

This professional development plan, written by and created for Loren Eisenlohr (myself), reveals the complexities and layers involved in the personal reflection and vulnerability required to identify leadership strengths and areas for improvement.

Beginning with an analysis of self-made videos and written journal entries, I break down common threads only identified when reviewing my work as a whole. I focus on my perceptions of two leaders in my life whom I've greatly admired. I explain what characteristics I hope to emulate as well as behaviors I can learn from. Comparing the characteristics of other leaders to myself, leads to a reflection and review of my own tendencies. Self-doubt, vulnerability, grit and intrinsic motivation all play a role in my current journey. When it comes to those I lead, my team, I express the importance of adaptability and how empathy can be mutually beneficial. This portion of my plan is concluded with a statement on personal fulfillment.

Throughout this semester, I've been introduced to a multitude of resources and inspirational pieces that have, in one way or another, guided my thought process. Within this document, I present three resources—a book chapter, an online article and a video—that had significant impact on my perspective of leadership. The concepts of reframing, carrots and sticks, and finding the “why” are explained in relation to my quest to become an inspirational leader, a catalyst for change.

This development plan is concluded with my purpose statement and eight SMART goals that feed into it. Each goal is specific and intentional, presented with reasoning, the “why.” Initial tactics as well as methods of measurement are also outlined. Since writing this initial document, I've had the opportunity to begin to implement one of my goals, so I've provided additional assessment as to overall progress and future troubleshooting. Feedback from my current boss, my closest friend and my professor is also included in an effort to ensure I'm presenting my best work and ultimately, set up for success.

Professional Development Plan: Loren Eisenlohr

Much like planning my wedding vs. a large-scale corporate event, I am finding it more difficult to write a development plan for myself than to write a marketing plan for a client. Even so, for context, I am compelled to begin with a situational analysis. As I work towards my goals, I hope to reflect on how far I've come.

I graduated with my undergraduate degree in 2006 knowing that one day, I'd pursue my master's. One day came fifteen years, one husband, two children, multiple jobs, a handful of states and a pandemic later. Through it all, I've naturally led. I take after my father and can't help but get involved and take charge. “Taking charge” in and of itself, however, has not molded me into a good leader. For years, I've led without putting much thought into what it actually means to be bestowed such responsibilities.

Now, at 38 years old, in likely the most complex mental state of my life, this course has forced me to dig deep psychologically and examine what makes me a leader. It's created a space in which my thoughts could move both haphazardly and constructively, and through the examination of personal characteristics, values and purpose, along with subsequent feedback, my development plan feels comprehensive yet open to evolution. Not only do I now know what leadership traits I possess, I also have a strong understanding of the work to be done to become a catalyst for change and a leader who truly inspires.

Videos + Journal Entries

The videos and journal entries I've presented reflect my thought process, comprehension and application of materials provided. Upon review through an overarching lens, I've identified concurrent themes that run through three interwoven facets, all playing into my overall development as a leader: characteristics and careers of other leaders (others), personal analysis (me) and interaction with followers (team).

Others

Reflecting on my lollipop moment (*Week 1*) with Dr. Gilbert was a reminder of not only the impact of seemingly small gestures, but also reasons in which I admired her so immensely during my undergraduate career. She was undeniably authentic and articulate, and in turn, her words and actions were always intentional and invaluable. The way in which she communicated reflected her love of research, academia and teaching, but also incorporated her passion for comedy. A former stand-up comedian turned college professor is a dynamic woman who can inspire those even in their darkest days.

Kasie, my current boss, is a different type of leader than Dr. Gilbert, yet equally as admirable. The common thread between the two is their ability to not only be vulnerable, but to use their vulnerability to relate to others and find new strength and skillset amidst challenge. Both Kasie and Dr. Gilbert saw potential in me: They both knew and know how to empower me while offering a safe space to explore vulnerability.

Growing from vulnerability must be done thoughtfully and with intention. While it can open up room for development and change, it can also act as a slippery slope into default habits. When Kasie becomes stressed, her tendency is to blindly grind (*Week 4*). Knowing this about herself, Kasie works with a personal leadership coach who has taught her how to acknowledge and address her vulnerability and ultimately, go to those she trusts for honest feedback on how her behaviors impact the team and how she can better focus her anxious energy.

"Her efforts led to an enlightened self-awareness and forced her to face vulnerability head on. It made her realize that heart can trump the grind. It's not her demonstration of all-consuming work that motivates her team: It's her effort to not only understand herself, but to also create a culture of belonging." – Week 4 Journal Entry

Analyzing Kasie and my personal reactions to her behaviors has led to increased admiration and gratitude for the ways in which she mentors and guides me. In the beginning of our relationship, I was bothered by her tendency to be a disagreeable giver (*Week 8*). I wasn't in a place at that point to accept or see the value in her direct nature. Having lost my previous job due to the pandemic, my guard was up, and in many ways, her tone and at times, uncomfortable feedback perpetuated a fear that another shoe was about to drop. Since then, however, trust has been established, and my role in the company has proven to be of value. Kasie leans on me as I lean on her, and while she'll always be direct, her words are respected because the care behind them is genuine. As a disagreeable giver, Kasie demands hard work and pushes her employees to take on new challenges; the beauty of it all lies in the fact that her employees aren't at all resentful. In fact, they want to work harder for her because they know she has their best interest at heart. That ... is aspirational.

Me

As a leader in a variety of circumstances, I've always recognized the importance of making decisions, but in the midst of making those decisions, I've experienced imposter syndrome. My Leadership Traits Questionnaire (*Week 2*) revealed that I personally think my self-assuredness is lacking, but my employees don't see it that way. The comments received from Andrew Fox after my *Week 2* video allowed me to put things in perspective: "I feel that it says even though you doubt yourself at times, your employees feel as if you are acting in the best interest of the job or their interest. In my leadership experience, people are willing to stand by someone who will make a decision and see it through or flex if it does not fit the needs of the people they lead." Despite my feelings of uncertainty, my employees rely on and appreciate my ability to make decisions and move things forward. By "standing in the gap" as Dr. Sheard puts it, I am able to lead despite doubt—as long as I am certain I am acting in the best interest of my employees and the collective team.

I've certainly grown in my ability to see, infer and understand my employees' perspectives. Empathy does not come naturally to me, and in the early years of my career, I was self-serving, initiating and demanding the completion of tasks out of fear that any inadequacies would reflect poorly on me. I spent little to no time learning about my employees, and in turn, they were not intrinsically motivated to perform well. Upon taking the Leadership Behavior Questionnaire (*Week 8*), I was prompted to share my story of "task master to empathizer." Over the years, I've realized the error of my ways, and have since been mindful in how I practice and show empathy. Taking the time to listen to my employees and recognize how their personal challenges may be affecting them professionally has made a world of difference in their motivation and loyalty to the company.

Admitting fault and working to improve empathy amongst other leadership capabilities has uncovered a new level of grit (*Week 9*). I've faced my fair share of adversity and failure, and it's an instilled grit that has pushed me through: It's emboldened me to face confrontation and seek different solutions. That being said, up until this phase of life, I've never needed the mental strength required to not only pursue personal goals, but to simultaneously take care of children and manage a household. Never before has my own childhood trauma taken such a gripping toll on my current reality. Grit is required day in and day out, and in writing my midterm, I found strength in the concept of reframing. Reframing my past into experiences that I've learned from and can subsequently help others because of, allows me to move forward as opposed to spiral. It offers mental fortitude.

"Reframing is something I continue to work on through therapy, reflection and writing. As I uncover and process, I find a new sense of mental and emotional strength that allows for vulnerability and more importantly, empathy and compassion." – Midterm

Reframing is half the battle, with the other half being motivation. Exploration of how I'm personally motivated (*Week 6*) has shed light on my overall purpose. Carrots and sticks are short-lived, but recognition of the value of my work and seeing the positive impact I've had on others is what gets me excited to go to work each day. My motivation to do better and be better is heightened when I surround myself with likeminded women. I am intrinsically motivated by a collective passion to challenge the status quo and create more opportunities for women to rise to the occasion. Embedded in that motivation, however, still lies a small flame of anger and resentment for the ways I, as a working mother, have been treated in the past (*Week 7*). In defining my purpose and the goals in which it is nurtured, I hope to learn to better manage and direct my emotions in that regard.

Team

“I often pride myself on my ability to “read a room” and then communicate in a way that alleviates apprehension and/or sheds light on what may be perceived as dismal. I now realize the importance of working through my own emotions and recognizing how my reactions could be perceived. It is my strengthened self-awareness ... that prompts me to positively and effectively adapt when needed.” – Week 3 Journal Entry

I view adaptability as one of the most important leadership qualities—but not for the obvious reason that change is inevitable. Adaptability allows a leader to “customize” their leadership style to each employee’s unique needs and preferences. It allows me to determine the best way to deliver feedback based on an individual employee’s communication style, and in addition, seek to uniquely motivate in ways that will have lasting effects. In order to adapt effectively, I have to be intentional about coming to understand the intricacies of the individuals on my team: This requires empathy, and at times, I struggle to *“genuinely hear my team without getting caught up in the worry that work isn’t progressing as anticipated.” – Week 3 Journal Entry*

My task master tendencies get the best of me at times, and in an effort to mute them, I swing far in the opposite direction: I become so empathetic that I become too caught up in the emotion and fail to initiate progress (*Week 8*). In his feedback on my *Week 3 Journal Entry*, Dr. Sheard presented two questions: “1) What do I need to accomplish to meet/exceed goals? 2) Who am I leading that will help me meet/exceed goals?” In these two questions, he reiterates that I must first identify what needs to be done and secondly, I must identify and reinforce the strengths of my employees in order to a) tackle the tasks at hand and b) strengthen purpose and motivation (*Week 6*) through collaborative effort.

Empathy is crucial and mutually beneficial. Dr. Sheard made this point in his feedback following my *Week 5 Video Reflection* by commenting, “An important characteristic or side effect of empathy is its benefits to the person practicing it as well. By helping others, we ironically take care of ourselves.” In *Week 8*, this concept clicked and as I wrote my journal entry, I realized that when I focus on giving—giving of my time, my attention, my emotion, my efforts—I am personally more fulfilled and my team is uplifted, better poised and more confident in all endeavors.

With years of teaching under her belt and a seemingly natural knack for mentoring, Dr. Gilbert understood this, and in turn, is happy, successful, motivated and respected. The ripple effect of her overall impact will live on for years through the lives of the students still singing her praises. And with that, I’ve come full circle ...

“... I am most fulfilled by an overwhelming sense of empowerment felt by those who have listened to me, ideally learned from me or participated in a unique experience developed because of personal conviction.” – Week 10 Journal Entry

Course Content

George, B., Sims, P., McLean, A. N., & Mayer, D. (2018). Discovering Your Authentic Leadership. In *Authentic leadership (HBR Emotional Intelligence series)*. essay, Harvard Business Review Press.

This essay gave me hope. At times, as I grapple with inconsistencies and difficulties in my personal life, I am left feeling broken and ill-equipped to lead. It is this essay that began to change my perspective, reiterating that I can learn from my life story and in fact, use it to establish authenticity and heart. What has happened in my past does not have to define me: It can instead foster self-awareness and a deeper understanding of others' challenges.

I read this piece by George et al. as a guidebook that ultimately provided validation for the purpose that drives me. I was comforted by the push to seek feedback as a means of tapping into openness and vulnerability, and then using that vulnerability to affirm a strong sense of self. I was struck by the emphasis on integrating all aspects of life—self-care, family, spirituality, education, etc.—as I often feel the need to compartmentalize to get by. Living authentically, leaning into supporters and interweaving seemingly different facets of everyday life, can lead to a healthier, more robust and impactful position of leadership. With it, comes confidence, knowledge, inspiration and fulfillment.

Lai, L. (2017, November 17). *Motivating employees is not about carrots or sticks*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved March 5, 2023, from <https://hbr.org/2017/06/motivating-employees-is-not-about-carrots-or-sticks>

My entire team consists of Gen Z individuals, and based on my experience in leading them, they are not remotely motivated by carrots or sticks. In fact, sticks actually deter them and run the risk of driving them out. I say this to preface what I found so valuable about this article: Lai perfectly explains ways to motivate void of carrots and sticks. In addition, she explains the intrinsic benefits of doing so. While I've been aware of these concepts, this article beautifully articulates what I've been attempting to do for the past few years. It lays out the importance of sharing the what, why, who and how in an effort to involve the employee, provide context and ensure them that they play a valuable role. As Lai writes, a good leader anticipates roadblocks and shows appreciation, knowing that it truly matters and can quite literally make or break a project. Lai also reminds us to check ourselves as leaders: If I'm not motivated, my team likely won't be either. I, too, have to find the "why" within and in turn, share that passion, encouragement and praise with my team.

Sinek, S. (2014, March). How great leaders inspire action [Video]. TED Conferences. https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action/comments

I have watched this TED Talk many times, and each time, I am motivated to think differently. In marketing, with the production of a never-ending amount of content, it's easy to become creatively stuck and lose sight of why you're writing what you're writing or what the true benefits of a particular service or product even are ... you become too close and fail to see outside perspective. In those ruts, it's imperative for a marketer to take a step back and reflect on the "why," not the "what." As Sinek demonstrates, people buy the "why," and sometimes, it takes either a strong reminder or some deep soul searching to fully connect with it.

I've showed this video to a handful of the teams I've led, and it always sparks moving thoughts and progressive conversation. As marketers, we attempt to uncover and communicate our clients' "why's," which perhaps pales in comparison to the importance of living our company's "why" and our personal "why's" within it.

Goals

**My purpose is to passionately and eloquently communicate,
lead and teach in order to build purposeful and progressive connections,
create fulfilling experiences and empower women to unmask their potential.**

"At this point in my career, I feel as if I'm in between my first and second mountains—not in a valley, but more of an overlap. I seek growth as a leader and teacher, both intrinsically and extrinsically. However, I no longer feel the need to be the star and instead, find greater joy in uplifting others and giving women platforms to find success and fulfillment. I'd like to take on a higher title and larger salary and believe I'll do so by thinking outside of myself, harnessing gratitude and giving back where my skills allow." – Week 10 Journal Entry

Goal	Why	Initial Tactics	Measurement
Improve time management to better maintain focus and mental presence in all facets of my life.	The less time I waste, the clearer focus I'm able to maintain. I am more present when I don't feel mentally cluttered by unaccounted for loose ends.	*Research time management methods that have proven to be successful *Seek out resources (articles, videos, podcasts) on ways to maintain focus *Implement at least one new method or tactic each month *Share at least one new method or tactic each month with a close friend or colleague	Document when a new method or practice is being implemented and after two weeks of implementation, make note of progress, pros and cons.
Participate in more webinars, seminars, luncheons, etc. that could offer inspiration and motivation, especially to female leaders.	I only stand to gain inspiration, understanding and motivation in each instance. All takeaways will improve my leadership capabilities.	*Seek out and register for 3 future events (virtual or in-person) that specifically focus on female empowerment and leadership.	Document participation in at least 3 events June 2023 thru June 2024, as well as at least 2 key, implementable takeaways from each event.
More effectively manage my emotions, articulate my thoughts and accept possible outcomes in circumstances that elicit anger and/or frustration.	I have struggled with properly managing and articulating anger for the past few years. It's a weakness that requires improvement in order to better cope, reduce stress, exemplify healthy practices	*Establish this as a goal in my therapy sessions. *Talk through instances of anger and frustration with my boss and together, determine the best ways to manage.	Document progress over the coming year in a journal. Tie feelings to dates and instances and make note of proper and effective resolutions. In 6 months' time, evaluate

	and increase mental fortitude.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Practice saying phrases that can diffuse certain situations and/or stepping away to collect myself prior to speaking. *Develop mantras that aid in “letting go.” *Write and release all negative thoughts in a journal. 	emotional progress and opportunity for improvement.
Increase professional development for each of my employees in an effort to foster positive collaboration and successful and efficient completion of projects.	Working with my employees one-on-one will allow me to learn their intricacies, where they require empathy and what motivates them intrinsically. In showing recognition and value in their individual roles, my hope is that the team will become stronger as a whole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Continue regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings. *Ask questions that prompt personal exploration. *Help each employee set (and document) long- and short-term goals and check in on progress monthly. *Individually schedule professional development events that speak to each employee’s passions within marketing. *Schedule quarterly team bonding events. 	At both 6 months and 1 year, evaluate progress and/or completion of established individual goals. In addition, document current team culture and compare overall sentiment, progress and cohesion after one year’s time.
Increase efforts to maintain and nourish close relationships.	My close friends and family bring me happiness, support and motivation. Knowing that that fulfillment serves and emboldens me long term, I’d like to more deliberately make efforts to reach out and show mutual compassion and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Outside of necessary calls, texts, emails, etc., reach out to 1 friend or family member each day. Intentionally reach out to a person I have not contacted in longer than 1 month. *Send 1 “just because” text each day to a friend who may be struggling. 	Each week, reflect and journal about the deepening of connections. Evaluate general well-being, happiness and feelings of support every 3 months.
Increase mindfulness and intentional thinking about other’s needs over my own.	Thinking about ways I can serve others has proven to clear my mind, offering a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment. This allows me to lead with more compassion and empathy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Each day, write down (in my journal) at least 3 individuals, their current challenges and how I may be able to offer help. 	After 3 months of implementation, evaluate general sentiment and overall fulfillment.
Greater participation in new (to me) experiences within the community.	I am often enlivened and reinvigorated when I experience new people, places and/or services. New experiences prompt creativity and a positive mindset, in addition to opportunities to build new connections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Identify and plan for one new experience in West Michigan each month (eating at a restaurant I’ve never been to, attending a show, exploring a museum, etc.). *Share each new experience with at least 1 other person. 	Make note of each new experience in my Outlook calendar as a means of tracking and being held accountable for planning each month.

Establish a consistent fitness routine that involves collaboration and/or connection with other women.	Exercise has proven to be incredibly beneficial to me, both mentally and physically. It reduces anxiety and perpetuates positive and motivating thoughts. Pure Barre is my fitness of choice because of its method, support and opportunity to “give back” to other women.	*Sign up for and attend at least 2 Pure Barre classes each week. Ideally attend on the same days/times weekly. *Incorporate 3-4 home workouts weekly, both cardio and strength training. *Every Sunday, put the following week’s workouts in my Outlook calendar.	Document and track all workouts in my Outlook calendar and monthly, make note of any gaps/shortfalls. If necessary, make schedule adjustments the following month.
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Feedback

The feedback I’ve received on this development plan has been extremely positive. Upon review, both my boss, Kasie, and my best friend, Keri, noted their appreciation of my SMART goals, each remarking that all goals seem doable. Goals I’ve set in the past have tended to be grandiose in nature, lacking any actual logistics or progressive steps in achievement. I am so pleased that both Kasie and Keri noticed my improved goal setting, as I was incredibly intentional in formulating goals that fit within my current lifestyle.

I was also glad to receive Dr. Sheard’s feedback, especially his insight on meeting preparedness. I had never considered a pre-meeting reflection, as Dr. Sheard suggests. I know that I am so much sharper and productive when I am mentally prepared, and in reflecting on the individuals who will be in my meetings as well as the outcomes I hope to achieve, I am confident that I’ll be better ready to respond and more importantly, more equipped to temper feelings of frustration or anger. Pre-meeting reflections will ideally eliminate surprises and potential triggers.

Implementation

Participate in more webinars, seminars, luncheons, etc. that could offer inspiration and motivation, especially to female leaders.

I recently attended a workshop on attuned leadership designed for professional woman. While I was familiar with the majority of the concepts presented, I was able to identify two key takeaways—takeaways I have already implemented in my daily life. 1) Complete the stress cycle: I am now better versed on what stress does to the mind and body, and I now notice the effect stress has on my vagus nerve. To calm my vagus nerve, I’ve practiced saying the word, “voo,” holding the long “o.” I’ve found that this simple tactic provides a small sense of relief. 2) Check in with my body: “Body wisdom” was emphasized in this particular workshop, and I was taught what it means to check in with my body as well as my mind when presented with difficult decisions. In practice, this certainly hasn’t solved all of my problems, but it does provide new perspective.

Overall, I enjoyed this workshop. I met a few new female leaders and felt a strong comradery amongst us. It was empowering to simply relate to other women in similar positions. Going forward, however, I want to ensure I’m intentional about which workshops or webinars I choose to attend, as I think some will be repetitive or too high-level in terms of topic for what I’m trying to achieve.