

If your college or university is interested in adding a Special Event Degree program to your offerings, it will take a unique individual to lead the design of the plan. Skills, creativity and industry knowledge are all important, but it will take a leader to ensure a quality product is created. The team who will accomplish this important task will need to be focused, results-oriented and possess unparalleled communication skills to realize success. Under the leadership of Erin Schneiderman the program will achieve results. What type of leader is Erin? In this paper, Erin explains her leadership approach comparing examples of similar styles and practical experiences in her daily professional life.

Leadership – an in-depth look at Erin Schneiderman
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As I continue to grow in my professional career, I find myself demonstrating evidence of the skills approach towards leadership. I consider myself a somewhat seasoned event professional with more than 16 years of experience. I have maintained the criteria set forth by industry standards to continue on my career path, which includes a full-time job as the Director of Special Events at a college within Arizona State University (ASU) and as a faculty associate teaching an upper level Special Events Management course also at ASU. At work, I lead a staff of contractors who provide services such as room set ups, catering, housekeeping and maintenance. In addition I have one student worker and a volunteer team consisting of staff (with other jobs at ASU) who come together to help me execute our on-campus events. In the classroom, I am considered the leader of my students (typically 15-35 in a given semester) who are usually juniors and seniors with a true interest in pursuing a career in event planning. I may have character traits that I was born with (Northouse, 2016, p. 19), that factor into the leader I am today which include a drive for responsibility and task completion and persistence in pursuit of goals; however, when I review the character traits and skills traits, I find myself more connected with skills traits.

A special event planner was definitely not the route I saw myself taking when I studied journalism at ASU, but an internship and two mentors opened my eyes to the opportunities within the industry that would lead to a career in event planning. I was put in situations as early as 21 years old that required me to demonstrate leadership skills over staff who were older and more seasoned than I. Providing a balance of the three-skill approach (Northouse, 2016, pp. 43-46), was as important to me back then as it is today. My ability to understand the technical side of event planning (risk, communication, developing a solid site plan and event flow) are all skills that were learned during my early years as an event planner. In the event industry, possessing strong human skills is imperative to success and one that I pride myself on. My ability to work with clients, vendors, volunteers and staff dictates the success of the event. The result of hard working, like-minded people working towards a common and clear goal is what I strive for when producing each event. Finally, conceptual skills (Northouse, 2016, p. 45), or my ability to work with ideas is also a learned skill that I have developed over my years in the field. Event planning utilizes vision, creativity and hypothetical notions typically developing an event sometimes with little direction.

At the beginning of my career, I focused more on obtaining the technical skills to get the job done. I would attend industry meetings, professional development workshops and read books on related topics; however, 16 years later, as Katz suggested I find myself focused more on the human and conceptual skills as I move into more of a top management position (Northouse, 2016, p. 46). Competencies that I believe I use in my day-to-day style include the ability to problem solve, work with others using social judgement skills and demonstrate knowledge about my field. I have been conditioned to maintain my composure in stressful situations and in turn, my staff who is counting on me to make decisions will stay clear-headed and able to make difficult decisions when needed. In fact, the job title "event coordinator" is consistently listed on Forbes' "The 10 most stressful jobs" list featured as #5 in 2016 and 2017 (Dill, 2016), which further demonstrates the need to be an effective problem solver.

Similar to Ms. Dawn Feldman (an interviewee in my CCHE class) wanting to let the “true Dawn” lead her staff to success; I would also like the “true Erin” to emerge as my authentic leadership approach (Northouse, 2016, p. 195). Dawn mentioned that she does not want to mimic or feel pressure to use other people’s leadership styles and I think that is a terrific outlook on leadership. I would love to develop my own authentic leadership approach that combines my characteristics, traits and experiences to achieve similar results as she has in her successful career.

The next leadership approach I would like to focus on is path-goal theory. Although the students in my class are not considered my “employees” or are not being compensated by me, I would still like to draw connections to the path-goal theory, as I believe they look to me as a leader. My class is a mixture of lecture, in-class activities, guest speaking engagements and practical experiences (site visits, volunteering at events and production tours.) I consider it my job as a leader in the classroom to figure out what motivates my students to get the best results (learning something they did not know, working well with a team, obtaining the best grade that they can and setting them up for internships and jobs.) It is my hope that I create experiences that provide followers with the tools they need to achieve their goals and excel in the class. (Northouse, 2016, p. 115).

I believe my teaching style achieves the path-goal leadership graphic offered in figure 6.1 (Northouse, 2016, p. 116). This image focuses on defining goals, clarifies path, removing obstacles (I always explain to students ways they can maximize success in the class) and finally, providing support (I feel I always give my students the tools they need to succeed and prove that I am always there to support them via email or personal meeting.)

In this setting, I see myself as using directive leadership as my students receive a task and what is expected of them, a timeline for completion and other clear standards (Northouse, 2016, p. 117). I like to combine this leader behavior with supportive leadership as I find myself being friendly and approachable to their needs, questions and special circumstances throughout the semester.

The final approach I would like to discuss is the transformational leadership approach. Although I would not consider myself the most charismatic person, I do think I demonstrate visionary leadership (Northouse, 2016, p. 161) when it comes to designing my events and the details that accompany them as well as when I create the syllabus for my class. I strive to carry a positive influence over people to get results. In my opinion, helping my staff and students to reach their fullest potential and exceed their expectations would be an exciting success in my career that I continually strive to meet.

I have made a case that the three styles I strive to use in my daily leadership approaches are a skills approach, path-goal theory and transformational. I would also like to talk about a contrasting style that I do not think would fit my leadership. In contrast to the transformational leadership style, I do not think I have the characteristics to maintain a transactional style. Although in the classroom, it is a pretty standard process of me giving an assignment as the

faculty associate and my students completing the assignment for a grade which is along the transactional leadership mindset. (Northouse, 2016, p. 162). However, I strive to break the norm and demand more out of my students, helping them reach their goals and find their fullest potential through transformational leadership. They could figure out a direction in the event industry that they would like to pursue, find another interest altogether, discover how much they enjoy working on a team, work really hard to achieve a higher grade and reach personal satisfaction. By being a strong role model, communicating high expectations and by expressing confidence, these are some strategies I would use to help my students reach their full potential in contrast to the transactional leadership style.

In order to continue on my quest to be an authentic leader, I believe Bill George's Authentic Leadership approach (Northouse, 2016, p. 197); will be the best guide towards achieving my leadership goals. By focusing on developing practical qualities such as understanding my purpose (within my organization, for each event and in the classroom as an educator), this will always keep me grounded and questioning the reasons behind what I am doing. For instance, if I have a bad day at work and after a grueling eight hours I get in my car to drive an hour to teach undergraduates how to be event planners, it would be important to remind myself that my college trusts me with educating the next generation of event planners. By understanding the impact I have on my students, I will hopefully turn my mood around and prepare to be an effective leader in the classroom.

I consider my values to be strong and hope to make decisions that are in the best interest of others. After nine years in my current job, I feel that I have earned the trust and respect from my colleagues. They know that their events are in good hands and I have only the best intentions for the greater good of ASU. One gap I have found is that since I teach a new class each semester, I must start over every six months building trust and rapport with my students. Further, I will continue to demonstrate self-discipline, a skill that I developed growing up as an athlete. Discipline was a huge factor in shaping my athletic career and professional career. I pride myself on staying focused on the task and understanding the consequences that result in my actions. Similar to Dawn Feldman who also grew up as a collegiate athlete, the team approach to leadership is one that I find myself using in almost every event task that I lead (Northouse, 2016, p. 123). Finally, if I lead from my heart, my passion for event planning and my institution will be witnessed by others and hopefully they will take on the same loyalty and productivity that I strive to demonstrate.

Although I talked about using path-theory leadership in my classroom, one gap that I would like to attempt to fill is the participative leadership behavior. (Northouse, 2016, p. 118). It is easy to give clear instruction to students (how I want an assignment to be done, deadline, etc.), but I would like to make a better effort in involving them in the assignment process. If I took more time to understand their interests, what would benefit them and their preferred method of learning (such as group work, online forums and practical scenarios) I may find students are more willing to engage and perform better on assignments. In fact, a study performed in 42 elementary and middle schools in one county showed that by asking students to select a topic of interest to study, teachers and program developers were able to narrow in

on what was of interest to a student and focus more on career aspirations. (Lock, 1984, pp. 261-262).

To fill this gap, I would like to begin each semester with a mixed method survey asking students quantitative questions such as how would you rate your interest in given areas and let them give qualitative feedback on the ways that they prefer to learn and their topics of interest. Would they like to focus more on certain types of events (social or corporate) or a niche area such as venue sales, weddings, non-profit strategies, etc. Of course, I cannot stray too far from the book offerings, but through guest speakers and adjustments in assignments, I am confident I can make changes to satisfy more students and their thirst for learning.

Another gap in my behavior is that I do not necessarily see myself as being a charismatic leader with a dominant personality. Although I am confident in my other traits including my desire to influence, self-confidence and strong moral values, I can strive to be more persuasive through a dominant personality in the workplace and in the classroom. (Northouse, 2016, p. 165).

In my opinion ethics have a direct correlation with leadership styles. Transformational leadership (one of the approaches I focused on earlier) is based on the leader finding ways for the follower to have higher standards of moral responsibility. (Northouse, 2016, p. 338). One section I really enjoyed navigating was the five principles of ethical leadership (Northouse, 2016, p. 341). It is amazing to me that by tracing back to Aristotle we can come up with a strategy that we still use today by combining a foundation of respect, service, justice, honesty and community. In an excerpt from *Confronting Aristotle's Ethics: Ancient and Modern Morality*, Garver states that causal connections around virtue is the middle term that connects the human soul and particular actions with happiness. (Garver, 2014). By looking at the five principals and applying them to what makes an ethical leader, I can see how conclusions can be drawn that lead to happier staff who have the pleasure of working with a leader that is fit for the role resulting in increased workplace satisfaction.

Based on the leadership styles and recommendations that I have outlined, I look forward to continuing on my career path making a more concerted effort to lead my staff (vendors, interns, volunteers) and students using leadership methods that are proven to produce successful results.

In conclusion, Northouse offers so many types of leadership styles that have been adapted over the past 60 years. (Northouse, 2016, p. 5), I take a personal interest in continuing to learn about the various styles in order to adjust my leadership behavior towards my followers (staff and students.) For me, I get the most satisfaction out of knowing I am a good communicator, I am fair in my decision-making, I am ethical and sensitive to all cultures. The way I am positively perceived by my staff and students means I am upholding the personal goals I have set for myself. There is always room for improvement and I strive to be the best leader I can be so I will continue to learn and grow in this area and am grateful for the take-aways I will carry with me from this course.

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