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SPA-362
27 April 2022

Final Reflection

Part I. Reflection on Social Action Project

Through my leadership project, I had the opportunity to interact with many key leaders within the corporate world. I was able to read diverse scholarship and perspectives on the issues of corporate social responsibility and the role of business in society. In particular, many industry leaders adhered majoritively to the transformational approach to leadership. Functionally, this meant that these were leaders who, through their work, transformed their employees and society for the better. I was able to identify transformation leaders in the business world, as well as the academic and political world, who have worked tirelessly to make sustainability the core of their company culture and thus invoke meaningful change in the world. Names that come to mind based on my research are Senator Chris Coons of Delaware, Mr. Bill Wollrab of AllPeople Marketplace, and Professor John Sterman of the MIT Sloan School of Management. Though these leaders have vastly different experiences, professions, and impacts, they all work to transform the very fabric of our society and to leave it better than they found it. To elaborate on the example of Bill Wollrab, he has used his capital and experience as an entrepreneur to found a new Amazon-esque online marketplace that specializes in the sale of sustainable goods and exemplified corporate social responsibility through donating 5% of every sale to a cause that the consumer chooses (e.g. World Wildlife Fund, etc.).

Beyond my leadership project, I had the opportunity to work with many distinguished colleagues this semester who exemplified many leadership approaches. In particular, I left nearly every single conversation with a fellow leadership student knowing more than I did when I arrived. I was greatly impressed by the work of my peers in various sectors and fields of unique value and interest to each member of the program. I was also fortunate to have a Teaching Assistant this year, Emily Larsen, who was extremely helpful and added great value to my own leadership project as well as my experience in the program more generally. On an individual level, I felt as though I experienced a great deal of adaptive and situational leadership this semester. While I have generally believed that all leadership should be situational in the sense that leaders should adapt to their team rather than forcing the team to adapt to them, I found that situational leadership has other benefits including comfort in new social situations such as interviews or when working on various components of a project like research as compared to essay writing. Further, my project forced me to demonstrate adaptive leadership as external sources fell through and I was required to pivot my focus and goals in order to produce a strong final product. Without practicing adaptive leadership, I would have suffered from Sunk Cost bias by sinking more time into a project that would not have the desired outcome. My project greatly informed my leadership journey and was an excellent opportunity to refine both the hard and soft skills of leadership as defined in our course and program content.

Part II. Reflection on Leadership

Leadership is a uniquely complex subject in that it is best studied through real world experiences and through interactions with leaders in various fields. Reading leadership theory as I have done throughout my first two years in the program has been relevant, but I have always felt there to be a disconnect between theory and practice. Much like ethics, it is one thing to read about various theories but another to apply them in a specific context and fully understand the implications of choosing a certain approach over another. As I have frequently mentioned in the course, my view is that specific situations require various

approaches, fused together seamlessly, depending on the specific context and needs of the team, group, organization, or culture. With this in mind, the first person testimonials and case studies through our reading spoke strongly to leadership in the public affairs world, and beyond. Indeed, these real world studies of leadership was extremely informative and heavily influenced my own personal socialization as a leader. Beyond this, interacting with leaders in the workforce was personally and professionally rewarding and formative.

In particular, I was impressed during our session with Dr. Ruth Zaplin. Her journey from KPMG to present as well as integrating wellness and self-care into the every day was fundamental to my understanding of the role of a leader. Prior to Dr. Zaplin's session, I had been under the genuine impression that leaders should be willing to suppress their own individuality and individual needs in order to further the agenda of the team. I appreciated that Dr. Zaplin was willing to share her experiences and tips for self care with our program. I left the session understanding more fully that leaders are best when they bring their whole selves into their role and pay close attention to their individual needs. While leaders should still reserve their own point of view and preferences in group settings as it is important to share responsibility and autonomy with group members, it is still incredibly important that leaders care for themselves as they would others. This is absolutely essential and a skill I have yet to reform and cultivate within myself. Dr. Zaplin's lesson was one that will remain with me for a lifetime in and outside the context of leadership.

Finally, I was impressed with the vastness of leadership approaches that leaders, both present and past, have taken. Through our work this semester and through observing the work of my colleagues in the program, I have noted that there is not one proper approach to leadership and, rather, leaders are those individuals who are able to appraise a situation and act appropriately. To revisit one of the key questions of our program, "are leaders born or made," I draw the conclusion that leaders are made by the development of skills such as context appraisal, interpersonal and time management skills, intuition, and overall comfort among others. While many of these skills are innate, I do believe that anyone can take them on and, importantly, that anyone can lead. I conclude my second year in the program more confident in my abilities as a leader than I had previously imagined possible.