The Meaning of Leadership

New York University
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
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Professor
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Office Hours: Email to schedule

Syllabus
Course Description

_The Meaning of Leadership_ will prepare you to practice effective leadership and teamwork in a variety of contexts—business, politics, community organizing, entrepreneurship, sports, teaching, sales, coaching, etc—without relying on authority, status, hierarchy, or other external conditions.

You will learn to create more meaning, value, importance, and purpose in your teammates, work, and professional relationships. As a result, your teams will accomplish more with greater satisfaction. Your teammates will feel inspired and will want to work with you again.

The course will also help you make leadership and teamwork more calm, rewarding, and enjoyable for you and your teammates—and your relationships and life in general too. You will develop professionally and personally, in a process that will continue throughout your life.

The course focuses on learning and practicing fundamentals. As in any discipline, people who have achieved mastery tend to focus on fundamentals and beginners can learn them readily. They also apply to all contexts. Once you have the fundamentals, practice leads to mastering high-level principles and skills, such as how to create meaning, value, importance, and purpose to inspire yourself and others. We begin with simple basics and build to advanced techniques.

The course is experiential. It will lead you through a series of exercises. As leadership is fundamentally behavioral, social, and emotional, these exercises develop behavioral, social, and emotional skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and empathy, which research shows to predict successful team performance.

The exercises are simple, introspective, challenging, active, and need few resources. Each develops useful skills on its own, builds on earlier ones, and contributes to later ones.

We start with the human motivational system, how it works, how to use it, and how it contributes to meaning and value. You will develop your awareness of and skill with its elements, such as perception, belief, mental models, emotion, behavior, environment, and reward. We first focus on the motivational system you know best and have the most access to—your own. After improving our understanding of it, we move to leading ourselves with it. We then apply that understanding and skill to understanding and leading others.

We will support our experiences with theory and perspective from various sources, including scholarly researchers, effective practitioners, historical leaders, and science, particularly evolutionary psychology, positive psychology, and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Because leadership and self-awareness are personal, you will keep a journal of your experiences of the exercises. Students can also expect to speak candidly and learn about each other as part of the learning process.

Unit 1: Understanding Yourself

We start by focusing on consciously observing how we think, understand, and act on our perceptions. We will work with self-awareness, beliefs, mental models, awareness that others...
have different beliefs, and how these factors affect motivation and strategy.
We will build awareness of these elements and skills using them, particularly through observing our inner monologue, seeing how it manifests our beliefs, judgment, and strategies, and improving our conscious control over it.
We will start to work with the interplay between perception, belief, and emotion and the value of acting on low-level specific instruction over talking about high-level principles.

**Unit 2: Leading Yourself**
We begin this unit with awareness of mental models that create undesired outcomes and emotions. We continue by actively choosing mental models to create motivations and behavior in ourselves to create intended results.
We will further develop our self-awareness through exercises showing the importance of outcome, motivation, and emotion as criteria for choosing mental models. We will see how language and behavior affect credibility and influence.
We will practice communicating genuineness and authenticity through exercises on communicating more openly and seeing its effects in generating interest and trust.

**Unit 3: Understanding Others**
In this unit you will use an explicit model for the human motivational system, eventually to create your own. This model uses a functional, systematic view of emotions based in evolutionary psychology to help understand and motivate yourself and others predictably. We will see and use the interplay of perception, belief, emotions, behavior, emotional reward and motivation, and how that reward sustains behavioral change.
We will practice using the model to understand and influence ourselves and others actively and effectively based on deliberate intent. After using this model, we will look at other models and develop our own.
We will also examine common but un- or counterproductive methods of influencing ourselves and others.

**Unit 4: Leading Others**
This unit's exercises show how to create and deepen meaningful connections based in empathy, compassion, and understanding conducive to productive collaboration.
We will see and become sensitive to the connection between strong motivations, passions, and vulnerabilities. We will experience the value and effectiveness of prioritizing the interests of those we lead since they are motivated by their interests, not ours.
We will learn and practice how to make others feel understood, not just to understand them, and as opposed to imposing values on them, which promotes resistance and resentment. Making
people feel understood leads people to feel more comfortable sharing their motivations. The deeper motivations they share, the more effectively you can motivate them on what matters to them, the more meaning, value, importance, and purpose they will feel in their work, and the more they will want to work with you again.

This unit also covers the hazards of relying on authority to lead, which can undermine more powerful existing motivations already in the people we lead.

**Grading Policy**

Journal (25%): Writing forces you to think critically about what you express and clarify your thinking. Each student must write at least one journal entry per week of at least 500 words on their experience of the exercises, readings, or some other part of class. The content is up to you, so I will not grade your journal entries for content, only that you wrote them.

Long-term personal leadership project (25%): Each student will find part of their life that can benefit from the leadership skills they learn in this class and create a project to apply them. You know your life best, so you will create the project for yourself, though I'll have ideas you can fall back on if necessary. I will look for effort in the project and clarity of thought in the presentation.

Final paper (25%): People behave consistently with their mental models. The course is designed to help you understand mental models and for you to create models for leadership that motivate effective behavior. The final paper is designed to have you think about a model and communicate it. It will likely change over time, but developing and clarifying a model will help you clarify your leadership practice. I will look for understanding of models in general, your model in particular, and clarity of thought and communication.

Participation (25%): Leadership is fundamentally interactive. Attendance and in-class exercises are essential. Unexcused absences will result lower your grade one unit—for example A+ to an A.

**Required Reading**

Required readings are listed in each class. All are online or I will distribute them in class.

**Suggested Reading**

*Competition Demystified*, by Bruce Greenwald

*The Fifth Discipline*, by Peter Senge

*Thinking in Systems, a Primer*, by Donella Meadows

*Getting to Yes*, by Roger Fisher, William L. Ury, and Bruce Patton

*Man’s Search For Meaning*, Victor Frankl

*Tao Te Ching*, by Laozi, translation by Ron Hogan

*The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu

*The Meaning of Leadership – Syllabus*
**Course Schedule**

I will distribute write-ups of and explain all exercises when assigned.

**Unit 1: Understanding Yourself**

**Week 1: Introduction, inner monologue, and self-awareness**

**In-class exercise**

1. Introductions: who we are, what brought us here, our goals, etc. We have different backgrounds, goals, things we offer, things we lack, and so on. Knowing each other helps us learn from and teach each other.
2. Overview of the course, its goals, history, pedagogy, structure, etc.
3. Describe exercises for next week

**Exercises for next week**

1. Your identity to the class: write about yourself for your classmates to know you (about 1,000 words and include a recent picture)
2. Three raisins exercise
3. Internal monologue exercise

**Reading for next week**

1. Watch *Mindfulness with Jon Kabat-Zinn* and minutes 22-54 of the video in *Sam Harris on consciousness and internal monologue*
2. Read and watch videos in *The most effective self-awareness exercise I know of, Know your self talk, know yourself*, and *Some self-talk you'll recognize, to improve your self-awareness*
3. Read each other's profiles

**Week 2: Beliefs and mental models**

**In-class exercise**

1. Review and discuss last week's exercises
2. Discuss inner monologue and self-awareness
3. Describe and practice exercises for next week
4. Discuss difference between beliefs and strategies

**Exercise for next week**

1. Write your beliefs exercise

**Reading for next week**

1. *Discovering Your Authentic Leadership*, by Bill George, Peter Sims, Andrew N. McLean, and Diana Mayer in Harvard Business Review
2. Introduction and first chapters of *ReModel*, by Joshua Spodek (I will post it on the class site)

**Week 3: Challenging beliefs and others' beliefs**

**In-class exercise**

1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Discuss beliefs, perception, and strategies
3. Describe and practice exercise for next week

**Exercise for next week**

1. Write three sets of beliefs: society's, other individuals', and when you don't like how you feel

**Unit 2: Leading Yourself**

**Week 4: Language, judgment, and getting useful advice**

**In-class exercise**

1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Discuss others' beliefs, how they affect you, and how you respond to them.
3. Discuss beliefs that create un- or counterproductive motivations, the challenges of becoming aware of them, and what to do about them.
4. Describe and practice exercise for next week

**Exercises for next week**

1. No, But, However exercise
2. Feedforward exercise

*The Meaning of Leadership – Syllabus*  
Professor Joshua Spodek
Reading for next week
1. Watch Marshall Goldsmith’s Leading and feedforward videos and the documents on this page.
2. (Optional: Read the Marshall Goldsmith New Yorker article)

Week 5: Your authentic voice and avoiding imposing values on others

In-class exercise
1. Review and discuss last week’s exercises
2. Discuss judgment and the effects of imposing values on others
3. How to get and keep a mentor
4. Describe and practice exercise for next week

Exercises for next week
1. Voicing your inner monologue exercise
2. Avoid judgmental language exercise

Reading for next week
1. Don’t: The Secret of Self Control by Jonah Lehrer in the New Yorker
2. Read and watch videos in Communications skills exercises, part 10: voicing your self-talk, Communications skills exercises, part 10a: examples of voicing your self-talk, and Communications skills exercises, part 10b: another example of voicing your self-talk

Week 6: Changing your beliefs, managing expectations

In-class exercise
1. Review and discuss last week's exercises
2. Discuss problems with imposing values on others
3. Discuss value of speaking authentically
4. Describe SIDCHAs
5. Describe exercises for next week

Exercises for next week
1. New beliefs exercise

The Meaning of Leadership – Syllabus
Professor Joshua Spodek
2. SIDCHA exercise

**Reading for next week**

Read the abstract, introduction, and conclusions/discussions of the first four articles, skimming the middle parts.

1. *The Heat of the Moment* by Dan Ariely and George Loewenstein in Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, **19**: 87-98, 26 July 2005
6. What you're thinking and Know your self-talk, know yourself, part 2
7. The Self-Imposed Daily Challenging Healthy Activity (SIDCHA) series

**Week 7: Changing challenging beliefs**

**In-class exercise**

1. Review and discuss last weeks' exercises
2. Discuss empathy gaps
3. Describe exercise for next week

**Exercise for next week**

1. Harder new beliefs exercise

**Reading for next week**

2. Watch *Richard Dawkins on Altruism and The Selfish Gene*
4. *Why Students Love Evolutionary Psychology . . . and How to Teach* It by David Buss (Optional: watch video *Why Students Love Evolutionary Psychology . . . and How to Teach It*)
**Unit 3: Understanding Others**

**Week 8: Models for leadership and emotions**

*In-class exercise*
1. Review and discuss last week's exercises
2. Discuss beliefs, emotions, and leadership
3. Describe exercises for next week

*Exercises for next week*
1. Your model for leadership exercise
2. Your model for emotions exercise

*Reading for next week*

**Week 9: Understanding what to change**

*In-class exercise*
1. Review and discuss last week's exercises
2. Describe mental models and strategies
3. Describe The Model
4. Describe and practice exercise for next week

*Exercise for next week*
1. Describe two situations you want to change about yourself in terms of The Model—that is, their environments, beliefs, emotions, behaviors, and rewards

*Reading for next week*
1. The Model—the series
**Week 10: Transforming what you want to change**

*In-class exercise*
1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Describe The Method
3. Create a strategy based on The Method to transform one of the situations from your exercises
4. Describe and practice the exercise for next week

*Exercise for next week*
1. Use The Method to transform one of the situations from last week's exercises

*Reading for next week*
1. [The Method—the series](#)
2. [Making Leadership Happen](#), by Cynthia McCauley at the Center for Creative Leadership
3. Chapter 3, The Relational Leadership Model, by Susan Komives in Exploring Leadership (to be distributed)

**Week 11: Transforming a more challenging situation**

*In-class exercise*
1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Create a strategy based on The Method to transform a more challenging situation
3. Discuss “creating your social world”
4. Describe next week's exercise

*Exercise for next week*
1. Use The Method to transform one of the situations from last week's exercise

*Reading for next week*
1. [Seven Transformations of Leadership](#), by David Rooke and William R. Torbert in Harvard Business Review
Unit 4: Leading Others

Week 12: Creating meaningful connections

In-class exercise
1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Meaningful Connection in-class exercise
3. Describe next week's exercise

Exercise for next week
1. Do the Meaningful Connection exercise at least once per day

Reading for next week

Week 13: Making them feel understood, evoking their passions

In-class exercise
1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Make Them Feel Understood in-class exercise
3. Describe next week's exercise

Exercise for next week
1. Do the Make People Feel Understood exercise at least once per day

Reading for next week

Week 14: Connecting their passion to your task

In-class exercise
1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Connect Their Passion to Your Task in-class exercise
3. Describe and practice next week's exercise

**Exercises for next week**
1. Do the Connect Their Passion to Your Task exercise at least three times

**Reading for next week**

**Week 15: Leading Others Comprehensively and Course Review**

**In-class exercise**
1. Review and discuss last week's exercise
2. Leading Others Comprehensively in-class exercise
3. Course review
4. Describe final exercises

**Final exercises**
1. Leading Others Comprehensively exercise
2. Your revised identity to the class: write about yourself for your classmates to know you after this course (what length you feel appropriate)
3. Final assignment: Write a paper on “What is your model for leadership?” of what length you feel appropriate.

**Final reading**
1. *Tao Te Ching*, translation by Ron Hogan
Joshua Spodek, PhD MBA

Joshua Spodek earned such praise as “Best and Brightest” (Esquire Magazine’s Genius Issue), “Astrophysicist turned new media whiz” (NBC), and “Rocket Scientist” (Forbes Magazine and ABC News) with success in such diverse fields as science, invention, entrepreneurship, art, leadership, coaching, and education.

A Professor at NYU, he holds five Ivy-League degrees, including a PhD in Astrophysics and an MBA, both from Columbia University, where he studied under a Nobel Laureate. He helped build an X-ray observational satellite orbiting the Earth as part of a multi-billion-dollar decade-plus mission led by the European Space Agency with NASA. He left academia to co-found a venture, Submedia, to bring to market his invention—a technology to show motion-pictures to subway riders moving between stations—starting the field of commercial in-tunnel motion-pictures. Submedia has grown worldwide to install dozens of displays in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Australia. He holds six patents. He co-founded and helped lead several education ventures, including partnering with New York City Public Schools. He has taught art at Parsons the New School for Design and NYU-Tisch's Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP).

Fascinated and surprised at how well business schools taught leadership, which he had previously thought unteachable, he studied it, soon becoming a leadership and executive coach for Columbia Business School’s Program on Social Intelligence (and to private coaching clients). He leads seminars in Leadership, Creativity, Sales, Strategy, and Motivation at institutions including Columbia Business School, Harvard, NYU-Stern School of Business, INSEAD Singapore, the New York Academy of Science, and in private corporations. As one of few people in the world to have visited North Korea twice, he has lectured on North Korean strategy at Columbia University and in South Korea and China. He wrote a book on North Korean strategy reviewed as “a very thought-provoking read that may totally change how you interpret the country.”

His coaching clients include start-up founders as well as employees of McKinsey, Bain, BCG, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, A.T. Kearney, UBS, Bear Stearns, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Deutsche Bank, Citigroup, American Express, Lazard Freres, Blackrock, the Cowen Group, ValueAct, Investec, DE Shaw, Stifel Nicolaus, the International Monetary Fund, Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, Google, Yahoo!, Yelp, Sony, IBM, Oracle, Honda, Carnegie Hall, Skidmore Owings & Merrill, Lionsgate, the William Morris Agency, the Creative Artists Agency, Time Magazine, CBS, Universal McCann, Proctor & Gamble, ExxonMobil, Lockheed-Martin, FIFA World Cup Organizing Committee, the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Army, and others.

His clients include graduates of Columbia, Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Cornell, Princeton, Duke, Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago, Indian Institute of Technology, University of Michigan, Northwestern, Tufts, Vassar, Amherst, NYU, the U.S. Naval Academy, and others.


The Meaning of Leadership – Syllabus 13  Professor Joshua Spodek
As an artist he has shown large public art installations in New York City's Bryant Park and Union Square and Amsterdam's Dam Square. He has had solo shows in New York City, group shows across the country, and has shown in museums, Art Basel Miami Beach, MTV, and more.

His work won an Obie Award for Design Excellence and reached the semifinals in the Adobe Design Achievement Awards.

He finished six marathons and counting (3:51 best), competed at the World and National level of Ultimate Frisbee (with teams ranked #5 at College Nationals, #8 at Club Nationals, and #11 at Worlds), including captaining his college team as well as playing at the first Ultimate Tournament in Pyongyang, North Korea. For fun he swam across the Hudson River and has jumped out of two airplanes. He has visited 26 countries in six continents, including years in Paris, Ahmedabad (India), and Shanghai. He lives in New York City’s Greenwich Village and blogs daily at www.joshuaspodek.com.