Michael Guebert: Authenticity of Leadership

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LDRS 3000 Foundations of Leadership: History, Theory, and Application

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February 21, 2021

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For this paper I decided to interview a close friend of mine, Michael Guebert. I have known Michael for a little over a year now and we have become fast friends through shared interests and pastimes such as video games and pop culture. Michael is a very authentic individual and has a goofy disposition that always lifts your mood and gets you to laugh when you are feeling down. I have known for a while that he works as the Global Account Manager for Hi-Rez Studios in Atlanta, and logically, I know that an impressive title like that comes with a need for strong leadership skills. I always thought it was funny to envision my goofy friend leading a professional business meeting for a large company and calling shots to grown adults in three piece suits- that is, until I had the opportunity to see him in action during one of his online company meetings. It was really remarkable seeing a different side of somebody that you have known for so long. He took charge of the direction of the meeting, fostered group discussion among his team members, and ran a tight and professional ship in a way that I had not seen from him before, yet was still deeply and authentically "Michael." I admired the professionalism he exhibited during this meeting, but what really caught my attention was the authenticity with which he carried himself. He agreed to conduct an interview with me after I expressed my eagerness to find out more about his professional life and his journey with finding his authentic leadership style.

Michael's role as Global Account Manager falls into the category of middle management and thus requires that he have an impressive mix of both technical and conceptual skills in addition to his human skills (Northouse, 2019, p. 103). Hi-Rez Studios utilizes tiers of management to best tackle projects that come their way. There are three main games that the company produces and there are three individual brand teams that work on technical operations

regarding content produced for said games. Each team is equipped with a Marketing Producer that falls under Supervisory Management. These individuals lead their teams by boasting high technical and human skills in order to achieve what needs to be done (Northouse, 2019, p. 103). These small teams, however, lack the conceptual skills needed to run an organization. Top management possesses these conceptual skills, but they have a disconnect with understanding the demands of technical skills required from the teams producing content for the games. This is where Michael comes in. When he first started working for Hi-Rez Studios, he served on one of the aforementioned game production teams. As he's moved up the Hi-Rez ladder and gained a greater conceptual understanding of how things work, he has also retained the technical understanding of operations that allows him to serve as a sort of liaison between upper management and supervisory management. Michael confirmed this with the following statement:

> "That's definitely something that helps me with directing the teams. I know what the higher ups need us to do, and since I've been on those teams before I understand how to best manage their workflow and enable them to get the result we're looking for" (Guebert, 2021).

Organization is incredibly important when leading teams of people. When asked what one of the most helpful tools is in directing workflow for Hi-Rez Studios, Michael referenced the Eisenhower Matrix. This is four quadrant organizational sheet used to help teams be on the same page of prioritization of tasks. Traditionally, the four categories of the Eisenhower Matrix sheet would be complete first, schedule for later, delegate tasks, and delete/do not do. In his management position, Michael has taken the Eisenhower matrix sheet and optimized it for use in the Hi-Rez teams. The categories were rebranded as high priority, medium priority, low priority, and

recurring tasks. In reference to his use of the Eisenhower Matrix sheet, Michael stated:

"With any given promotional event we're running, there's a lot on hand for our teams to complete. It can be overwhelming and even confusing for them. The Eisenhower Matrix sheet really streamlines things and helps teams focus their efforts on what really needs to get done instead of getting hung up on small things." (Guebert, 2021).

Michael's use of this organizational tactic is reflective of adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership focuses on how leaders help others accomplish given tasks at hand (Northouse, 2019, p. 103). There can be confusion among teams during big projects about what tasks should take priority. As an adaptive leader, Michael works with the teams to reach consensus on the organization of tasks that will best benefit the project and is able to pivot to address the needs of a given team when required. Michael's adaptions made on the Eisenhower Matrix sheet are also reflective of his implementation Path-Goal Theory in leadership. During our interview, Michael recalled an experience with a very talented, but underperforming employee. During promotional events at Hi-Rez, there are certain tasks that are completed consistently in the same way on a recurring basis. The underperforming employee often forgot to complete important recurring tasks that for most employees fell into second nature. Michael shared with me that he consulted with the employee to try and nail down where the performance issue rested. The employee ended up admitting that they knew these tasks are something completed for every update, but for some reason they lost track of them and they often slipped their mind. This indicated to Michael that there was not a lack of clarity on how the tasks are performed, but rather an issue with organization in order to keep track of the numerous tasks at hand. This is why he added the

recurring tasks quadrant to the Eisenhower Matrix sheet. Since the addition of this organizational effort, Michael boasted that the underperforming employee has not since had any issues regarding expectations of keeping track of recurring tasks. Path-Goal leadership is characterized by defining goals, clarifying paths, removing obstacles, and providing support to followers (Northouse, 2019, p. 199). Adapting current tools for overcoming obstacles is an excellent showcase of leadership, and in this case, helped Michael to build a rapport with this employee by taking the time to understand and resolve the issue instead of chastising and ostracizing them for their shortcomings.

Michael tries to exhibit qualities in his leadership that he admires in others. Something of particular importance to him is being approachable and have authentic and genuine communication with team members. Michael reflected on his digital marketing professor (Professor Michael Bucannon in the Scheller College of Business at Georgia Tech) as one of the most influential leaders he's modeled his behavior from. Michael reminisced about how he always felt comfortable going up to Professor Bucannon to ask for guidance regarding things both inside and outside of the classroom. Michael had the following to say regarding his professor:

> "Professor Bucannon is a really great guy who I now have a life long professional connection with. I really look up to him, and because of my experience with him, I want nothing more than to be able to be a mentor to someone like he was to me."
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> (Guebert, 2021).

Michael's reflection on his experience with his mentor mirror the sentiments present in servant leadership. Servant leadership puts an emphasis on leaders understanding and empathizing with followers so as to nurture them and holistically develop their personal capabilities. (Northouse,

2019, p. 348). Michael's driving sentiment behind servant leadership rests is his desire to serve others. Professor Bucannon nurtured and enabled him in a way that so deeply resonated with him that he makes a point in his daily leadership to model his behavior in such a way so as to best provide for the holistic needs of his followers.

Michael is a great leader and a pillar of his company that many people look up to and receive assistance and guidance from. There are many varied aspects of leadership that apply to what he does, which is a characteristic that is reflective of a comprehensive and adaptable leader. The keystone to how he conducts himself as a leader rests within his authenticity. He establishes genuine and candid rapport with his followers and maintains and open and approachable front so that people feel comfortable and confidant asking for guidance from him. His attitudes and personal conduct are reflective of the interpersonal process of both his efforts as a leader, and the response from his followers (Northouse, 2019, p. 309). Maintaining authenticity in his leadership serves as his defining trait and filters all of his other aspects of leadership to put him in a distinctive position that his followers can admire and be proud to work under.

References

Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership: Theories and practice* (8th ed.). Sage.