

## **Philosophy of Leadership**

**Ginger MacDonald, Ph.D.**

“Fail to honor people, they fail to honor you. But of a good leader, who talks little, when the work is done, the aim fulfilled, they will say, ‘We did this ourselves.’” Iao Tzu

### Definition of Leadership

Leadership is a reciprocal and relational activity. It involves the leader having a vision of problem solving, grounded in a solidly defined worldview, and then sharing it with others in a way that encourages them to want to follow. It is also taking the vision and ideas of others, and helping them formulate action solutions for the good of their unit. When both of these occur together, the resulting progress may be owned by all parties. It also means the leader steps back and lets others take credit for their good collective work.

### Person of the Leader

With competence and knowledge a given, it is the *person* of the leader that truly makes an impact on those within the leader’s sphere of influence. A goal of mine is to live a life driven by compassion. The word compassion often evokes a mushy non-critical approach to care. On the contrary, I see compassion as a risk-taking and dangerous virtue, because it demands action. From my parents I learned to express compassion through a life of service to others, in all life tasks and relationships. My leadership style is one of service. Not in the doormat sense, but in a general sense of building others up so they may reach their potential. In all of my spheres of influence, I attempt to keep a sense of humor about myself that fosters an easiness of others in my presence. A final personal value is the importance of family. It is within my family that I find the place of strength, honesty, challenge, and love that makes each day worth living, and my performance in the workplace strong.

Although I often emerge as the leader, I am a strong team player. When I make a commitment to others I am extremely reliable. I am also careful about making commitments, having a sense of personal boundaries about time management. I am a risk-taker and also can be supportive of others in challenging situations. The projects I agree to usually have to affirmatively answer this question, “Will this make a difference?”

### A Leadership Challenge

One leadership challenge for the century ahead involve coping with change in our culture. One challenge involves leadership in a time when traditional models do not always work. Today voices are heard from Americans of various values, economic experiences, national origins, in different languages, and with different styles of expression than those to which leaders are accustomed. The voices are from those who believe they have a right to be heard, and are often spoken disrespectfully of the person in authority. Solving this problem demands leadership models which create a chorus from the voices, rather than quelling the noise. This is a challenge, because we know what does not work, but we do not yet have a good model for what will. Our children need more cross-cultural experiences so when they become leaders this chorus will not seem so unusual. It also will demand a mainstream American reduction in arrogance, thinking we always know what is best for others. As leaders, we must be compassionate listeners and observers of others’ perspectives, instead of so quickly offering advice.

### Facilitator of change

As a mental health counselor I always had a goal of working myself out of a job with each client. A client’s self-sufficiency as a problem solver is much more of a focus than resolving any individual problem. I see my leadership for the institutional environment in a similar fashion. I will use my skills of compassionate leadership in order to facilitate departmental and individual goal achievement. Change is not easy, especially when it involves confronting inefficiencies, budget challenges, or less than competent performance of those for whom I am responsible. However, when approached with integrity and compassion I believe that solutions are usually available.