

Learning Leadership Reflection

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In 2016, New York Times bestselling authors, James Kouzes and Barry Posner published the book entitled *Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader*. The five fundamentals outlined in the text by Kouzes and Posner (2016), are as followed: believe you can, aspire to excel, challenge yourself, engage support, and practice deliberately. The authors use these five fundamentals for becoming an exemplary leader to encourage and guide readers in mastering the skill of leadership. This essay will reflect on these five fundamentals and rank them in order of most importance for successful management in the global society.

This writer believes the number one fundamental for successful management in the global society is believe you can. Kouzes and Posner (2016), express that a person's ability to have faith in themselves is one of the essential steps in learning and developing leadership. First, Kouzes and Posner identify that leadership is a skill that people learn, just like any other behavior. "Leadership emerges from within," according to Kouzes and Posner (2016, p.34). By believing that leadership is a learned skill and ability, people are more likely to make an effort to become a better leader. Lack of belief in the capability of leading will result in no energy or reason to engage in management endeavors. Kouzes and Posner (2016), points out the image a person has for themselves significantly influence the action they take or don't take. If a person does not believe in themselves or their ideas, then it is also problematic to visualize that others would pay attention to them and follow their directions. According to Kouzer and Posner (2016), oneself is the ultimate obstacle a person will ever encounter in developing, owning and mastering the skills needed to manage and lead others. Based on these persuasive arguments made by Kouzer and Posner, this writer agrees that believing that a person can is the most vital of the five fundamentals of becoming an exemplary leader.

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The next second most important fundamental to becoming an exemplary leader is aspire to excel based on the evidence provided by Kouzer and Posner. Before a person can manage, they must first determine what they care about, followed by why they want to lead. To guide others, a person must first identify their values and beliefs. According to Becky Schaar, a technical program manager at Google has transcribed by Kouzer and Posner (2016), if a person does not have strong values and beliefs no one will pay attention to them much less follow them. To become a leader, it requires entering into a process of self-discovery to identify core values and beliefs. Being self-aware and clear about their epitomes will allow leaders to warrant the respect of others (Kouzer and Posner, 2016). To be the best leader, a person must figure out what they care about and why it is essential. This concern is the motivation to lead. A motivation to lead can be based on anything but Kouzer and Posner (2016), notes that this motivation should be intrinsic, not instrumental. Instrumental needs are wanting to lead for money, advancement at work or fame, while intrinsic desires are to achieve a mission or a purpose beyond themselves. Once a person knows their values and their motivations to lead, they can help others find their aspirations or purpose (Kouzer and Posner, 2016).

Once a person finds the aspiration to want to lead, then they need direction on how to be a leader. The need for guidance points to the third most crucial fundamental of becoming an excellent leader, which Kouzer and Posner (2016), denotes as engage support. A person cannot become a leader alone; they need help in the forms of counseling, advisement and up close and personal observation of what exemplary leadership looks like in action, confers Kouzer and Posner (2016). Engaging support allows for a new leader to get feedback on the impact of their behaviors and actions; feedback is the critical element of knowing the progress of a person's leadership. An example of how vital engaging support is in building quality leadership abilities is

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the many, “I couldn’t have done it without you” speeches given at every award show and ceremonies as noted by Kouzer and Posner (2016, p.141). These display of excellence are accompanied by a support system such as faith, coaches, parents, team members, children, and spouses.

Once a person believes they can lead, has a desire to manage, and has a support system, they must then practice their leadership skill. The four most important fundamental of becoming an exemplary leader is practice deliberately. According to Kouzer and Posner (2016), and agreeable by this writer, “You can’t get better at leading without practice” (p.169). Practice creates discipline and allows a person to improve on their strengths and address areas of weakness. Practicing to improve areas of weakness will eventually change that weakness to an asset. Daily commitment and being a lifelong learner are attributes of an exemplary leader; this is a commitment to learning something new each day and evaluating progress each day says Kouzer and Posner (2016). Pure talent is not enough to attain greatness, a combination of commitment and deliberate practice are also required. Kouzer and Posner (2016), points out showing up is not enough, deliberate practice over many years is needed.

The final and fifth fundamental to becoming an exemplary leader is challenge yourself. Continuously engaging in new experiences and going outside of one’s comfort zone will grow one’s leadership skills. Testing one’s self through seeking new experiences will result in mistakes, but leaders learn from their mistakes according to Kouzer and Posner (2016). A part of growing as a leader is trying new things, taking the initiative even when it is not comfortable, making mistakes, and failing, drawing on the lessons learn and repeating this cycle of learning. Repeating this cycle of education will create and strengthen resilience and a person ability to

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bounce back and persevere in the face of adversity. Kouzer and Posner (2016), says the strength to grow is drawn from courage and, “Challenge is your leadership training ground” (p.99).

Kouzer and Posner identified five fundamental attributes needed to be an exemplary leader. This writer ranked the order of importance of these attributes based on the evidence and arguments in the text as followed; believe you can, aspire to excel, engage support, practice deliberately and challenge yourself. To master the skill of leadership, there is a requirement to believe in one's ability, have the desire and motivation to lead based on one's values and belief. Growth in leadership occurs through mentoring and feedback, which is improved through practice and challenging the status quo.

## Reference

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2016). *Learning leadership: The five fundamentals of becoming an exemplary leader*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.