

Looking Back to Lead Forward - Understanding Your Leadership Journey

"Who we are is how we lead".
(Brené Brown)

Introduction – Developing Worldviews

Let me start with a question: Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why you make the decisions you do? Why you trust some people more than others? Or why certain leadership styles feel more natural to you than others? The answer lies in something deeper than habits or preferences—it lies in your worldview. Just like a pair of glasses, your worldview colors how you perceive and respond to the world around you, including how you lead.

Today, we start our discussion by considering how we develop our worldviews. According to James W. Sire, our worldview is the fundamental perspective from which we interpret and interact with the world around us (Sire, 2015). This worldview is shaped through various experiences, teachings, and reflections from our cultural, philosophical, and religious contexts. As we navigate life's complexities, our worldview becomes the lens through which we understand leadership and its practice.

Reflective Exercise

Let's take a moment to reflect quietly:

- What are the key influences that have shaped your worldview?

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Hold these insights as we continue.

Personal Story – Shaping of a Worldview

Allow me to share my personal story: As the first-born child of a first-generation Seventh-day Adventist couple—my mother, originally from Munich, a recent convert to Adventism, and my father a Protestant-background immigrant from Romania—I was raised in a devout, yet culturally complex household. Growing up in a predominantly Catholic environment, I often felt like an outsider. My parents reminded me regularly that I was a unique gift of God, which gave me a strong sense of self-worth.

Later, visiting West Africa and living in France exposed me to stark contrasts in societal expectations, gender roles, and systemic privilege. These experiences challenged and deepened my worldview. At age 27, I experienced a conscious spiritual conversion that shaped my leadership identity around authenticity, responsibility, and service. Values like achievement, empathy, and integrity—rooted in my faith and family teachings—continue to guide how I lead today.

Influences on Leadership Development

Leadership is inherently relational and contextual, influenced significantly by those around us. Consider Albanian leaders such as Skanderbeg, who demonstrated adaptive and transformational leadership by uniting diverse groups during turbulent times, and Mother Teresa, whose servant leadership prioritized compassion and humility.

Mother Teresa once said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." Each leader's actions reverberate far beyond their immediate context, shaping the leadership paths of others.

Interactive Question to Audience: Who is a historical or personal figure whose leadership deeply influenced you, and why? Write your answer in the chat:

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Personal Story – Influenced by Great Leadership

A few years into my professional journey, I was introduced to Peter, who was looking for someone to lead recruitment coordination across Switzerland at an international corporate company. I joined his team at a time when recruitment processes were fragmented, inconsistent, and even competitive between departments.

Peter had a clear vision: to align recruitment practices across the country for greater efficiency and collaboration. He secured buy-in from top leadership, gave me full access to his network, and empowered me to build a strategy and team to realize that vision. When challenges arose—including one where I was blamed for a mistake outside my control—he stood by me, clarified the facts with stakeholders, and publicly entrusted me with more responsibility.

Peter's leadership wasn't just strategic—it was deeply human. He fostered trust, unity, and creativity, and he inspired us. What stood out most was Peter's way of building high-functioning teams. He organized off-site workshops when new managers joined the team. These sessions weren't just social—they were strategic: we identified interdependencies, set shared goals, and cooked meals together to build trust.

His example taught me the essence of transformational and empowering leadership: setting direction, backing your people, and building real connection. It shaped the way I lead to this day—empowering others, fostering team cohesion, and holding a long-term vision while trusting people with the details.

Overview of Leadership Theories

To better understand how our leadership is influenced, let's briefly explore several leadership theories:

- **Trait Leadership:** Leaders possess inherent qualities like charisma or decisiveness (Stogdill, 1948).
- **Transactional Leadership:** Emphasizes structured exchanges and rewards (Burns, 1978).
- **Behavioral Leadership:** Leadership effectiveness results from learned behaviors (Blake & Mouton, 1964).
- **Situational Leadership:** Adapts leadership styles to different contexts (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969).
- **Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory:** Focuses on building strong leader-follower relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

- **Transformational Leadership:** Inspires followers through vision and charisma (Bass & Riggio, 2006).
- **Adaptive Leadership:** Addresses complex, changing environments (Heifetz, 1994).
- **Servant Leadership:** Prioritizes service, empathy, and community (Greenleaf, 1970).

10-Minute Breakout Session

We will now move into a 10-minute breakout session. We will group you into small groups of 2–3 people. In your groups, discuss the following questions:

- What are one or two experiences that shaped your leadership style?
- Which leadership theory resonates most with your experience, and why?
- How does your worldview affect the way you make leadership decisions?

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Take turns sharing and ensure everyone in your group has a chance to speak. You will receive a signal when the time is finished and when you are called back to the main hall.

Philosophical Leadership Insights

Our leadership approach is not only shaped by experiences and models but also by the philosophical and cultural lenses through which we see the world. Across the globe, diverse traditions offer profound guidance for leadership.

In Confucian thought, leadership is rooted in moral development, social harmony, and a deep sense of duty to others. Aristotle’s virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of cultivating inner character—leaders should model virtues like justice, courage, and modesty as part of their moral responsibility.

Monotheistic worldviews also provide powerful leadership paradigms. The Judeo-Christian tradition emphasizes covenantal leadership—rooted in relationship, service, justice, and stewardship. Leaders are expected to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). From a Christian perspective, leadership is modeled on Jesus Christ, whose servant leadership emphasized humility, sacrifice, and unconditional love.

Islamic leadership, influenced by the Qur'an and Hadith, places strong emphasis on accountability before God (taqwa), justice (‘adl), and consultation (shura). A leader is seen as a

shepherd (ra'ín) responsible for the welfare of their people, guided by ethical integrity and spiritual consciousness.

In contrast, more contemporary Western philosophies might emphasize autonomy, individualism, and rational strategy. These differing worldviews can lead to very different leadership behaviors and practices.

Understanding these philosophical and theological roots helps us examine our own assumptions and make room for deeper reflection and growth.

Interactive Question to Audience: Which philosophical or cultural traditions have significantly shaped your leadership style? Write into the chat:

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Conclusion and Takeaway

To summarize today's exploration, let's return to Brené Brown's assertion, "Who we are is how we lead" (Brown, 2018). Our leadership journey becomes more effective and authentic as we understand the diverse influences shaping our worldview and leadership style.

Continue to reflect and integrate these insights into your personal leadership narrative. The deeper our self-awareness, the stronger our leadership impact.

Thank you for your thoughtful participation, and keep engaging in reflective practice as you evolve in your leadership.

Next presentation

Answering the Call - The Path to Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership isn't just a role; it's a calling, an upward journey. It requires us to ascend our metaphorical mountain, connecting with our source of inspiration. This path demands constant growth and a commitment to lifelong learning, tapping into a power beyond ourselves.

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