The lesson to be had here is that a good leader keeps growing, stretching, and learning new things. The side benefit is humility, as my mother explained: "When you view yourself as a lifelong learner, it keeps you humble. You realize there is always more to learn and you can continue growing. When leaders become calcified in their skills, they're in danger of becoming prideful. People see right through pride and ego. If the leader is trying to lead genuinely and authentically, learning is the key to staying humble and continuing to build a culture of continual improvement in one's organization and field."

One of my mother's emphases is bringing others along in the leadership journey. As she explains in a [blog post](#): "We know how tremendous an honor and blessing it is to play a small part in God's plan for someone to fulfill their calling. We can do this more intentionally by looking around at our teams and asking ourselves, who do we need to say 'yes' to—particularly those who are worthy of a 'yes,' but may not have had the same opportunities for leadership? Who is deserving of and needs an open door to take on additional responsibility or a new role?" (Swaner, 2020). This is servant leadership and the effeminate style of using power in action. It is an invitational approach that seeks the good of those on one's team, that seeks to develop them and help them to grow. Most important is that this style looks to identify those who are perhaps overlooked—those who aren't the loudest or flashiest. It looks beyond appearances to see how God has gifted each individual and puts the leader in the position of cultivator and nurturer of those gifts and abilities. Interestingly, in this same blog post, my mother shares her unconventional story of how she became a leader. Again, both the Republican style and the Effeminate style place a lot of value on storytelling.

As I move from the major influences that have shaped my leadership style and view of power to my vocational interests and how I will use these in my career, I can identify two vocational interests that I am considering for the future. The first is continuing my passion for theater by obtaining a masters in arts leadership. This is different from a masters in fine arts, which would mostly entail me solely acting. Perhaps unsurprisingly given my leadership philosophy, the masters I am considering would have me more in the background of the theater versus up front on the stage. Although I would still be in a position of power, it would be quite literally “behind the scenes.” I would be working on productions and keeping the theater running, but I would not be in the spotlight, except perhaps on rare occasions.

This connects directly in terms of servant leadership: “As a theatre director, one gets little attention comparatively, but their work permits the cast to shine” (Covenant Park Team, 2021). Being a leader in the theater does not mean that you are necessarily front and center of the promotional images, or even the face of the production. A servant leader in the theater is there to ensure that everyone is taken care of. That things are getting done behind the scenes, so the shows can run smoothly and the story being put on can be told so that the audience can receive it. In taking on an arts leadership role, I have cemented my view of leadership as being centered in servanthood.

Although I am passionate about the theater, in the past year I have developed a second vocational interest, which is to work in a higher education setting as an academic advisor. This interest developed as I found myself helping classmates with advising situations over the past few months, as well as in my ability to solve a recent complex advising issue for which (frankly) I did not receive very clear advice from advising personnel. As a result, I have decided to also apply for the masters program in higher education and student development at Wheaton and



potentially pursue something there. Interestingly, this is the exact same path my mother followed; she was an English/Communications major in college, and then pursued the same masters degree upon graduating. She also had an interest in the academic side of higher education (versus the purely student affairs side, such as residence life). Her pathway was from academic advising, to working with students with disabilities, to a doctorate in organization and leadership, to being a faculty member, and finally to being an organizational leader in a number of nonprofits.

This vocational channel also is well suited for my personal philosophy of leadership and power, as it would entail me coming alongside students as a kind of partner to help guide them in their interests, plans, and decisions. Instead of being on the “stage” of academia, such as a faculty member or coach or student life leader, academic advisors do just that—they advise. They do not direct, tell, or otherwise use power to impact students directly. Instead, this approach aligns with VanBenschoten’s description of persuasion as it is used in servant leadership: “But you’re not looking to convince someone to see what you see. Instead, persuasion is getting them to see what you see through their own intuitive sense based on your actions” (VanBenschoten, 2004).

Some difficulties that may arise within these vocations and communicative styles surround the approach of servant leadership. This view of leadership is not particularly common in secular settings, and may be considered transgressing social norms. With the Republican style, being so dependent on the opinions of others, this could turn audiences away from the help and advice I am trying to give. My persona may not be able to live up to what is pictured when my role is considered, and it could lead to not being respected or being dismissed. With the effeminate style tying into that, not only could my ethos be compromised by how people view

me, there is a concern of being labeled in a way that would discredit my communication. It is a delicate balancing act, to try and act as a leader as well as a servant in the theater world or an academic setting.

Many factors throughout my life have shaped my personal philosophy of leadership and power. This has included being in Workout all four years of my college career, as well as my mother and her leadership positions and style. From these influences, I can say that my philosophy of leadership is one of servant leadership, which employs a mixture of the effeminate style and the Republican style. While I am still undecided as to whether to pursue theater in an arts leadership position or academic advising role, I feel that both of these routes require very similar leadership styles that align well with my personal philosophy of leadership and power. Regardless of which path I end up taking, I believe that this philosophy will inform the way I work with others and how I can build community in either setting.

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