

If Serving is Beneath You...

If you look back across my coursework you will find several leadership philosophies referenced in writings, reflections, and assignments. I suppose I could have chosen any of them to represent my emerging leadership philosophy. But each of them was written through the lens of a particular course or as an extension of a specific reading or class discussion. None of my previous leadership philosophies were comprehensive or accurately reflect what I have come to understand overall about leadership moving forward as a school administrator. This reflective essay is a concise summary of my emerging leadership philosophy; what I have come to understand through course work, practical application, and on-the-job training as a first year principal.

Right or wrong, I have always held the belief that the best administrators have served a substantial amount of time in the trenches of their respective learning communities. I felt it important for my credibility and ability as a future administrator to first establish myself as a strong teacher and teacher-leader. I feel I have strived toward that goal over the past decade and, while I am a long way from mastering the art of teaching, I am anxious and ready to take that next step.

My leadership philosophy is an amalgamation of lessons learned from past leaders. I have learned much, as we all do, from former supervisors, mentors, and peers. I have often made mental notes about how certain

situations were handled, good or bad, and reflected on how I might have responded in similar situations had I been in a leadership position. I have slowly assembled my leadership toolbox by tucking away best perceived practices and tossing away tools that don't fit my style.

Overall my leadership philosophy is closely tied to my twenty years of military service. I don't mean the concrete, black and white, yes sir and no sir, type leadership that most people think of when they hear the words military service. It incorporates values steeped in the rich traditions of Army's the non-commissioned officer corps; traditions that include mutual respect and collaboration, lead-by example direction, structured but not rigid standards, and open and honest communication.

That training and experience has served me well as I have worked to apply it to my career in education. I feel teachers and students alike want firm, fair, leadership with integrity and transparency. I strive to be the type of leader that encourages and inspires the learners and educators around me. A leader in education should continue to champion the cause of education from the office, without forgetting the time I spent in the classroom. A principal should empower teachers to empower students, create safe and supportive learning environments, and be a conduit for positive change throughout the building and community. My desire is to soon be able to breathe new life into this ever-evolving philosophy and to be the kind of administrator I have wanted to see in

my schools since I began this quest ten years ago. I want to be a servant leader.

The servant leader was a concept covered in a brief article amidst a sea of readings and references in my voluminous Ed Leadership coursework. The Washington Post article, “Servant leadership: A path to high performance”, written by Edward D. Hess (2013) tears down many of the stereotypical illusions of widely accepted leadership traits or “myths”. The servant leader, according to Hess, leads by example, is people-centric, and humble. The servant leader lets his/her actions communicate conviction, trust and support. “Servant leaders,” Hess concludes, “are vigilant in fighting elitism, arrogance, complacency and hubris daily.” This concept, the servant leader, defines my overarching desire to be a genuine, people-centered, steward of our learning community.

An anonymous quote found on the homepage of my portfolio, and on the wall of my office reads, “If serving is beneath you, leadership is beyond you.” I firmly believe that to be true and hope to live up to that standard as a leader in education.

Hess, Edward. (2013). “Servant Leadership: A Path to High Performance” in The Washington Post Capital Business, 28 April 2013.