Students' Perspectives of Leadership Development

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COLUMN EDITOR'S NOTE

The successes and failures of a professional organization are often defined by the quality of the leadership managing the organization. The ability to influence others, facilitate meaningful change, move the organization forward, and in the case of athletic training, advocating for and protecting the patients served are highly desirable qualities. Leadership is an essential component of the health professions, and as educators we play an essential role in establishing leadership qualities and mentoring students to prepare them for future leadership roles. Several questions pertaining to leadership development, however, must be asked and answered: What does the concept of leadership mean for those students who will someday be our local, state, district, and national leaders What are the benefits of student leadership? What role can educators play in leadership development? What constitutes bad leadership? What is the difference between leadership and management? To address these questions, I recruited 3 coauthors, each of whom are student leaders in a variety of capacities. To answer the aforementioned questions, Katch, Tomczyk, and Shinkle not only reflected on the experiences of themselves and their peers, but also examined pertinent literature related to student leadership.

DEFINING LEADERSHIP

Every day the concept of leadership plays a specific role in peoples' lives, both personally and professionally. Unfortunately, we do not often reflect on the bigger picture of what leadership entails, particularly how the concept applies to being a student leader. Leadership is a complex, multifaceted concept[1,2] defined as ". . . an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes."[1(p328)] The truth is, however, there is no perfect or agreed-upon definition of leadership or what it takes to be a leader. Even athletic training and health care textbooks/articles define the concept of leader and leadership differently (Table 1). One can have the credentials and leadership status, but it is how he/she acts and presents himself/herself to others that provides the true meaning of leadership.

BECOMING A STUDENT LEADER

Becoming a student leader requires students to poignantly self-reflect in order to become intimately familiar with themselves and their potential leadership capabilities.[1–4] A student must have a realistic and practical understanding of their best-established skills, underestablished skills, physical abilities, personal biases, and triggers that have the possibility of clouding any judgments or actions they may take.[1,3,4] Student leaders, whether rookies or seasoned veterans, must be aware of their decision-making abilities and how they will react (verbally and nonverbally) when presented with stressful situations.[1,3,4] This is of particular concern when the situation/decision conflicts with their personal values and beliefs.[1,3,4] Self-awareness, however, is not always the easiest skill for students to acquire, but it is essential to be a competent leader who will excel.[5] Only once students are secure with themselves can they begin to start leading others.[1,2]

A successful, and more importantly, a credible student leader is able to demonstrate leadership qualities by setting an example for other students in order to exert influence.[1] Demonstrating commitment, poise, responsibility, dependability, accountability, and other important traits can have a contagious effect on the students being led.[1,5,6] In a perfect world, this statement suggests that eventually all students will begin displaying leadership qualities, but unfortunately this is not the case, even as a student matures. In some cases, students have the necessary characteristics and qualities to be a leader but are not interested in a leadership role often because of increasing requirements for graduation, work, and other extracurricular activities that have left little room for leadership to be in their schedules.[2]

Other important characteristics (Table 2) that a student leader needs to possess are loyalty, encouragement, and reprimand.[1] Remember, leadership is, "an intentional influence process by a leader over their followers," so displaying loyalty is very important in determining leadership capabilities.[7(p5)] Without loyalty, leaders will struggle gaining the respect and dedication of their followers, and a leader is only as good as the people who trust and stand by them.[4] Leaders deserve no

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Table 1.   Definitions of Leadership

Reference	Definition
Athletic Training Management: Concepts and Applications[25]	Ability to influence others toward the achievement of goals.
Management Strategies in Athletic Training[7]	Process of influencing the behavior and attitudes of others to achieve intended outcomes.
Administrative Topics in Athletic Training: Concepts to Practice[26]	Ability to influence others.
Leadership and Management: Techniques and Principles for Athletic Training[1]	Influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.
Program Design Considerations for Leadership Training for Dental and Dental Hygiene Students[17]	Ability to see the entire landscape through which a team must navigate, to listen objectively, to organize and manage projects by team members, and to monitor progress towards objectives.
Leadership Behaviors of Athletic Training Leaders Compared With Leaders in Other Fields[27]	Process of influencing people to accomplish goals.

more and no less than the loyalty they earn from their followers.[4] Encouragement and support are also imperative as a student leader because in our society it is naturally easier to be pessimistic.[1,8] A simple "thank you" goes a long way, and praise given publicly is always a positive reinforcer in students' minds that good things can happen.[1,2,6] The simple phrase, "Praise in public, and reprimand in private," is a noble concept when it comes to both encouragement and reprimand.[1(p329)] Though reprimanding another student is not the student leader's responsibility in the classroom setting, this is still a very important aspect to being a leader, especially when running student-based committees. Knowing how and when to reprimand, or better yet to redirect a fellow student is difficult, but the quicker one confronts a problematic issue, and the manner and demeanor you embody to accomplish this task, will determine if you will reach a positive and healthy outcome.[1]

For an educator, instilling these leadership traits and qualities into students may be difficult. It takes persistence and demands that the educator exhibits these desired leadership qualities as well.[9] Educators need to understand the importance of developing their students during their early college years because leadership development encompasses various activities, perspectives, and experiences that synergistically enhance the ability to make a meaningful difference.[10] Educators need to be aware that their students are not assembly made and will have different motivation and abilities. This being said, educators must continue to foster a mentor-mentee relationship, showing students "the ropes"

Table 2.   Characteristics and Qualities of a Leader[1,3,6,8,27]

Characteristics	Qualities
Model	Sets examples for what they expect from others.
	Ensures everyone follows set standards and principles.
	Loyal and dependent; always follows through with commitments.
	Has a clear philosophy of leadership; reflects with others about their performance.
	Exemplifies initiative, enthusiasm, dependability, and moral courage.
Inspire	Speaks with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of their work.
	Demonstrates their long-term interests can be realized with hard work and dedication.
	Shares struggles where they persevered.
	Highlights that opportunities can be seized with a shared vision and the concerted effort of many.
Challenge	Seeks out challenging opportunities to test their own skills and abilities.
	Takes risk even when there is a chance for failure.
	Challenges individuals to take a new path to experiment and find new solutions to problems.
	Searches outside formal organizational boundaries to find innovative ways for improvement.
Enable	Develops cooperative relationships with the people they work with.
	Supports decisions people make on their own.
	Treats others with dignity and respect.
	Promotes others to learn from their own work; offers guidance instead of taking control.
	Demonstrates effective listening skills to all situations.
Encourage	Encourages others to continue persevering even in the face of challenges.
	Seeks ways to celebrate accomplishments.
	Publically praises individuals for their hard work and commitment.
	Shows confidence in others abilities.

of progressing into the profession and working with other professionals outside of their state or district.[6]

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING A STUDENT LEADER?

Athletic training students, like any other student on a campus, are facing increasing academic graduation requirements including: (1) experiential learning during organized clinical education experiences, (2) working to pay for college, and (3) other extracurricular/social activities. The question then becomes, who has the time to get involved as a student leader whether it be at the collegiate, state, district, or national professional level? Despite the time commitment, there are many worthwhile benefits to engaging in leadership experiences.

Research demonstrates that being a leader enhances growth and development during the undergraduate years;[11] this occurs because of increased student interactions and responsibility. Both these characteristics create a strong influence on all aspects of personal and professional growth, and help in the development of multiple applied skills during college which include: (1) intellectual development and orientation; (2) political, social, and religious values; (3) academic and social self-concept; (4) intellectual orientation; (5) interpersonal skills; and (6) moral development.[11] The range of roles that a student leader can play is wide, and include being a: (1) role model, (2) personal support agent, (3) resource and referral agent, (4) academic success or learning coach, and (5) college success coach.[11] Furthermore, students need peers who provide personal and intellectual support, and it is important for students to view peers as academic mentors.[11]

Not only does being a student leader cause maturation as an undergraduate student, but it is also beneficial once a student graduates. The student leadership experience often better prepares students for the work environment because many of the skills required by entry-level employment and graduate schools mirror those gained from being a student leader.[11] There is a forum for integration of different skills such as the ability to communicate effectively, lead groups and group activities, and work under pressure.[11] Additionally, having student leadership status helps with professional networking. Meeting and interacting with professionals who may be potential employers or coworkers is very useful when searching for employment.

Being a student leader is also an honorable position. Student leaders are chosen and empowered to exert a positive influence upon their peers and to do so in a way that is less intimidating to fellow students than an authoritative demeanor of professional staff and faculty.[11] Representing a degree program, college/university, or the profession itself says a lot about the leader as a person and professional. There is a lot of responsibility with being a leader, and having leadership characteristics is admirable compared to students who are not leaders.

As research about leadership evolves, one constant will remain; increasing and enhancing leadership programs will contribute to institutional goals and missions that develop responsible and capable leaders and citizens. Involving educators in this important work benefits the educators themselves, the student participants, and the sponsoring institution as well.[12]

WHAT MAKES A BAD LEADER?

After reading about everything that can make an individual a successful leader, it is important to recognize what constitutes a "bad" or "unsuccessful" leader; success alone does not determine leadership effectiveness.[13] There are many theories and characteristics about what makes a good leader, but when a leader fails to grasp the concepts outlined in Table 3, it may be time to consider stepping into a different role.[14]

A potentially devastating characteristic of a bad leader is the inability to develop a clear vision and/or being unable to align the organization's measurable and achievable goals. Rather than advancing the organization, they find comfort in the status quo and are unable to clearly see the future. Without a clear picture of the future, bad leaders are unable to: (1) inspire individuals or teams, (2) motivate performance, and/or (3) create sustainable values in those that they lead. This is because they do not understand nor are they able to measure success of both the organization and those being served by the organization.[13]

A study by the Center for Creative Leadership[15] tracked leaders to discover what characteristics ultimately depict a bad leader. In fact, studying and identifying bad leadership qualities is just as helpful in determining leadership efficiency.[16] Nahavandi[13] compiled characteristics of leaders who have failed, and some of these characteristics include: (1) an abrasive, intimidating style; (2) coldness and arrogance; (3) untrustworthiness; (4) self-centeredness and overly political behaviors; (5) poor communication; (6) poor performance; and (7) an inability to delegate.[13] Myatt[14] also offers a few qualities held by bad leaders (Table 4). Together, the list of what makes for a bad leader and the list of what makes for an effective leader will help advance the understanding of successful and effective leadership.

MANAGERS VERSUS LEADERS

Nahavandi[13] also refers to 2 commonly misinterpreted organizational groups, which are worth discussing when examining leadership, managers versus leaders. Managers are people who can manage a group of followers and keep them organized, while leaders are charismatic people who can inspire a group of people. Possessing a manager mentality in a leadership position sets a person up for demonstrating bad leadership because problems will arise when there is a situation which requires leadership, not management. Managers manage, whereas leaders move an organization into the future.

College is the perfect time for students to figure out whether they are a manager or a leader because it allows them to make mistakes and fix them with few negative consequences. Ways to do this are studying the differences between leaders and managers. Leaders are people who have long-term and future-oriented perspectives and have a vision for followers that go beyond the immediate present.[13] Managers take the opposite, short-term perspective and focus on issues that happen during the daily routine within the immediate present time. Examples of manager characteristics include: (1) focusing on the present,

Table 3. Characteristics that Identify Leadership[8,28]

Characteristics	Implication
Model the way	Individuals of an organization recognize the impact of their behavior on others.
	By firmly upholding self-identified values, one's character and reliability forms a base for authentic and respectable leadership identity.
	Follow through on promises and commitments, and affirm the common values they share with others.
Inspire a shared vision	Leaders seek to enlist individuals in a common cause or shared belief.
	Able to create compelling visions that can guide people's behavior, and can visualize positive outcomes.
	With a shared vision, any task can be achieved through the dedication of others.
Challenges the process	An individual is willing to change the status quo and step into the unknown.
	Instead of following the path already taken, take a different path while experimenting and taking risks.
	It is the willingness to seek out new solutions that yields the most promising rewards; make sure no opportunity goes unlooked.
Enables others to act	Most overlooked dimension of leadership. Places emphasis on the importance of letting followers learn to become leaders themselves.
	Offers guidance instead of taking complete control of a task if it isn't going as planned.
	Build trust with others and promote collaboration, while listening to diverse points of view with dignity and respect.
Encourages the heart	Loving one's work and organization is a significant factor in enabling an individual to become an effective leader.
	To encourage the heart means demanding a close understanding of both oneself and one's followers, as well as supporting and appreciating others for a job well done.
	Work becomes a pursuit rather than a burden when one is encouraged to be passionate about their role.

(2) implementing policies and procedures, (3) maintaining existing structure, (4) maintaining status quo, and (5) using positional power. Leaders on the other hand: (1) focus on the future, (2) create change, (3) initiate goals and strategies for the future, (4) create a culture based on shared values, (5) establish an emotional link with followers, and (6) use personal power. Once a student has discovered whether they are a manager or leader, they can place themselves in positions and be effective within whatever group they are involved in.

FUNDAMENTALS OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A student's professional success is a multifaceted process based on factors such as experiences they encounter, as well as engaging in modeling the professional behavior of his/her mentor(s), preceptor(s), and other well-respected professionals.[6] Since leadership is an essential part of the health professions, educators play an essential role in mentoring students to prepare them for future leadership roles within the profession.[17] An effective athletic training educator is seen as responsive to student's needs, professional, and one who demonstrates active communication and a high level of commitment to the student's education and future.[6] Engaging in one-on-one meetings and discussions with a student and exhibiting the traits of an effective educator, one can effectively start fostering a mentor-mentee relationship.[6] A sound mentor-mentee relationship is not established overnight; this is a process that takes time and commitment from both the educator and student. Once this relationship is established, educators can begin fostering a potential student leader; without it, an educator will struggle to provide leadership influence because they are only aware of a student's abilities, goals, and personal characteristics exclusively expressed in the classroom.[2]

Student leadership is not for everyone, and it is important for educators to know how capable each individual student is of becoming a leader.[2] There are 4 questions an educator should ask and answer to understand a student's leadership ability: (1) Is leadership important to the student? (2) Does the student consider himself/herself a leader? (3) Will leadership be important to the student after college? (4) Is the student able to work collaboratively?[18] If an educator answers "yes" to all of these questions or the student has exhibited previous leadership qualities, it is a good indicator that the student is ready to be groomed and mentored as a leader.[18] Additionally, an educator may determine a student's potential leadership qualities and abilities by determining if they are: (1) modeling appropriate behaviors, (2) inspiring a shared vision, (3) challenging the process, (4) enabling others to act, and (5) encouraging the heart.[10] These 5 characteristics, especially encouraging the heart, meaning loving one's work and organization, are significant factors in enabling people to become effective leaders which educators can recruit and mentor.[8] If an educator encourages their students to be passionate about their roles, their work becomes a pursuit rather than a burden.[8]

There are multiple ways for an educator to inform a student about leadership and to help them get involved including: (1) sharing individual experiences; (2) helping students evolve their existing leadership qualities; (3) informing students of local, state, district, and national student leadership positions; and (4) engaging students in service learning. Educators sharing their individual experiences with a student, especially ones that involve struggle, will justify the educators own

Table 4. Characteristics of Bad Leaders[14]

Characteristics	Implication
Leaders who do not have vision	Leaders who do not have a vision and don't inspire their followers through motivation to follow that vision will ultimately fail.
Leaders who lack integrity	Leaders without integrity over time are more likely to rationalize unethical behavior no matter how intelligent or persuasive they are.
Leaders who consistently underperform	No leader is perfect; however, leaders who consistently fail and do not show results will eventually lose credibility with followers.
A leader who thinks they "know it all"	A leader does not have to be the smartest person in the room to be effective. Recognizing that he/she doesn't know everything will prove to be an important concept.
Bad communication	Bad leaders do not communicate in person or with technology.
Leaders who think it's all about them	Leaders need followers, if leaders put themselves above the people who make them successful then failure is imminent.
Leadership without "love"	A leader who thinks it is weak to show empathy, humility, and kindness is mistaken. It proves worthwhile to show these traits to create followers.
Leaders with only one leadership style	Leaders should be flexible and adaptable. The "my way or the highway" mentality will only create a nonproductive group.
Leaders who lack of focus	The best leaders have a vision and focus. Leaders without focus are unable to create a common goal.
Leaders who are confined to their comfort zone	Good leaders take risks to achieve the overall vision. Doing what no one else will do will put your group in front to become more successful.
Leaders who do not pay attention to the needs of the followers or people	Leaders who do not know the needs of their shareholders will eventually fail based on the fact that their service as a leader will no longer be needed.
Leaders who are not invested	Leaders cannot lead if they do not have passion for what they are doing and are not invested in the organization.
Leaders who are not accountable	Real leaders are accountable for their actions. Blaming others and then taking credit for just the success of the organization will create a lack of trust.
Bad culture	Understanding the culture of a group is essential. Creating a culture that grows success is necessary. It doesn't just happen; a leader has to work for it.
Leaders who lack courage	Courage is a necessary characteristic. Bad leaders who do not show courage will never be able to push for change or seek new opportunities by cutting losses and admitting faults.

leadership capabilities and shows validation that struggling is an important aspect to leadership development.[3,19] When educators share their struggles, it shows the student that even a mentor can fail; more importantly, though, it shows the student that, out of failure and learning through self-evaluation, you can still be a successful leader. An educator sharing his/her experiences will enable a student to hone qualities such as determination, drive, commitment, independence, and toughness.[3] Effective student leaders will be more open to risk failure because they will know failure and disappointment are a normal part of leadership development.[2]

Once students show leadership qualities, it is important for the mentor/educator to foster such qualities. As stated above, a leader should encompass commitment, poise, responsibility, dependability, accountability, loyalty, and many other important characteristic traits. One good way an educator can foster these qualities is by integrating project-based learning into their curriculum which provides the student with new opportunities to lead using authentic learning.[2,20,21] Authentic learning normally focuses on "real-world" or complex problem-and-solution activities that emphasize the cultivating of "transferable skills" entry-level practitioners in any discipline require or have difficulty acquiring on their own.[21] This project-based learning practice focuses on the student learning through one's experiences and also involves collaborative interactions with other students which have been shown to be a strong, positive predictor of personal development.[22] This collaboration with other students demonstrates the complexity of working in groups and requires the student to learn from and teach peers throughout the project, effectively enhancing leadership qualities.[22] Another way an educator can nurture student leadership qualities is for the educator to display such qualities themselves.[2] Research suggests there is a direct relationship between exhibiting instructional leadership and being visibly committed to a student, which leads to an increase in student performance.[9]

An educator can help potential student leaders get involved by informing them of any student leadership positions at the local, state, district, and national level. Young student leaders need exposure to situations that require them to lead in order to help develop individual skills that will enable them to be successful group and community leaders.[2] What better way is there for a student to get situational leadership exposure than to get involved in a leadership position in their field of study? This informational and experience-driven method is how I (R.K.) personally became involved in leadership positions or activities within the local, state, district, and national levels. Getting involved in situational leadership positions also enhances the student's ability to lead with the following styles: (1) directing, (2) coaching, (3) supporting, and (4) delegating.[23] Situational leadership will help a student leader determine which of the above leadership styles is appropriate when they are performing different tasks with different individuals who have different qualifications.[23] This is

important because without situational and experience-based leadership, a leader is all talk and no game. It is clear that experience is the best teacher of leadership because it bridges the gap between practice and performance.[24]

CONCLUSIONS

Developing student leaders is not an easy task. It is a multidimensional responsibility that requires early recognition of leadership qualities and characteristics, evolution of those characteristics, and most importantly dedication and commitment from both the educator and student. Student leadership is an important aspect of any profession, and the time and devotion required to develop a student into a leader is always time well spent. Students are the future of any organization, and it is pertinent there is a leader among the crowd who will be a frontrunner and advocate that is not afraid of difficult tasks or situations. An educator should not shy away or be deterred from aiding in the development of a student leader because an educator's actions or inactions could be the difference in whether a student becomes a leader and a positive influence on the profession at the local, state, district, or national level.

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