



Thoughts on Leadership

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I have a passion for developing people, thus, this is where I focus my time. This is how I see my role, as an Operator and leader, as a people developer. Since my focus on developing people to be stronger people and leaders, this is where I focus my time. I desire to create a relationship and leverage that relationship for the sake of life-long growth. I achieve this by following the 80/20 Principle, meaning 80% of my time is spent coaching and developing my top 20%, and the burden of development carries from the top 20% to the rest of the Leadership Team, and team at large. This occurs by developing trust over time through honest feedback, regular 1-on-1 sessions for the sake of alignment toward our business vision, values and goals, as well as regular life coaching sessions. When I interact with leaders, it is my goal to ask questions, primarily “why?” I believe that this process leads to great discovery and results. I use the following strategy for teaching and coaching: Great leaders listen first, ask questions second, and give their opinions last.

To me, leadership is not something that I know from merely reading a book or having a title, or even from having been in a position of leadership over time. Rather, leadership is a verb: it is something you choose to do, or not do. If you are a leader, it follows you in all aspects of life; in everything you do. I don't think that someone is “promoted” to leader. However, it is possible to be promoted to a leadership role with more responsibility as you have developed the job and leadership skills needed for a particular position. Leadership is influence. Great leaders embrace this gift, take it seriously and are constantly looking for ways to utilize their skill!

I believe that leadership can be developed and honed over time. I know that I am not the same leader today that I was last year. I grow as a leader by actively seeking knowledge, whether in books, sermons, conferences, blog or discussions with other leaders. I then think and pray about what I have learned, and then test it for validity. I know I have grown when I can teach this new idea to other leaders who then adopt that same idea, and then add it into their leadership arsenal. If I have learned something as a leader, but fail to share and teach that to others, I have not done my job as a leader, and perhaps am not even a leader. The concept of teaching other leaders is essential to a leader's development as it sharpens them toward mastery, and increases their influence. In short, great leaders possess a desire to grow that they cannot shut off.

If you are truly a leader, you cannot help but develop others and make those around you better, as it comes naturally. Great leaders develop other leaders, influence people to be great, offer great advice, care about their team, lead by example and get results. At any time, you should be able to answer the question: “Who am I intentionally developing?” You should also be able to answer the question: “Are the people I lead better because of me?” If the answer to these is “No,” I think you should reevaluate and possibly change your approach to leadership. I also believe that you are not a leader if no one follows you. That is the first test of your leadership. If someone tells me they are a leader, I immediately look for evidence of that. I seek to find someone following you. I believe that you gain followers by serving those you lead, just as our Savior modeled. The first thing the best leaders do is remove their symbol of authority, get down to your level and serve you. This can be clearly seen by Jesus in the book of Matthew where He washes the feet of his disciples. I think that great leaders can cause their follower(s) to be awed by humility. Great leaders are comfortable with authority and power, so much so that they are able to leverage it for the sake of those they lead. In short, great leaders do not actually “need” or “covet” the power, but they are comfortable with it, and are developed enough to know how to use it. Great leaders are selfless rather than selfish. Thus, great leaders are not afraid to “get dirty” shoulder to shoulder with their team. In fact, they embrace the opportunity when it arises.

While great leaders serve, they also S.E.R.V.E. (See and Shape the Future, Engage and Develop Others, Reinvent Continuously, Value Results and Relationships, Embody the Values) and they work to develop their skills in this. They are worried more about growing in the principles associated with this, the skills of leadership, than they are the tasks, such as creating game plans and counting drawers. Growing in the principles of S.E.R.V.E. will actually allow a leader to be better at the day-to-day tasks that they need to do. I feel that servant leaders attract followers.

I believe that leadership occurs best in teams, and I place a heavy value and emphasis on how you personally develop and conduct yourself and your development for the sake of the organization and those on your team. At Chick-fil-A, I believe that power and responsibility should be shared amongst a team of key executive-level leaders, each who is solely responsible for a key area of the business, for the sake of the greater good. This allows for clear goals, expectations and role clarity, which is a recipe for success. I believe that within a leadership team, leaders are able to build a community that is deep and genuine enough for tough accountability, celebration, effective communication and results.

Great leaders have developed an ability to build great relationships, by engaging those around them, developing trust and healthy communication. This is essential to great results, both in and out of the organization. I expect this team to work through situations without the need of me as a mediator. You are responsible for building yourself as an individual in particular skills, such as communication, to make sure you are doing this with the team. If you cannot do this, it is my belief that you are not ready for the position. In the context of teams, it is also pivotal that leaders have the ability to lead strategically across various teams of the organization. They are able to effectively lead themselves, team members and other leaders (peers) across the organization, by gaining and leveraging their influence outside of their assigned area.

At Chick-fil-A, you will only be promoted to a new position when you are actually already meeting the criteria and expectations of that position. We do not promote and hope for the best. As an example, a mid-level front-of-house leader seeking promotion should be proficient at leading an entry-level team member, and a mid-level leader or top-level leader who works in the back-of-house. It is our goal to make sure that all who are interested in advancement have access to the expectations for the sake of achieving their goal. If you are seeking a promotion, develop yourself in the skills of leadership.

Along the way, we will answer questions, give feedback, teach and coach to help prepare you for the next step. However, simply learning the tasks and skills does not necessarily mean that you will be promoted. At this time, you will go through an interview process with the Senior Leadership Team to hear directly from you on your approach to leadership. Following the interview, the Senior Leadership Team will meet to discuss your promotion, considering need, fit and timing. You will not be selected to join the Leadership Team if you are not a life-long learner, open to putting in the work to read and receptive to being pushed and challenged. If someone collaborates with me as a member of the Leadership Team and leaves no better a leader than when they started, I have failed them. It is my intent that when you leave Chick-fil-A, you can call me a friend, maybe even a mentor, but more importantly, you leave as a stronger person, bold in your leadership, confident in your identity, and prepared for what the Lord has next for you.

Finally, leaders should be oriented toward transcendence, meaning they should be able understand that some things are just bigger than we are. Furthermore, they should be able to be able to view things from a macro-level, and not just a micro/"me"-level. Transcendent leaders are able to easily think about their entire organization, and not just their assignment. They keep in mind the global ramifications of their decisions and actions. As a result, they work to identify and help solve problems beyond their current role, thus demonstrating an ability to have an impact beyond their specific role. Furthermore, leaders who are oriented toward transcendence are comfortable with being focused on helping others win. They are confident enough in their own role and identity that they cannot help leading others to victory. Leaders like this have a great awareness of their identity, and thus, do not seek credit. This is a refreshing concept that quickly endears you to those around you.