

Part One: Awareness

I am not a product of my circumstances.

I am a product of my decisions.

- Stephen Covey

Chapter One: The Leadership Definition & Value

Defining Leadership

Describe a leader. Do that now.

Grab a pen and piece of paper or your phone and brainstorm for a minute or two. What words, phrases or actions come to mind? Jot those down and keep that list close as you continue to read.

Maybe words like strategic, collaborative, innovative, personable, confident and successful float to mind. Phrases stringing those words together may follow.

Names of well-known leaders like a president or chief executive officer (CEOs) of a leading company may fill your notepad. Alternatively, even the CEO, vice president (VPs) or people manager at the company where you work.

You may even think of a member of the community who leads initiatives and projects that you see make a difference like Scouts, fundraisers or cultural events.

Or, a friend of yours whom you think leads by example in the way they live their life. Did you even think of yourself?

If you happen to think about CEOs, VPs or people managers, keep in mind that those are people in particular roles completing particular tasks and duties within a company. However, does that equal leadership?

Maybe, but maybe not.

We've romanticized leadership. We've taken it to dinner, been wowed by its over-hyped and adjective-filled stories and profiles.

We've even taken it to post-movie coffee and been blown away at the research, theory, behavioral analysis and assessments that have helped leadership get to where it is today - high profile, sexy and, somewhat, unattainable.

Let's face it: Leadership is out of our league.

How can one person be and do so much? Moreover, how can we expect that both from others and ourselves?

We define and understand leadership based on characteristics, behaviors, and traits that we associate with leaders.

We sometimes may define leaders the way that we envision our future or desired selves.

Everyone's leadership definition is going to be different. Everyone's idea of leadership is going to be different. That's what makes thinking and talking about leadership fascinating.

In thinking about ourselves, why do we want to be leaders based on our definitions? Why do we buy books, listen to podcasts and attend lectures on this topic?

We all have our reasons.

Maybe leadership aligns itself in with power, and the idea of having that power is exciting.

Power is the reason for wars, for mergers and acquisitions and corruption. The list goes on and on. Power also associates itself closely with the idea of money.

And, who doesn't like money? That's why I hear people study management because management pays well. However, maybe that's not the case when we think about leadership and the power that we bestow upon those we consider to lead.

Maybe the search for power and the way that we use the word leadership has skewed the way we view leadership and what it indeed is.

Moreover, this is where the lines between management and leadership got crossed.

Our want to lead could stem from feeling the need to help those around us and those whom we work with.

Whatever the reason, or reasons, maybe, the most important is the one to you.

Think to yourself:

- How do you define leadership?
- What skills, behaviors and characteristics make a leader a leader?
- Why did you buy this book?
- Why do you want to be a leader? Am I a leader now?
- Why is being a leader or working on your ability vital to you now?

No one can tell you how to define. No one can tell you what leadership is and what it isn't. No one can answer these questions — the only one who can is you.

That's the beauty of leadership.

It's fluid. It's what we make it and why. Defining it depends on what we want to achieve as leaders and how we assign a value to others who lead.

In creating our definition and gaining clarity by doing this, it gives us perspective on whether the time is right for us to lead, or not.

Knowing this, we can then define how we will move forward with our decisions. Answering these questions builds our foundation in moving forward.

Redefining Leadership

Before evaluating the value in leadership, let's dig deeper into our definitions and understanding.

No one's definition is wrong, but maybe we have some underlying bias and misconceptions in whom we define as leaders that's worth addressing.

One day at work, I was walking down the hall and noticed the back of the company's CEO running towards the men's room. I thought to myself: He must have diarrhea.

Now, that may sound utterly ridiculous, as it should, but it struck me as incredibly funny to see him in that situation at that moment.

Why? It made him seem human and not some sort of CEO pillar that made him unapproachable.

We do this with our leaders. We put them on pillars and make them seem unattainable with the lists of skills, the traits, the behaviors and the comparisons to others. We take away much of their humanness.

How? We can't say certain things in fear of angering them. We can't act a certain way in fear of changing their perceptions of us (hey, we all want to look perfect to the CEO).

We can't treat them the way that we would treat our peers or colleagues. They are far too mighty and superior. We can't be honest. We can't be ourselves. We can't trust.

Thinking back to our leadership affair, CEOs are out of our league.

CEOs are humans. VPs are humans. People managers are humans. For some reason, we forget that. Organizations forget that and encourage that forgetfulness. We all need to be perfect and professional each day, all day.

However, even CEOs get diarrhea.

Let's build more on diarrhea. Assuming that most people have suffered from this ailment at some point, it never is a popular feeling, and it never happens at a great time. Ever.

Another point about diarrhea - it makes everyone vulnerable. Everyone.

Keeping that in mind, it demonstrates the humanness that each one of us has and with that being able to be vulnerable.

We may not be able to control when we have diarrhea and make that decision about when we have or when we don't, but we all feel vulnerable at some points, and we can use this to our advantage.

One day, I was perusing LinkedIn a few months after writing this section. Feeling somewhat ridiculous about talking about the link from diarrhea to vulnerability to the importance of vulnerability to leadership, I was struck by a "liked" post that happened upon my feed.

This woman wrote:

"I can't stop thinking about our company meeting yesterday. In my experience, it's rare to see an exec (much less a co-founder) be open, vulnerable and honest about difficult topics. We are lucky to have a leadership team that leans in when it gets hard, not shy away from what's difficult and be transparent with the team."

We don't teach vulnerability when we teach management. We show strength. We teach theory. We teach numbers. This is what wraps management in a different box and bow.

Leadership is about being human and, at times, means showing our vulnerability to others as a way to connect. When we connect, we lead.

We have titles. We have titles at jobs. We can have that title and job today, but it doesn't mean we will have it tomorrow.

It's a title. So a title doesn't define who we are as people and as leaders. We do that through our actions and behaviors, which are based on our decisions.

It also means that we can't fear people in titles. And, if we do have a title, it doesn't rip the humanness and vulnerability out of us.

It makes leading in a way that shows the two even that much more important.

Keep that in mind as we move through the rest of the text. CEOs are human. Leaders are human. And, humans get diarrhea.

Now knowing that vulnerability is a part of leadership, let's debunk some more stereotypes in our definitions to challenge our misperceptions about leadership so we can frame our decisions in further fine-tuning our definitions.

The Forty-Something, Balding, White, Male VP

One day, I took a good hard look at my career. I thought about where I was and where I wanted to go. I thought about the people I worked with and the things that I did. In some ways, I felt proud.

However, then, noticed a pattern. I realized that I had devoted myself and my career to making forty-something, balding, white men who were in corporate leadership roles happy. I let these CEOs and VPs dictate how I found value both in myself and my work.

I gave up my personal life, worked hard, cried and based my life happiness on whether or not these men were happy with my work performance and in my defining my value as a leader. I don't think that I'm alone in that.

But, what? Wait? How? Why? How did this happen?

I read a lot of career statistics and headlines about the workplace. These show, as we may already presume, that:

- The average CEO age is 56, and the average CFO and COO age is 52
- Only 19 percent of U.S. congressional members, less than 5 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs, and only two out of the current crop of U.S. presidential candidates are women
- By race, whites made up the majority of the labor force (79 percent). Blacks and Asians made up an additional 12 percent and 6 percent, respectively
- By the age of thirty-five two-thirds of American men will experience some degree of appreciable hair loss, and by the age of fifty approximately 85% of men have significantly thinning hair.

In looking at those numbers, it made sense that I had fallen victim to the attack of this ever prominent species lurking in the halls and coffee areas of corporate office buildings waiting to unleash their unwelcome feedback about my job performance and life.

This also taught me something fundamental:

- Leadership is not an age
- Leadership is not a gender
- Leadership is not a ethnicity

Leadership is about people. We follow and judge leaders on age, gender and ethnicity.

Regardless of the other leadership books, articles, course and the like on the topic, we need to have a reality check.

Men hire other men who are like them and grant them smart sounding titles like, “Senior Director of Financial Success” or, “Vice President of Emerging Markets.”

These types see another man, forty-something, balding and white and think, “Yes, this is someone I can trust. They look like me.”

Yes, this is changing, but not fast enough. We still define and discriminate and make decisions when defining and finding value in leaders and in making our own decisions about our leadership ability.

We all have a bias. Moreover, we have a bias about leaders. We need to admit that to change our minds and the minds of those around us.

There are tools online that aid in determining what your bias is. You may be surprised to learn that you have a bias. I encourage you to explore that. My favorite one is <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>.

We need to think about this and how it impacts our decisions especially when it comes to bias about those in leadership, whom we place in leadership roles and whom we deem worthy to lead.

In becoming aware of that, we can make better decisions about ourselves and others.

Let's dissect further.

Leadership is Not an Age

Jacob, at 16, needed to get a job. However, Jacob was a special guy. No regular teenage job of flipping burgers, scooping ice cream or taking tickets at the amusement park would do.

Jacob met a buddy when he was ten, Nathan, through the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program. The two were inseparable.

Nathan participated in a lengthy bike ride in Massachusetts once a year to raise money for cancer research - The Pan-Mass Challenge.

In knowing that Jacob needed a job and that Nathan needed to raise several thousands of dollars to participate in this annual bike ride, the duo came up with a brilliant idea.

That idea was to open a pedicab business for Jacob to manage over the summer months, which in turn would help Nathan raise the funds he needed to participate in the bike ride.

Talking to the government officials of the small city that they planned to launch their idea in was the first step.

Then, through working with local businesses, they ensured sponsorship and support. From that support, were able to purchase the pedicabs. The two were busy creating and leading a company.

As things started to move forward, the local media outlets began to feature stories about Nathan and Jacob both sharing the friendship between the two while promoting their upcoming business partnership encouraging locals to keep an eye out for the cabs in the summer months.

Then came the next challenge. Who would drive the five pedicabs that now had sponsorship, approval to hit the streets and a well-written mission statement on the purpose of the cabs posted so all passengers would understand the value upon hoping in with that mission was to raise funds for cancer.

The two began advertising for help and assumed that young, well-built, college-aged men would apply to maintain their ripped physics from riding a bike with a sustainable amount of weight on the back while allowing them to make some money and to meet some ladies during summer break.

However, these young academics failed to apply in droves as assumed.

Who applied instead? Men in their forties and fifties as a way to get out of the house. A few young people applied.

They came and went. However, a solid group of the middle-agers stayed on throughout the six-year duration of the business.

What's the point of this? When people think about leadership, they tend to think about the experience.

Let's face it; when we think of experience, we guess the age. How many years have they been doing a job, which translates to how old are they?

If someone at 28 years of age began working in marketing at 18 applied to a director level job at an organization that required at ten years, would they get it?

Maybe they would. Perhaps they wouldn't.

Ageism is alive and well within today's workplace and applies to the way we look at and define leadership.

Older people don't want to be lead by younger people, and younger people think that older people are out of the loop.

The workplace today is a mishmash of generations and with that comes a vast melting pot of values and wants from work and from leadership from the boomers to the millennials.

Yikes! What a mess. However, much opportunity if we reframe our lens.

In this situation, Jacob began his leadership path at around 16 with the start of the business. Jacob and Nathan could have easily laughed off the idea of starting a pedicab business in the local community.

Let's face it - that's much work for a teenager even with a friend.

But, they worked through it. Day after day, decision after decision the two worked to create and mold this idea into reality and from that Jacob began to demonstrate his raw abilities to be a leader.

Nathan could have easily pushed Jacob aside and taken the reigns of the business while only giving Jacob the roles and responsibilities of scheduling, washing the cabs and refilling soft bike tires.

As a leader of this business, Jacob was quiet, yet determined.

He motivated his staff about the mission of the company and checked on them throughout their shifts to ensure they had water, food or needed a break in the warm summer New England temperatures.

The staff was treated fairly concerning scheduling and ensuring that not one person got every weekend night shift to ensure that it was spread out.

Even though Jacob was deemed leader by Nathan, people respected him as one regardless of that official title concerning the business.

He was, after all, young when working as a manager of the inspiring pedicab service.

The staff could have easily contacted and worked with Nathan instead of him if they saw age and level of experience as a problem or barrier to the company's success.

But, they didn't. They saw Jacob as a leader. They didn't see him as a 16-year-old young man when it came to the business.

Was he a perfect leader? No.

Is anyone?

Jacob acted in the way of being a leader who helped his staff do well, and the business grows in popularity and revenue in helping Nathan achieve his goal of riding the cancer fundraising bike ride.

Leadership isn't an age. This example shows us this.

Leadership is having an opportunity and the ability to have a chance to prove oneself through their decisions and behaviors.

Real leadership shines through outside of a corporate title or years of experience. It's about who we are as people and what we can accomplish while working and collaborating with others.

One's ability to lead depends on their level of experience meaning their age. Now it's not to say that the sayings about wisdom coming with age aren't true.

There is a certain level of skill and awareness that does come with age. That's the beauty of growing old.

This, depending on the person, may or may not be the best chance to put a twenty-something in charge after one week at the job, but it does encourage us to think about how we view people in thinking about leadership with experience.

Someone at 30 may be a better leader than someone in their forties or fifties.

In knowing that, regardless of age, we need to be aware that leadership isn't age and date of birth. If we limit ourselves to that, we're going to hurt both ourselves as leaders and in thinking about the corporate world, the future of our organizations.

We need to know that in thinking about our leadership ability, aware that our brains will change with age and to be mindful of that when thinking about our continuous decisions and leadership ability.

Not only does that teach us about how age isn't a factor in thinking about leadership but it does help to challenge us about the way we think about age and its association with leadership.

Just because we have a certain level of experience or because we are a particular age doesn't mean we are better leaders than others.

In giving that consideration both to where you are in life now and how you define, what does that mean to you and your decisions?

How, in answering, can you now make new decisions about your understanding and development moving forward?

Leadership is Not a Gender

In being a woman and one who has started women's leadership groups, I would fail myself and those I've helped if I didn't include discussion around gender and leadership especially in thinking about the forty-something, balding, white male VP.

Have you ever noticed that leadership books are geared to the masses or geared to women specifically? We don't see *Leadership for Men* gracing the shelves specifically.

We do see book after book about ways that women can enhance their financial status, assertiveness and leadership ability all while looking and dressing the part. Ironic.

Reading *Leadership for Men* would be great fun, in any case. I write that with a wink and a nod.

Why is that? Earlier on, we looked at a statistic about women in leadership roles in U.S. government and U.S. based top organizations.

Those stats don't paint a great picture, and we don't see enough women leaders. Think about this:

The study on gender diversity by Marcus Noland, Tyler Moran, and Barbara Kotschwar for the Peterson Institute for International Economics released earlier this year says there is a positive correlation between the presence of women in corporate leadership and performance "in a magnitude that is not small."

It is hard to nail down the exact performance bump a woman's presence can lend a company — only about half of the companies studied had any female leaders at all.

However, the study did suggest that having a woman in an executive position leads to better performance, with more women, the better.

The study points out that diversity in general probably leads to higher performance.

A single female CEO doesn't perform better than her male counterpart when controlling for gender in the rest of the company, but a higher rate of diversity throughout the organization has an impact, the study found.

Leadership is not a gender. Leadership is leadership. It doesn't and shouldn't matter if you are a man or a woman. People are leaders. People are leaders regardless of what gender they are.

In understanding our bias, further understanding diversity and inclusion is essential in today's workplace and to leadership. It's something we can make decisions about.

Regardless of the statistics, the comments that men make about women still amaze me about women's age, dress, looks, intelligence, marital and children status even in today's day and age when it comes to judging their ability to lead and how they lead once gaining a formal role.

I once heard a story about a woman in a leadership role within a sales organization. And, at one point, her husband and her boss met. In front of her, the two began to talk about her work performance and ability to lead.

Think about that: Her husband and her boss talked about her about her leadership ability and work performance right in front of her.

Now think about the decisions that each person made in this scenario whether conscious or not.

If you don't see something wrong with this and how we define leadership and those who lead, take the bias assessment now: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>.

Women have different decisions to make about their leadership than men.

Men also can make decisions about how they work with and understand the issues that are important to women within the workplace and in life.

Who knows if women and men will ever be truly equal when we define each as leaders and within the workplace. This discussion has been happening now for hundreds of years.

It will continue for hundreds more if we don't start acting now to change that conversation and change the landscape through our decisions, understanding our bias and examining how we define and find value in those who lead.

Women make decisions all of the time. Not to say that men don't, but some of our decision lies in traditional gender roles that we may, or may not, need to address each day.

For example, women in their twenties and thirties, and maybe for some even later in life, need to make decisions on whether or not they want to marry and have children.

Now, of course, men face similar decisions as they are the ones marrying and reproducing with these women.

I once knew a man in his mid-forties who said he felt like he had to get married to protect his leadership and his reputation at work as he didn't want those whom he worked with to define him as gay.

Men, regardless of sexual orientation, also can suffer from traditional gender bias.

Some men don't have maternity leave and spend months out of the office to may or may not come back to that job that they left pre-baby and how this impacts their leadership in the workplace.

When going back to work, men may not face similar emotions and circumstances as women either and how this may impact their leadership and leadership lifestyle decisions.

Historically and numerically speaking, men haven't suffered as much as women in thinking about gaining momentum in the business world, either.

What matters in reading this section is for you to stop and think about how you view leadership in relation to gender.

Take the bias assessment. Examine your own decisions about it. Pause and reflect to think about whether you may have a bias to one gender over another.

We can't wake up and make the same decisions about ourselves as leaders and for the development of others when it comes to leadership and gender.

We can decide to gain insight into ourselves on our bias (awareness), practicing better and more inclusive leadership lifestyle (practice) and obtaining feedback on this from those around us (evaluation).

Sometimes these biases are deeply rooted. We can make these decisions to change for ourselves and teach our children to move beyond these for the sake of a better future for all.

Leadership is Not an Ethnicity

In keeping with gender, while also introducing ethnicity, I once coached a Japanese woman who was in her mid-thirties and a mother who was driven and smart.

Let's call her Sigu.

When I first met and started working with her, she reported to an Indian male in his forties and was getting promoted, acknowledged often and had recently been granted a formal "people manager" leadership role.

Her boss also gave her flexibility to balance long working hours with motherhood. She loved her job and enjoyed her life. All was right with the world.

A few months into our time together, the organizational structure changed and she went from working under him to a fifty-something, white male.

Once making that change, all was not right with the world.

She and the new boss didn't get along. He claimed she wasn't a hard worker, he demoted her from a people manager role and took projects away from her.

He even got to the point of accusing her of not being passionate enough and attributed to that to her being a mother.

The other people on the team were two Caucasian women and two men: one who was Caucasian and one who was Pakistani.

These four were younger, unmarried and no children. He raved about them and made sure each had what he or she needed to do well in his or her roles, but not Sigu.

Sigu didn't change in those few, short months. What changed was whom she reported to. She went from loving her job to having panic-attacks and need to seek medical attention.

Now, each person will read this story in different ways. You may see a level of bias towards both gender and ethnicity. You may not. You may think that you have no prejudice against anyone.

Moreover, if you are in a position where you do promote and making hiring decisions, it's important to give this much thought. People think they may be open-minded and unbiased, but are you?

Sigu reported to a minority manager at first and had all the opportunity she wanted. She was even being granted a formal leadership role within the organization.

All of that changed when she began reporting to someone else.

Now, this new manager may not have had any bias against her ethnicity and that all of this is coincidental. Alternatively, maybe he did, and this was a way to push her out. With this change, she suffered. Her career suffered. Her life suffered.

Some bias may be clouding our decisions whether we realize it or not.

In knowing this, we can begin to become more aware and then empowered on how we make decisions about working and hiring others.

It helps us to destroy further the barriers that still impeded the working world today.

I read an article once that illustrates this point:

Christopher Cabrera, the chief executive of Xactly, understands the challenge of inherent bias. Earlier in his career, he had to hire eight team members.

When he was halfway through the process, his boss, who was African-American, pointed out that the first four hires were all white, 23-year-old men.

"I was so embarrassed because I certainly hadn't done that on purpose," Mr. Cabrera said. The lesson he learned was that we often do what makes us comfortable.

"I distinctly remember [my boss] saying to me: 'How interesting do you think your team meetings will be when you have 12 guys that are 23 years old, white, with the same background? Do you think that that's going to be a challenging and rich environment where you're learning?' So I remember thinking: 'Yeah, that's crazy. Why would I want that?' It stuck with me."

What does this story tell us? It tells us that bias happens whether we realize it or not. This is why I call this out in thinking about this section. Leadership is not skin color. Leadership is about people.

Leaders and organizations hurt themselves and their people when they don't include people with diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Richness in employees brings a new perspective.

New perspective brings better business decisions. Working with people who can challenge us and our own leadership decisions helps us to become better leaders.

Here's another story. I heard this in graduate school from one of my peers and had stuck with me throughout the years.

There was a gentleman in the class who was from Ethiopia. He was brilliant and very driven. He first came to the United States as a young adult and began interviewing for pharmaceutical leadership positions.

During one interview that was with a woman (the rest were with men), he avoided making eye-contact as it was a sign of respect based on his cultural background.

When sharing the story, he mentioned that during the interview he didn't give this much thought.

After getting the job, he somehow got the interview notes from those who interviewed him. In reading through, he came across the woman whom he avoided eye contact.

In her notes, she wrote that she didn't think he could be trusted as he couldn't make eye contact and she didn't recommend him for the job.

He almost missed this opportunity because of a cultural misunderstanding. Now, was this a mix of her misreading his actions or was this an ethnicity issue?

Alternatively, a combination of both? He went on to move up throughout the organization and held various leadership roles and did well for himself.

But, maybe not. However, it does show how we judge. We judge on ethnicity. We judge cultural norms. We need to be aware of this when we define leadership and whom we value as a leader.

It is not about the skin color or what country we come from. It's how we decide to lead and behave that enable us to lead.

Once understanding and internalizing that, we may be surprised to see leaders where we didn't see leaders before.

We've Picked on the Forty-Something, Balding White Male VP Enough

Now, there's nothing truly wrong with forty-something, balding, white male VP. Do not run in fear when encountering this person.

We all have the power to lead regardless of who we are or where we are in our life- Twenties, thirties, female, male, trans, white, black, Asian. Whatever. We can all be leaders.

And, this is changing, bit by bit day by day. However, it needs to improve more. We have the power to make that decision by deciding now about our leadership ability regardless of who we are.

We can also use this increased awareness to face our own bias in our decisions of who and how we define and categorize leaders.

In one study, researchers found that people used factors in photos like gender and face length to make guesses about people's height and then used these same factors when they judged their leadership qualities.

I think about this and how much easier life would be if we all walked outside of our homes in hazmat suits when dealing with other people whether it be at work, volunteering or heading a community project.

We couldn't decipher gender. We couldn't decipher age. We couldn't decipher ethnicity.

We would follow and lead not giving this any thought - not defined by any of these barriers that we put around leaders and ourselves.

Give this consideration as you examine your definition both written and unwritten.

What's Right With How We Define

Now that we've talked about how we define leadership, how we have over-glorified leaders, and ways we should reconsider the way we think about who can lead, let's take a moment to address the positives in the way we define before looking at how we derive value.

On a Monday during lunch with a co-worker, we find ourselves providing feedback to one another to help with our leadership and professional development.

Corporations are creating leadership development programs to aid those in people manager roles learn how to be more effective and to learn how to lead.

We see academia changing the focus from that of management programs to leadership in recognizing and appreciating this shift and ever-growing need.

We see schools including leadership early on in the curriculum to teach all students about the importance of leadership.

We read books and listen to webinars and podcasts and articles and radio shows and TV talking more about leadership as a whole.

Moreover, that's what's right in how we define. We are talking about it. We are finding ourselves trying to learn more from corporations, consultants, academia and one another.

We see the value that this study can do for corporations, communities and, most importantly, for our self-study and development.

The last part is the crucial piece for both you and I - What can we do as individuals to improve our leadership ability?

Only we know our history, our situations, our feelings and thoughts, our goals and our lives.

This is where we have power. We can think about what we want and make decisions on how to achieve.

We can become aware through any of the noted channels (again, media, academia, books and the like) and we can use those around us to learn more about how these people perceive and experience us and in knowing that, figure out through our brand exercises how we can define whom we want to be as leaders.

In having this level of awareness, we can then begin to decide to practice. We can practice being good leaders at home.

We can practice leadership at work. We can find other ways to lead in our lives in working in the community to starting a side project to help us to develop and grow.

This is what's right.

We can practice and begin to live life as a leader. In doing that, we can start to evaluate in both our self-study and internal reflection through that of mediation or yoga or journaling or seeing changes in the way that people work and interact with us.

Evaluation can help our practice and success by gaining feedback outside of ourselves through the insight of people that we trust and value.

In working and talking to these people who interact with us and with us, we can start the cycle again with learning and gaining that awareness on how to keep going or what else to improve on.

This is what's right.

Learning as a leader never ends. This is not a one-time management class that you can check the box and BOOM; you are a management expert. It does not work like that at all. At all.

This is why we need to realize and understand that to think about where we can go next where our leadership practice and our lifestyle.

And, that's what makes leadership and talking about it fun. Inspiring. Utterly frustrating at times. However, influential, all at the same time.

This is your decision. This is your practice. Decide to be aware. Decide to practice. Decide to evaluate.

Decide for yourself to become a leader. Know that realizing this and changing the way we lead and define others who do is what's right.

The Leadership Value

Once defining and then redefining, we can begin to see what we value when it comes to leaders and leadership both for our development and in how we interpret the value of others.

Let's examine values in the broader sense before narrowing down to why this matters to our leadership decisions.

Most people find value in something. We all have our definition of what value means to us and why we value what we do.

Often when we hear the word "value," associations with that of religion come to mind. That can be one stream of values.

Also, it's not to say that religious values aren't necessary and relevant. They are. However, there are more to values than religion.

We are busy with our own respective lives and allot time to what we value. Life and what we make of it is about prioritization. We prioritize based on our values.

Let's look at a few.

Maybe we value family or friends or freedom. We could value health or money or career.

We can even consider values outside of these buckets and into combinations that help us define our lives, our wants, our paths along with who we are and whom we want to be.

We may not always associate values in thinking about how we make decisions and especially how we make decisions about our leadership. But, we should.

Leadership values and finding value in leadership is essential. It sets a baseline for how we lead. It also defines what we value in leaders. We do this whether we realize it or not.

Think about politicians you follow and admire. Well-suited, smiling, talking heads trying to broadly address how they are smilier to us with having the same values in blanketed ways to appeal to the masses.

We get drawn into some and define as leaders, and others repulse them and belittle their ability.

At work, we talk about values too - Leadership, organizational and cultural — the values we have at work and in the cultures that we work within impact how we make decisions in those settings, or why we work where we do.

Think about what you value in your life. Think about what you value at work. Think about what you value about leadership.

Now, think of three leaders whom you interact with on a regular basis. Do the values you have about your life and work align with those whom you see value in when leading?

Let's say we value excellent communication skills in our work leaders.

Do we appreciate great communication outside of our work lives? Do you care if your aunt or cousin writes a robust, well-written email to you on a Saturday?

Do you judge your child's potential leadership ability with how they give visionary speeches at the dinner table if you are home for dinner?

Do you reprimand your friends if they are late to a lunch gathering and note their failure in providing a well-thought-out agenda?

Probably no. So if you do, you probably drive them crazy. But, this is how we define value within leaders in the modern day.

Why? Why aren't we in a place when we define and value leaders inside in the workplace with the way that we identify and value leaders outside of the workplace?

Classes, articles, and tools focus on value both in finding and defining from an organizational or corporate world standpoint.

Even leadership consultants and trainers who ask people to perform exercise after exercise asking those eager to lead to thinking about what they value and why.

Questions like:

- What life events or happenings helped to shape us?
- What were we taught as a child when it came to values and how did that form us as adults
- What do you value and why?

Some can give this type of exercise thought quickly in defining life happenings and how said incidents helped to shape who they are.

Same with defining family and our upbringing in the way we were raised and how this relates to our values as people and as leaders.

Others may have more of a difficult time giving thought to their upbringing, life events and values and how that has impacted who they are at this very moment.

I've heard that some think this is too "mushy" or "touchy-feely" for the workplace or when thinking about leadership or management.

We'll discuss this more in thinking about our leadership lifestyle as it's important to see where alignment is in what we value, what we appreciate in leadership and whom we value as leaders to unite the concepts together to help us with our own leadership decisions.

Once in a course, I had a student ask me about this. He was confused about why we were talking about values when talking about leadership and career.

I knew him within a marketing and product management role at a software organization.

He was in his sixties and had worked at this organization for more than thirty years. From the mix of tenure and age, he would spend his sunsetting career years at the same organization and in the same role.

So he was happy with that.

When answering my question about values, he explained that he didn't know how to define his values and what that would even mean to the workplace and why that matters to how we interpret the significance of leaders both for ourselves and for those in "formal" leadership roles.

I asked him to name one value. Just one simple value.

He took a few moments to think and then replied, "Hard work."

Fair enough. I pressed on.

"Why did you think of hard work?" I asked trying to dig deeper into his mind.

He thought again for a few moments and then looked up at me and said, "My father was a hard worker, and as a child, he always told me that hard work was important in life.

I always worked hard throughout my life and then started working here. I never decided to leave after the decades that I've been here and will continue to work hard."

A valid value. I explained to him that if hard work were a value that even outside of the walls of this office if he gets a new job post-retirement, let's say working at a golf course, he'd still value hard work and he'd probably still be a hard worker within that role.

He nodded and agreed. The look on his face showed that he began to internalize this lesson once he was able to frame it based on the lesson he learned from his father.

The next step for him would be to further define these values in how we define value about this own leadership ability and that of others.

In thinking about this, both overall and with this example, we can see how what we value shapes who we are and how we go about our lives day-to-day. We make decisions about our lives and our leadership based on our values.

If we value hard work and leaders who are hard workers, that's a value in how we can further define leadership for both ourselves and how we evaluate others.

I challenge you to think about your values. Whatever they may be. Religious, personal, work, whatever you think of value, think of that value and how you got to that conclusion.

Your values will determine your decisions about the way you lead. Your values define how you define leaders and leadership.

Your values define your life and what you want out of it.

Once defining leadership and further dissecting to find value within that definition, we can use this as the foundation base our leadership practice and development decisions.

When thinking about your values and what they mean to you and how they were developed within your through life happenings, childhood and other moments, you can further build your mindset and decision making about your leadership through this self-awareness.

This is one step in gaining awareness as part of the APE Model in how we can then use to make decisions about our leadership.