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EDTC 802

Themes of Leadership

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For this essay on Themes of Leadership, I chose the videos by Brene Brown, Jocko Willink and Oprah Winfrey. They all talk about different kinds of leaderships and there are some emergent themes that can be found in each video. While Brene Brown talks about vulnerability and empathy and how they impact leadership styles, Jocko Willink talks about war, blaming other for mistakes and mishaps and taking ownership of our mistakes. Oprah Winfrey talks about women in leadership and how women can impact the world with humanity and compassion.

The first video I watched was by Brene Brown, a professor, author and podcast host. In her video, I could identify four themes that she talks about: scarcity culture, vulnerability, empathy and blame. According to Brown, we are living in times of “scarcity culture” where nothing is ever enough. It is a mindset which is rooted in fear and anxiety which prevents us from being ourselves and we tend to focus on not what we have but rather what we do not have. In workspaces this kind of scarcity culture can translate into feeling of inadequacy and create a culture of blame, shame and fear (“The toxic culture of scarcity”, 2019). Brown further says that since we are afraid of getting hurt, we put an armor around ourselves and refrain from opening our true inner self to others or be vulnerable to others. By armoring up we are protecting ourselves from potential criticism, judgement or even ridicule. According to her “vulnerability is a path to love, belonging, joy, intimacy trust innovation and creativity” (Brown, B. 2013) When leaders are true to themselves, open themselves up to their teams and are willing to admit their mistakes, it creates an environment of trust where people can learn from each other’s mistakes and experiences. This leads to better collaboration and sparks innovation and creativity (Romero, B. 2023).

If people cannot let go of their vulnerability, they cannot be empathetic either. For a leader to be a good leader, they need to be empathetic towards their followers, understand their perspective without judgement, recognize emotions and feelings and communicate those emotions and feelings to the followers. (Brown, B. 2013). Empathetic leaders are willing to show vulnerability, are able to connect better with their teams, motivate them and support them at all times. It creates an environment of better understanding, employee engagement, collaboration and greater productivity.

Another theme that emerged from Brown's video is "blame". Whenever something goes wrong in our life, we always want to know "whose fault, is it?". We are always very quick to blame others when something goes wrong in our lives. Blaming is simply a way of showing anger since we cannot take accountability of our actions. Leaders who blame others often fail to take responsibility of their actions and behaviors and this leads to mistrust, lack of cooperation and disrespect among team members.

The second video that I watched was called "Extreme Ownership" by Jocko Willink, a former US Navy SEAL, a podcaster, entrepreneur, and motivational speaker. In the first part of the video Willink, talks about the war in Iraq in 2006 and how it taught him valuable lessons in brotherhood, honor, humility and leadership (Willink, 2017) especially when things go wrong. He recalls an incident that happened in Iraq where due to some misunderstanding, shots were fired, and an Iraqi soldier (not an enemy) died, and some other soldiers were wounded. There was an inquiry and the top brass wanted to know what happened and who was to be held accountable for what had happened. Willink knew there was a failure in planning and execution

for what had happened, but he didn't want to put the blame on his team members. As the team lead, he stepped up and took responsibility of the incident. This is What Willink calls, "extreme ownership" where he let go of his ego and took ownership of the incident rather than incriminating the other members of his team. By not making excuses and blaming others for his failure, he won the trust of his seniors and the respect of his juniors. Ownership is all about being accountable, being decisive, taking action and problem solving. An accountable leader understands and accepts the consequences of ownership and is willing to take responsibility of his actions. When leaders don't take ownership of their actions, the team suffers, results are not achieved, and it can have damaging effect on the whole organization (Narlock, 2018).

The third video that I watched was by Oprah Winfrey, philanthropist and global media leader. Her talk was primary about women leadership and how women can change the world by their leadership, determination, commonsense and humanity. "Women leaders help increase productivity, enhance collaboration, inspire organizational dedication, and improve fairness" (Novotney, A. 2023). Winfrey urges women to first become a leader of their lives, families and communities then become a leader of the world. She talks about wholesomeness and that fact that women should strive to become wholesome so that they are perceived as decent, nice, sincere and trustworthy. She further talks about spirituality and how spirituality adds to the wholesomeness of a person. If one has gratitude, kindness, empathy, joy and reverence for life in their soul, they will be able to spread their inner joy outward into the world (Winfrey, 2019).

The last part of the video focusses on the former Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern who became a role model to everyone for her compassionate and humane leadership in the wake

of a massacre in two mosques in New Zealand. Ardern showed up wearing a *hijab* (headscarf), in solidarity to the Muslim population, to comfort the families of the victims of the massacre. Her genuine compassion and empathy were lauded all around the world for bringing people together in humanity. It was a true leadership skill and attribute as she opened people's hearts and minds to a peaceful way forward. She displayed inclusive leadership as she was able to “lead a diverse group of people while demonstrating respect for each person’s unique characteristics without bias” (Radicioni, 2021). In the words of Winfrey, Ardern exemplified the fact that women as leaders can channel their own inner humanity to make the world a better place.

After watching all the three videos I can conclude that common theme in the videos was – empathy, compassion and taking ownership of actions. These are true hallmarks of a great and engaged leader. We need more leaders who understand a situation from another person’s perspective and respond to it with compassion and empathy. Oprah Winfrey and Jacinda Ardern are excellent examples of how to use a platform to make the world and life better by display of compassion and humanity. We also need more genuine leaders who take responsibility of their actions and lead with integrity. Such skills are displayed by authentic leaders who are fair, trustworthy, have high moral values and take responsibility of their actions (Northouse, 2021).

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