Leadership Philosophy

Simone Tchagou

My leadership philosophy is built on delegation, not authority for its own sake. I do not lead by directing people from behind a title, or by assuming that the person in charge should always have the final word before anyone else has spoken. I believe strong leadership means trusting the people around me enough to draw on what they know — and then standing ready to own the outcome once a decision is made. Over the years, leading our elementary team and organizing school-wide events has taught me that this approach is not softer than top-down leadership; it simply asks more of the leader, not less.

Valuing the Expertise of Others

Every person on a team brings a different vantage point, and a leader who consults only her own judgment is working with a fraction of the information actually available. Before I make a decision that affects a classroom, a grade level, or a school-wide event, I ask for input from the people closest to the work — teachers, assistants, and often the students themselves. As a member of my school's leadership team, I help interview new staff and help build the yearly academic calendar, and in both of those responsibilities, the better decision has always come from listening first rather than deciding first and explaining later. Respecting someone's expertise does not mean handing off a decision and walking away from it; it means believing their perspective makes the outcome better, and treating their time and judgment as worth the ask.

Owning the Outcome

Delegating responsibility does not mean delegating accountability. When I ask a team to weigh in on a decision, I am not shifting the final call onto them — I am still the one who stands behind it, including when it does not go as planned. I would rather take the fall for a decision made with my team's input than protect myself by keeping all the authority, and none of the risk, to myself. People work harder for a leader who will not let them absorb the blame for a call that was ultimately hers to make, and that kind of trust is worth far more than being right every time.

Leading by Example

I have never asked a team to meet a standard I was not willing to meet myself. Whether that means being the first one on campus and the last to leave, or stepping into an unglamorous task during a big event simply because it needs doing, people notice what a leader does far more than what a leader says. Organizing events such as our school's International Day, the annual Talent Show, the School Bazaar, or the Festival of Performing Arts and Sports (FOPAS) has required dozens of people — teachers, students, and outside vendors — all doing their part well under real time pressure. The only honest way to ask that of a team is to be visibly willing to do the same work alongside them.

Finding the Good in Others

I try to lead the way I try to teach: by looking for what someone is doing right before I point out what needs to change. People tend to rise to the level of belief placed in them. When I mentor a colleague or support a teacher through a difficult stretch, I look first for her strengths and build from there, because criticism without encouragement rarely changes behavior — it mostly just makes people defensive and less willing to try again. A team that knows its leader is looking for the good in them will take more risks, admit mistakes earlier, and ask for help sooner, and all of that makes the whole team stronger over time.

Staying Calm in the Storm

Large events rarely go according to plan, and neither does a school year. Vendors cancel, schedules collapse, and plans change an hour before they are supposed to happen. I have learned that a team takes its emotional cue from whoever is leading it: if I stay calm, the people around me stay calm and keep problem-solving; if I panic, that panic spreads faster than the original problem ever could. Being the steady presence during a crisis is not about having every answer immediately — it is about making sure the team believes the problem is solvable, so they keep working instead of freezing.

Conclusion

Taken together, these are not five separate principles so much as one belief stated five different ways: leadership is something you do with people, not to them. I will keep making the decisions I am responsible for, but I intend to keep making them alongside the people who know the work best, and I will keep standing behind the outcome either way. That, to me, is what it means to lead.