It is believed that individuals characterize their perceptions of life and leadership based upon their personal experiences, achievements, hardships, and environment. A set definition of leadership is unclear, because it means something different to each person.

I was born the youngest of four children, but the only shared child between my parents. Until I was about 7 years old, my parents were married and each of my 3 siblings and I lived within the same household. From a young age, I valued the embodiment of belonging, stability, and normalcy. As a cohesive family unit, my earliest memories were defined by a values-based leadership approach. The approach was demonstrated by two physically and emotionally present parents that allowed each child to follow their own path while maintaining a common fortitude; we were not distracted by overbearing rules and structure and instead knew what was expected of us. As with values-based leadership “instead of focusing on purposes of supervision, exact control and emphasis on hierarchy, leadership concentrates on values and insights” (Shatalebi & Yarmohammadian, p. 3703, 2011). At that time in my life, my leadership approach aligned closely with the theories presented by the Messiah Discourse, which placed emphasis on loyalty and commitment within the organization.

At 7-years old, I was a second-grader with what most would consider to be an ideal and normal family structure and environment. It was during that time-frame that I was first introduced to adversity, change, and conflict. My mom no longer placed the family-unit as her main priority, as she abandoned most of her maternal obligations and turned instead to alcohol and an alternative lifestyle. My parents divorced, and within a few short weeks our family was torn apart, as myself and 3 siblings were separated, my oldest brother moving out to live with his mother, and myself, my other brother and sister living with my mother. Because my brother and sister were several years older than me, they stepped in as authoritative figures in my mother’s absence. My sister embodied matriarchal leadership, providing a sense of a strong, reliable motherly figure. Although she provided a means of stability, she was herself a teenager and understandably not in a place to be in such a role. As my mom’s absence grew more apparent, I moved in with my dad and quickly went from the baby of the family to an only child. My dad was a police officer, serving as a tactical sergeant for the Constable’s office in Houston, Texas. His job was dangerous, unpredictable, and not conducive to typical parenting roles. He worked a minimum of 16 to 18 hours a day, typically 7 days a week. It was then that I learned the importance of self-reliance, independence, and maturity. My dad was my best friend and supporter but did not serve in a typical patriarchal-role. His leadership was authoritative, as he encouraged me to be “independent, but also set limits and boundaries. Discipline [was] applied, but in a supportive, non-punitive way. Typically, authoritative parents give their children increasing levels of independence as they mature and this leads to higher leadership potential in the children of authoritative parents. Social skills, self-control, and self-reliance are more highly developed, and these are qualities that make ideal employees, leaders, and life partners” (Riggio 2014).

My leadership approach transitioned to a style most closely aligned to the eco-leadership discourse, as I learned the importance of leadership in being able to respond and adapt to change. Although my primary example of a leader, my father, was not always able to come to my sporting events and be present for most of my childhood activities, his career taught me the values of servant leadership. Instead of resenting him for his absence in a parental role, I respected and admired his selfless sacrifice, duty, and integrity. The values embodied in me through his example reflected the characteristics of servant leadership, which include “valuing people, humility, listening, trust, caring, integrity, service, empowering, serving others’ needs before their own, collaboration, love/unconditional love, and learning” (Focht & Ponton, p. 57, 2015). My leadership approach was also influenced by my desire to emulate my father, as I too hope to serve others rather than just lead.

The remainder of my youth was comprised of self-motivation, coping with fears of abandonment, and a constant struggle between loneliness and resiliency. I graduated high school, became my own legal guardian through emancipation, and moved out on my own to begin college at the age of 16. Although there were a lot of hard times during my childhood, I value the trials and tribulations, as they forced me to fight to become who I wanted to be. I am grateful for every struggle and hardship, because I truly value every opportunity and joyous moment, whether for myself or those around me. Because I so often sought out support and stability, I seek to provide that to others through leadership. Because I faced adversity, I learned to adapt and overcome. I learned to value humor, optimism, and hope. Each defining moment in life shapes and molds us into who we ultimately become. My leadership biography is my story, and it is up to me to use the skills and experiences I have acquired to positively impact others and ultimately write my own happy ending.

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