Leadership and Me

Leadership is a mysterious thing. Throughout the history of civilization, people have been trying to understand it, followers having been trying to find it, and leaders have been trying to exemplify it. Personally, I have never really thought about leadership unless it was part of a college or scholarship application. However, along came First Year Seminar, where I was forced to think about it. In the short month and a half that I have been at Minnesota State University Mankato, I have learned and thought about leadership more than I ever thought I would have, and subsequently have thought a lot about what leadership opportunities there are for me here at MNSU.

Since the start of the semester I have, among other activities, read a book about leadership, taken a questionnaire to discover my leadership strengths, taken notes on the different types of leadership in class, and partaken in leadership activities. From these varied events I have learned a lot about leadership. The most important thing that I have learned is that the best style of leadership varies from leader to leader as well as from follower to follower.

Each leader is unique, as is each follower. Each and every one of them has unique strengths and weaknesses. As such, each particular person has specific needs and desires. Some leaders might be strong in the Executing theme, but they need help with Relationship Building. Similarly, some followers might feel the strong need for somebody that they can trust to lead them, but not necessarily care if their leader is compassionate or not.

This is why leadership is a very fluid skill, as is the act of leading. Along with the needs of each follower differing, the style and skills of each leader varies greatly. A leader might be very authoritarian and make one follower feel like they are being babied or that they cannot do anything correctly while conversely making another follower feel protected and cared about. Or perhaps the leader prescribes to a more laissez faire style of leadership which makes one follower feel like they can control their future and gives them the freedom they desire and need, but leaves another follower floundering, looking for some sort of direction without ever finding it. Essentially, leadership is about finding a balanced style of leadership wherein he or she can provide the type of leadership that each individual needs to function effectively. Knowing that each follower has varied needs, a leader needs to seek the best way that he or she can serve them so that they can, in turn, serve him or her and achieve their collective goal.

Knowing this, I have been looking to the future and I have wondered where and how I might use this new found knowledge. Of the assorted groups and teams that I have looked at as a means of practicing my leadership skills while at MNSU two stand out above the rest. The first is being a Community Advisor or a Learning Community Coordinator in my future years at MNSU. I feel that besides being an easy way to make sure I am still plugged into campus life and being a fun job, it could be a great way to work on becoming a better leader. While my word would not be as iron clad as it would be in comparison to being some sort of a supervisor at a store, I would still be leading a large group of people. Plus I could be their friend and help them transition into a new world, a new life. Being a CA or a LCC would give me the opportunity to more than just leader at work or in a club. It would allow the opportunity to be a personal leader of a large group of people and would better position me to give the type of support that my followers are looking for in a leader.

The other opportunity for me to practice and grow as a leader that interests me is becoming involved and eventually running for an elected position in one of the aviation clubs. I like these options since it would keep me involved in my selected major and help me grow as a leader. There are three big aviation clubs. There is the fraternity of Alpha Eta Rho, Women in Aviation, and Flight Team. Alpha Eta Rho does not have a house, but like other fraternities its main purpose is to gather a group of likeminded people, namely pilots, and give back to the community. Women in Aviation similarly looks to give back to the community, although it pursues other interests as well. Flight Team, is a competitive flight team the MNSU has that competes against Flight Teams from other colleges and universities. Through all of these groups I could stay attuned to what is going on in my major, become a better leader, and help create a difference for others

Though leadership was a pretty foreign concept to me, at least in terms of truly understanding it, I have learned a lot about it during my short time at MNSU. I have learned that leadership is a fluid concept; that leadership is an abstract concept that must be applied personally for it to truly work. With this knowledge in hand I have looked to the future and searched for certain niches in the aviation world where I could work on incorporating the new knowledge I have into my personal leadership skills, and become a more well-rounded and intelligent leader.