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**MY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

***Executive Summary***

At the start of this course, I was not the most confident in my ability to become a successful leader. I thought I needed to possess a specific set of characteristics, engage in particular behaviors and consistently have a certain attitude. I soon discovered that my definition of a leader was very much molded by society’s inaccurate depiction of leaders and that a true leader comes in many forms.

Everyone has the ability to become a successful leader, and it depends on what your definition of a successful leader is. I am not currently in a leadership role but creating a leadership development plan has been one of the most valuable projects for my professional journey to date. Through class group discussions, I’ve come to find that everyone has a slightly different definition of what a successful leader is, and none of them are wrong. For me, I took my strengths and my weaknesses and combined them to sculpt my own idea of a leader. Leadership success in my eyes is creating a positive work environment that leaves others feeling empowered and inspired.

The numerous theories we’ve come across in this course have built my confidence in becoming an impactful leader. I see parts of myself in many of the different theories, as I documented in my weekly journal entries. I plan to combine all those characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes to make myself the best leader I can be. My leadership plan was created to build on my strengths and address my weaknesses in the leadership world. The four steps I created; organize my thoughts weekly and create action items, get coffee, encourage feedback, and unwind and reflect, are tailored to best fit my leadership style.

I believe a leader’s success truly comes in the form of followers’ success. Being committed to the growth of followers and caring about their motivation and success is a leader who can transform others and create a positive and productive workplace.

I will utilize this leadership plan and continue to transform it. This document is fluid and as I grow as an individual and as a leader, I plan to revise and edit steps that will best fit my goals. Leadership is fascinating and involves so much more than what I believed to be true at the start of this course. There are so many ways to become a successful leader, and for me, it’s about placing value on both my strengths and weaknesses, remaining vulnerable, and consistently empowering others and making a positive impact.

***Step 1: Journal Entry Excerpts***

Week 2: Trait Approach

My strongest traits can be seen in the traits approach. Empathetic, outgoing, open, and sociable to name a few. These are traits I personally know I have, and when asked, others believe this to be true as well. I strongly believe that you are never finished learning and can always be a better version of yourself, so as a leader, I plan to grow these traits and use them in a more transformative way. I may possess these traits, but how can I use them for good? Throughout the module, I found some areas for improvement. Conscientiousness, consistency and perceptiveness are areas that I thought I possessed prior to this module, but found I need to work on after learning the definition of these traits and asking others their opinion. These areas are important in the workplace, and I find that they’re some pieces I’ve been missing. I’m good with people and at relationship-building, but I need to improve on my productivity and follow-through.

Week 3: Skills Approach

After taking the skills inventory, I’m more confident in some of my leadership skills than ever before. The module discusses skills that are learned and developed over time that make one a great leader. Separated into three categories: human, technical, and conceptual, these skills all represent different areas of my leadership expertise, some I knew I had, and some I didn’t. Human skills and technical skills are two areas I’m aware I tend to be better in. I hope to expand on these and use further concepts in this class to develop them more. My take on conceptual skills, and my results with the skills inventory, has allowed me to learn so much about myself. Plans and visions are intimidating to me but as a leader, they’re crucial. Although I may score low in conceptual aspects of leadership, doesn’t mean I can’t improve on them.   
  
Week 4: Behavioral Approach

Yet again, I’ve scored high on a people-centered, relationship-oriented aspect of leadership. This module has opened my eyes to the behaviors a leader needs to show to truly be effective. Before this class, I believed that I could get by as a leader by focusing my time and talents on relationships and people. As much as this is true, it is only part of the equation. In terms of the behavioral approach, I need to combine that concern for people and relationships with achieving tasks, implementing policy and process, and promoting productivity. Together, when combined effectively and equally, these components build the framework of a powerful leader that I hope to be.

Week 5: Situational Approach   
Prior to this module, I have been inspired by the concepts discussed in this course, but keep asking myself, “but what if I was in a different situation”? All these leadership theories make great points and can be effective, but there are times when different situations demand a change in leadership style and as a leader, you need to know how and when to adapt. This module gave me answers to that lingering question. My birth year puts me in the millennial group, and my current team at work are all millennials, and we’re the only ones in our entire department aside from the intern team. It wasn’t until after watching Simon Sinek’s interview that I thought about the idea of instant gratification in depth. I think it’s important to remind myself, a future leader, and my team members, that the rest of the world and the workplace doesn’t operate the same way we do. There is no such thing as instant success, it takes time. For my work to be more rewarding, I need to look at the progress I continue to make and the small steps forward as success as well. Millennials, myself included, need to take a step back from other aspects of our everyday life and think about our jobs and the work that we do in a different way given situations we endure.

Week 6: Path-Goal Theory Approach   
The experiences I’ve had, and my life story continues to shape who I am as a leader every day. This module reminded us that as leaders, our central purpose is to help followers define their goals and help them be successful in reaching them. I am proud to be most motivated by my experiences and life story, and I should encourage that in my followers as well. Getting to know your followers and what makes them tick can help you figure out how to best interact with their characteristics. I am who I am because of the adversity in my life and I hope to encourage this self-awareness and authenticity in followers. Every part of your life story can be used to shape yourself as a leader and empower your followers.

Week 7: LMX Theory Approach

It’s up to each human to use reason and process the stereotypes and bias in a way that doesn’t cause harm or steer us wrong. Putting ourselves in situations where we can’t use bias in a negative way is the most effective. Creating stereotypes and bias is a normal part of human thought and can often be rational and help us, but we need to be more self-aware and stop ourselves from using those in a negative way. Sheryl Sandberg reminds us that women and minorities are commonly left out of the in-group, and as a woman who has experienced this, strive to be a leader than prevents this from happening.

Week 8: Transformative Approach

I feel as if it’s easy to rate others in attributes such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, but it’s much harder to rate yourself honestly in these same areas. These attributes make up a transformative leader, one who creates a connection with followers and has a vision for success. I believe my core conviction as a leader would be to *inspire*. Why do I want to be the leader I write about in my journal entries? Because I want to inspire others to accomplish their goals, to act selflessly, to consider others, to empower one another, and to stay motivated through any situation.

Week 9: Authentic Leadership Approach

Stepping on the MSU campus for the first time as a freshman truly opened my eyes to the world around me. As Tanya Menon mentions, we are creatures of habit, and it took me stepping out of my comfort zone more than I ever had before to realize I needed to diversify my surroundings. I changed my lifestyle throughout college to broaden my horizons in every sense of the phrase. I made sure every day was not made up of the same habitual process and I discovered that my weak ties were indeed the ticket to a “whole new social world” and I expanded on it. Some of the greatest opportunities I have been granted, have come about in situations I have felt most uncomfortable.

Week 10: Servant Leadership Approach

The purpose of work? To serve. I don’t think I’ll ever forget this. It’s so important to remember and for me moving forward in my leadership journey, will be something I look back on consistently. We should learn to respect and tolerate differences among one another, this is another takeaway from Fuhr’s TEDTalk that I need to instill in my everyday life. I always consider others’ opinions before making any decisions in the workplace, but I think I need to add a component to that – considering others’ differences. Opinions are one thing, but considering, respecting, and tolerating differences of your followers is extremely powerful. These differences can propel you into a new world that brings innovative, creative visions and ideas.

***Step 2: What I’ve Learned: My Leadership Strengths & Challenges***

Throughout this course, it has been refreshing to know how valuable some of the strengths I possess are as a leader. It gives me confidence that the person I have come to be and the traits, skills, and behaviors I have learned will allow me to become a successful leader. Each week, I made sure to either reflect in my journal, on video, or to myself on what aspects I learned that I already have. It’s important to value the traits and skills you already portray, and then begin thinking about how you can build on them and continue to better yourself as a leader. Next, looking at the leadership aspects you need to improve on or don’t have at all. This course was extremely motivating and has made me want to expand on my strengths and learn more about my challenges and how to turn them into strengths of their own.

I believe everyone has the ability to become a leader that motivates and empowers others. Every part of your life story, the experiences you’ve had, the skills you’ve acquired and the ways you’ve adapted combine to create a unique individual with power to transform. Prior to this course, I thought to be a leader, you had to have an exact list of skills, a certain level of talent, and the perfect balance between people and production. What I’ve come to learn is that there is no one definition of a leader. Every leader is different, and every one of those leaders can be successful in their own ways.

I look forward to taking my strengths and weaknesses and transforming them into a leadership style that makes a positive difference in people’s lives. I take pride in who I am and am eager to find out the leader I can become.   
 ***Step 3: Fresh Insights for Leadership Aspirations***

I’m including a few excerpts from my original leadership aspirations. Each of the excerpts below include fresh insights I have gained from my time in this course.

*I allow myself to be wrong in situations and I choose to learn from those mistakes. I think it’s important in a leadership role to allow yourself to be vulnerable. You don’t always need to be right. I am not afraid to ask questions for further clarification and I think it’s a talent leaders should have.*

I still find vulnerability as one of the most important leadership aspects. However, I now understand the full meaning of vulnerability as a leader and its true power. According to Brene Brown, vulnerability is letting ourselves be seen. As humans, and especially as leaders, we tend to numb vulnerability, but then we end up numbing all other emotions with it. Allowing yourself to be vulnerable as a leader opens doors; it shows your followers you’re human and holds the potential to allow them to connect with you in new ways. As a leader, I aspire to allow myself to lean into the discomfort of vulnerability and transform those around me.

*I make big decisions by considering all perspectives of a situation and making sure everyone’s voice is heard. Lastly, I feel like an important leadership talent I hold is inclusion. Inclusion is such a powerful tool in everyday life, but especially the workplace. I would eventually like to lead an organization of employees who are genuinely happy to be there and are passionate in what they do.*

Inclusion is necessary in the workplace. As a leader, I want inclusion to come naturally in all situations. Creating stereotypes and bias is a normal part of human thought and can often be rational and help us succeed. On the contrary, it can also harm and lead us to think negatively and treat people in a way they shouldn’t be treated. Putting more thought as a leader into the bias that comes naturally can lead to successful inclusiveness. It’s up to each human to use reason and process the stereotypes and bias in a way that doesn’t cause harm or steer us wrong. Putting ourselves in situations where we can’t use bias in a negative way is the most effective and I hope to do this successfully.

*I want to be a leader that people feel comfortable talking to and opening up to. I value emotion and relationships in the workplace, and I feel like they’re important to maintain in a positive work environment… As hard as I try to include different perspectives, make people feel motivated and valued, and learn new things, when it comes down to being transformational and make big changes, there’s times when you just can’t make everyone happy.*

Leading in a passionate and realistic way is the ultimate goal. Empathy is so important to have as a leader because it shows your followers that you care and take their feelings into consideration, but caring enough to be tough; open, honest, and helpful whenever necessary is a leader who genuinely cares and wants followers to succeed. A leader who considers your feelings and opinions while being realistic and knows when to help you when you need it can be so beneficial to the growth of followers and is one I hope to be.

***Step 4: My Leadership Plan to Develop Strengths and Address Challenges***  
  
My plan for developing these leadership strengths and improving in my areas of challenge:

1. **Organize my thoughts weekly and create action items.** This step speaks to my weaknesses in conceptualizing and diligence. I have a very active mind throughout the week, and I need to be better about transforming those thoughts into words and conceptualizing them. Taking my thoughts, turning them into measurable components and creating steps to achieve can help my productivity at work and improve my diligence. I tend to not follow through and this will give me more motivation. I will create an ongoing list of thoughts and ideas throughout the work week, and at the end of each week, will conceptualize each one and create action items to accomplish. I will schedule a weekly reminder mid-week to stay on top of this. Monthly, I will look back at how many ideas were implemented.
2. **Get coffee**. Throughout this course, I’ve been reminded of how proud I am of the relationships I’ve created and how much I enjoy maintaining them. I plan to *schedule more coffee breaks and lunches* with coworkers to continue learning more about them and the work they’re doing. This piece of my plan can also be used to improve on diversifying my network. Those outside of my network can be the ticket to a new world, and I want to act on that. I will *reach out to those around me* that I don’t have strong ties to and try to get to know them more.
3. **Encourage feedback**. I want to encourage more feedback from those around me. I want to know the things I’m doing well, the things I can improve on, and honestly, the things I should stop doing. I pride myself in the work that I do. No matter where my professional journey takes me, I’m passionate about my work and I want constructive criticism and meaningful feedback. There’s always room for improvement, and I want to hear it. *I will step out of my comfort zone and ask for feedback on my work.* As this step requires that I step outside of my own comfort zone, I must be mindful and acknowledge that providing honest, detailed feedback may also be uncomfortable for others. I will allow those I am seeking feedback from to give it to me via email or in person.
4. **Unwind and reflect**. *An hour or so per week, I will reflect on all the things I accomplished, what worked, and what didn’t.* I think it’s important to remember that instant gratification comes in many forms. Success takes time. What steps did I take throughout the week to get closer to success? In what ways did I make a positive impact on others? If something didn’t go as planned, what do I need to do differently next time? In the workplace, it’s easy to forget to reflect on all the things you and your team have done. I will schedule a time slot in my calendar to give myself time to focus on this crucial step.

***Step 5: Feedback***I encouraged my class peers to look over my leadership development plan and take some time to give me some feedback. My classmate Chelsey Fether gave me some confidence in the action steps I included in my draft. She mentioned that each of the steps seem “*very doable and unique*” and I looked back at my steps and used that positive feedback to transform it a bit more.

Chelsey also included comments about the feedback action step in my leadership plan. She simply mentioned that she too struggles with this concept in the workplace, as well as her manager, and that comment made me look at my leadership plan from more of a big picture perspective. I revised this step’s definition to be more mindful of others.

The feedback I received from class leadership was extremely helpful. As this is my first time creating a leadership plan or anything like it, I was looking for constructive, meaningful criticism that I could use to make my plan the best it could be. I was given unexpected appraise for my draft that was great to see, but I still used that positive feedback to revise my plan even more. Tamara suggested to think further about *how to track and hold myself accountable to the steps in my plan*. With this, I made a few edits to my plan and its explanations.

***Step 6: Self Reflection***

After putting a leadership plan into words with measurable action items, I was eager to implement it in my workplace. I did some more research into the current resources in my department and how they can help me become a better leader. I found out that my workplace encourages professional development, and leadership wants us to take advantage of any and all resources we come across including conferences, webinars and classes. Steps one, two, and three in my personalized leadership plan require me to set aside some time from my busy schedule to accomplish. Knowing the positive environment that encourages professional development, I feel very motivated and comfortable implanting these steps.

In efforts to begin my leadership plan, I scheduled a coffee break with one of our team interns. She’s been a valuable asset to our team and I simply wanted to learn more about her, her passions, and how she can continue doing her best work for our team by finding areas she’s interested in that we can grow on. We came up with some new projects and we both came out of our coffee break with a smile on our faces and our motivation high.

I began an ongoing list of my ideas and thoughts regarding my work. Although a step that seems simple, writing them down and giving myself time to think about how I can accomplish it was very satisfying. Next week, I will set aside time to implement step four, unwind and reflect. This step is extremely important in my journey to become an impactful leader. Relaxing and reflecting on what has gone well, what could be done better, and what kind of impact I’ve created from my team and I’s valuable work is key to making improvements.

I have a few projects I’m wrapping up, and before publishing any final products, I plan to ask for feedback from my supervisor and team members. I hope my eagerness to share my work and ask for opinions encourages the rest of my team to do the same.

This course, and more specifically, this semester project, has taught me to be more mindful in terms of who I am in the workplace and how I interact with those around me. This mindfulness and self-awareness have already done incredible things, and I look forward to putting my leadership plan in place, holding myself accountable, and sticking to it.