In the 20 years since I graduated from Baylor, I have had the privilege of working with various
different leadership styles. As I reflect back, I realize my leadership style is really a mashup of the best
qualities of those leaders. Some gave me terrific insight into what leadership is all about and others
demonstrated to me what not to do. Surveying the bookshelf in my study, I note many different books
on leadership. Some are process-focused, others are people-focused and others say leadership is
more of an art than a science. At the end of the day, I have developed some core tenets that guide
me in making decisions on a day-to-day basis. Call it my leadership playlist.
I like to think of myself as a servant leader. It would be interesting to survey my teams and see if they share the same perspective. I try to invest in the development of individuals I lead. I try to be inclusive and build consensus when appropriate, versus leading in an authoritarian manner. I like to give people a choice in what happens to them at work. I want them to own their career and to realize that I am there to help them progress. At the end of the day, if you don’t have a devoted team of people you value helping you to achieve your goals, what exactly are you leading? Those leaders I have worked with who maintain a “win at all costs” approach often leave bodies in their wake. While their projects may be successful, is the toll worth it?

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

As a leader, you may think you must always have the answer for all situations. Sometimes, through years of experience, you do. At other times, you may not. This is where relying on your teams is critical. If you have done your job of building a high-performing team, it is reasonable to leverage them in gaining consensus around the approach to a project or a solution to a particular problem.

What does empowerment look like?

EMPOWER PEOPLE AND TEAMS

I prefer a more collaborative approach, rather than an autocratic top-down style. As a senior leader, it is not my job to actually write code or develop project plans. My job is to build high-performing teams (through internal or external hiring) and empower them to be successful.

MAKE THEM PART OF THE PROCESS

I make sure I have a career discussion at least twice per year with my team members. I want to understand their aspirations. Where do they see themselves in five years? This affords me a perspective. I try to invest in the development of individuals I lead.

Make someone a project manager? Can I test someone to see if they are ready for a promotion? Can I try them in a new technology? These are options that I may take, but I am also strategic as to the projects they work on. I align with organizational goals, but also help people develop skills that are smarter, harder working and better equipped than you are. Once you have built this team, it is your job to develop them. This is accomplished through a concerted effort around coaching and feedback.

Work yourself out of a job

What’s on your playlist? Remember, playlists, by their very nature, are dynamic [songs come in and out of favor] and everyone’s choice of songs is unique to them. Your leadership playlist should be, also. Continue to add, remove and alter your style and techniques as you grow in your life and career.

Jeffrey D. Blackwell is a Director at Deloitte Services LP. As an executive with Deloitte Application Studios, he is responsible for overseeing a team of over 150 employees, focusing on the development of applications in support of the Talent (HR) Partner Materials, and Deloitte University channels. Blackwell graduated from Baylor in 1992 with a BBA in Accounting and Information Systems. He is a Certified Public Accountant in the State of Texas and holds the Certified Information Technology Professional (CITP) designation from the American Institute of Certified Accountants (AICPA). In the July 2007 40th Anniversary Edition of Computerworld Magazine, Jeff was selected as one of the 40 innovative IT people to watch, under the age of 40. Jeff was also selected as one of twenty five 2010 Award Recipients of CIO Magazine’s “Ones to Watch” award. You can connect with him on LinkedIn.

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