

EMBRACING HOSPITALITY LEADERSHIP:
A PARADIGM FOR UNIVERSAL SUCCESS ACROSS INDUSTRIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. An Interdisciplinary Inquiry of Hospitality Leadership..... 3

II. Background..... 4

III. Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Organizational Connection..... 9

IV. Methods..... 10

V. Multi-sector Evidence of Hospitality Leadership..... 12

 A. Perception..... 13

 B. Empathy..... 14

 C. Personalization 16

 D. Altruism..... 18

 E. Authenticity..... 20

VI. Conclusion..... 22

VII. References..... 25

VIII. List of Appendices..... 2

 A. Appendix A..... 30

 B. Appendix B..... 31

 C. Appendix C..... 32

An Interdisciplinary Inquiry of Hospitality Leadership

Leadership in my experience has emerged not only through intentional coaching and structured experiences but also through serendipitous acts of kindness, revealing its profound influence on personal and professional development—an exploration central to this work on hospitality leadership. This project, embodied through a series of podcasts, aims to capture these impactful moments, presenting them not merely as stories, but as lived experiences and oral histories that illustrate the essence of hospitality leadership. Through the MALS program, I wanted to go beyond traditional academic boundaries, venturing into an interdisciplinary synthesis of leadership studies, hospitality, and various social sciences, like sociology, communication, and psychology. Each episode of the podcast serves as a mosaic of diverse narratives and showcases real-life experiences highlighting *perception, empathy, personalization, altruism, and authenticity*—the tenets I’ve unveiled of hospitality leadership.

Leadership, particularly as portrayed and embodied in the hospitality industry, is practiced in the subtle choreography of everyday interactions. By probing into the lived experiences—and reflections on those experiences—of my podcast guests, this work shows the ubiquitous, yet often overlooked, presence of hospitality leadership surrounding our lives. Through their stories, we see the interdisciplinary nature of leadership—how it interweaves with elements of psychology to enhance understanding and communication, how it overlaps with the principles of sociology in community and relationship building, and how it responds to complex people in complex workplace cultures.

Leading with a hospitality mindset has been a 21st century focus of leaders in service and experience-driven markets (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). This transformation is characterized by a growing emphasis on intangible aspects of business, such as customer engagement, brand

loyalty, and personalized products or services—elements that are critically dependent on the quality of interactions between service providers and their clients (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The critical nature of this relationship—between the provider (i.e. employee) facilitating the experience and the client (i.e. guest) receiving it—elevates the importance of employee satisfaction and empowerment. Leaders striving to deliver high quality experiences must therefore center their focus on the employees and create a culture that supports employees in their experience delivery efforts.

This work addresses a gap in existing leadership literature, where hospitality leadership principles have traditionally been confined to service-oriented industries like hotels and restaurants. By illustrating the transformative potential of these principles across a broader spectrum of industries, this project explores the application of hospitality leadership as a universal paradigm. This approach enriches the understanding of leadership and champions its broader application, providing a better framework for organizations aiming to innovate their leadership practices in response to evolving market demands and the growing importance of exceptional service delivery. This work aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how modern leadership can evolve to meet the challenges of the service and experience economy, demonstrating that the tenets of hospitality are not just nice-to-have, but apply broadly to successful work environments.

Background

The rise of the experience economy, a term popularized by Pine and Gilmore (2011), underscores the importance of creating memorable events for customers, suggesting that the memory itself becomes the product (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In this new economy, the quality of customer experiences directly influences consumer loyalty and spending, making

customer-centric leadership a strategic imperative. This focus on customer experience is intrinsically linked to the role of employee engagement in driving organizational success (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Research consistently shows that organizations with highly engaged employees exhibit higher productivity, better customer service, and stronger profitability (Harter et al., 2002; Jagannathan, 2014; Macey et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2020). Therefore, leadership models that cultivate a supportive and motivating workplace culture not only enhance employee engagement but also directly contribute to the enriched interactions that are essential in the experience economy.

This work proposes that hospitality leadership mirrors the attentive service found in hospitality industries, reimagined through how leaders engage with and support their teams. This approach ensures that employees are not only supported but are also actively involved in shaping the service experience, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness and morale within the organization. This conceptualization of hospitality leadership builds upon servant leadership, a modern style of leadership that has come to the forefront of academic leadership studies.

Servant leadership is defined as a leadership style where the leader prioritizes the support and empowerment of their followers (Brownell, 2010). It is characterized by a commitment to serving others, which fundamentally influences the leader-follower relationship and shapes the organizational culture towards service excellence (Brownell, 2010). This approach is particularly suited to industries like hospitality, where leadership through service is a core element. Chon and Zultan (2019) provide a succinct definition of servant leadership that highlights its core principles, "The mode of servant leadership concentrates on empowering followers, involving them in decision-making and constantly supporting their development." This description underscores the foundational elements of servant leadership, emphasizing the leader's role in

fostering an environment of growth and shared decision-making. Servant leadership shares many principles with hospitality leadership. While both styles emphasize the importance of serving and supporting team members, hospitality leadership particularly advocates for leaders to treat their employees with the same high level of care and respect typically reserved for guests. Servant leadership focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of team members; hospitality leadership extends this ethos with a unique emphasis on the customer experience, aligning leadership actions not only with the development of employees but also with the satisfaction of guests. While servant leadership is more internally focused on organizational dynamics and employee relations, hospitality leadership applies these internal principles to outward-facing interactions, ensuring that leadership actions resonate throughout the entire service cycle, from internal management to the end customer experience. This dual focus differentiates hospitality leadership, as it advocates for a balanced approach to caring for multiple stakeholders.

Numerous theoretical frameworks from other fields also support the concept of hospitality leadership, including Bandura's social learning theory (1977), Blau's social exchange theory (1964), and Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1974). These theories would predicate that as employees increasingly identify with their organization(s), their responses to favorable treatment often turn into enhanced performance and higher quality work.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes the importance of learning through observation and modeling, particularly the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (1977). Latham and Saari (1979) utilized social learning theory to inform their behavioral modeling training program for supervisors. The training aimed to improve interpersonal skills among supervisors, focusing on effective interaction with employees. The results highlighted that supervisors who underwent this training showed significantly improved performance in

managing their teams, illustrating the robust application of social learning theory in developing essential workplace skills. In the realm of hospitality leadership, this theory provides a foundation for understanding how leaders can serve as role models to foster a service-oriented culture within their organizations. When leaders exemplify traits such as empathy, personalization, and authenticity, they set a standard that employees observe and emulate. This modeling is crucial because it directly influences how employees interact with each other and with customers, ultimately shaping the organizational culture.

Peter Blau's social exchange theory explores social behavior as an exchange process aiming to maximize benefits and minimize costs (1964). Zhang et al. (2017) highlights how transformational leadership, as an application of this theory, significantly enhances knowledge sharing among employees, contributing to the overall organizational learning. This theory is also particularly relevant to hospitality leadership as it explains the dynamics of the reciprocal relationships between leaders and their teams. Leaders who invest in their employees through recognition, support, and opportunities for professional growth are likely to witness a return in the form of increased employee engagement and motivation (Zou et al., 2015). This investment in human capital is critical in the hospitality industry, where the quality of service can significantly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Finally, Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1974), which highlights the impact of group memberships on a person's self-esteem and sense of belonging, offers valuable insights into how leaders can cultivate strong organizational cultures. Dr. Joanne Barnes from Indiana Wesleyan University elaborates on this by discussing how leaders can inadvertently establish in-groups and out-groups based on perceived similarities and differences. This segmentation can significantly affect organizational culture and employee engagement (Barnes 2020). In the

context of hospitality leadership, fostering a sense of community and shared organizational identity is crucial. By consciously striving to understand and integrate diverse groups within the workplace, leaders can enhance the sense of belonging and commitment among all employees. This alignment with the organization's values and goals not only enhances employees' commitment but also motivates them to contribute positively, ensuring that their actions consistently support and enhance the guest experience.

Hospitality leadership, which can excel in creating and managing service-oriented experiences, is characterized by a proactive approach to meeting the emotional and practical needs of both employees and in turn, customers (Bavik et al., 2017). It emphasizes service, personalization, and a commitment to exceeding expectations—qualities that are becoming increasingly important across all sectors, not just in traditional hospitality industries like restaurants, hotels, and destination attractions. This approach is articulated in sources such as *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara (2022), a bestselling book by a hospitality industry professional, which provides a compelling depiction of how prioritizing personal interactions can transform service dynamics. Essentially, by fostering an environment where employees feel genuinely cared for and valued, organizations can instill a deeper sense of responsibility and enthusiasm among staff, which naturally extends to their interactions with customers. It is not merely about enhancing workplace satisfaction but about creating a supportive culture that empowers employees to deliver their best. This employee-centered approach is crucial as it directly correlates with how effectively they can fulfill customer needs and embody the service ethos of the organization. By embedding these hospitality-derived principles into the leadership strategies of broader industries, we can advocate for a leadership style that not only prioritizes the end-user but also leverages the human capital that drives all organizational success. In

expanding this conceptual framework, I showcase how the qualities traditionally celebrated in hospitality hold transformative potential for multiple sectors.

As industries as diverse as education, consulting, and construction recognize the value of these elements, they are beginning to see the benefits of adopting a hospitality-oriented leadership model, although they may not know it's called such a thing. More importantly, it is positively impacting the lives of their employees by creating a culture of positive communication and intrapersonal development.

Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Organizational Connection

I've distilled five tenets of hospitality leadership after a comprehensive synthesis of foundational theories and customer-centric practices described in foundational works such as *The Starbucks Experience* (Michelli, 2017), *The New Gold Standard* (Michelli, 2008), and *Unreasonable Hospitality* (Guidara, 2022). Through my study of these texts among others, I identified a recurring cycle essential to effective service: 1) *perception* and self-awareness of the environment, situation, or individual; 2) The capacity to *empathize* with this understanding; 3) *personalization* of responses to meet specific needs; and 4) an *authentic* and 5) *altruistic* willingness to serve others. These elements are condensed into the core tenets of hospitality leadership which I explore throughout this paper.

The tenets form a dynamic paradigm that interlinks intrapersonal values, interpersonal impacts, and organizational culture (Figure 1). These traits originate at the intrapersonal level, where individual leaders cultivate values that influence their behavior and decision-making. This personal foundation directly impacts interpersonal relationships, enhancing how leaders interact with and respond to both employees and the people they serve (Brownell, 2003). The cumulative effect of these interactions shapes the “organizational DNA,” reinforcing a culture committed to

exceptional service quality. This organizational culture, in turn, reinforces the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, creating a continuous cycle that strengthens and perpetuates a culture of hospitality leadership. Through this cycle, hospitality leadership not only improves experience delivery but also embeds these core traits deeper within the organization. Through the conversations I had in podcast guests, I continued to unwrap what each tenet means in the context of personal values, how they manifest themselves in team dynamics, and how they impact organizations at-large.

Hospitality Leadership Paradigm

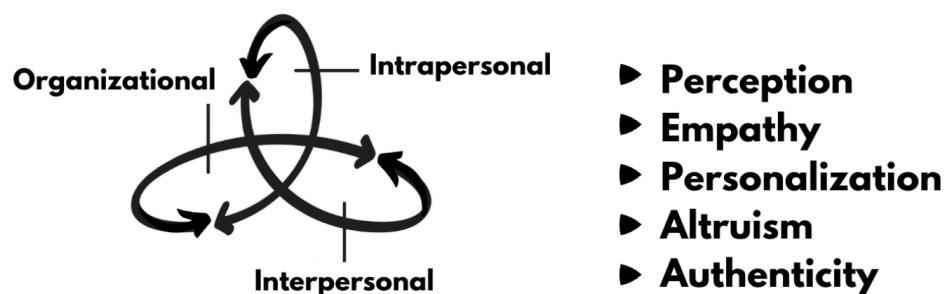


Figure 1: Hospitality Leadership Paradigm

Methods

This project aimed to engage leaders from distinct sectors—specifically education, construction, and traditional hospitality—to participate in structured conversations. The choice of these sectors was designed to reveal both differences and similarities in leadership styles across diverse industries. These sectors each have unique objectives: education focuses on learning, construction on building, and hospitality on experience. Despite these differences, leaders across these fields share a common goal: to develop their teams into effective leaders who not only advance professionally, but also drive better outcomes. For example, leaders in the education

industry want to develop their faculty so that they can teach better. Construction leaders, similarly, want to develop their employees so they become more efficient. Hospitality serves as a benchmark for comparison, emphasizing experience delivery through food, beverage, and/or accommodation. This focus on experience highlights the intrinsic value of nurturing leadership qualities that cater directly to client satisfaction and operational success. The selection of participants was also strategically influenced by network proximity, ensuring easier access to a broad spectrum of leaders and enhancing the interdisciplinary nature of the study.

The project was designed as a series of conversational interviews, through the medium of a podcast, which are ideal for gathering a rich, descriptive background that reflects the nuanced views of participants on hospitality leadership. This method was chosen over traditional survey approaches because it allowed for a deeper, more nuanced exploration of personal leadership philosophies and practices as they naturally occur in professional settings.

The 45-minute interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the podcast guest, accommodating their convenience and preferences, and the core of the interview was structured around a predefined set of questions (Appendix A). These questions aimed to delve into the guests' leadership experiences and their personal interpretations of hospitality leadership. To aid in the understanding of the theoretical framework, an associated slide deck (Appendix B) was utilized during the interviews. This visual aid introduced the definitions and core concepts of hospitality leadership, including its tenets, to the participants. This not only helped in grounding the discussion, but also allowed guests to reflect on each tenet as it relates to their personal experiences and leadership styles. The interview process allowed for deviations from the script based on the flow of conversation and this flexibility enabled a deeper exploration of topics as guests shared insights.

Each of the seven sessions featured open-ended questions that facilitated discussions on personal leadership styles, the influence of hospitality principles in their leadership approaches, and the effects of their leadership on their teams. Through their conversational experience-sharing, I explored the application and understanding of hospitality leadership principles in varying organizational contexts. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of subjective elements that are not readily quantifiable, but are essential for understanding complex leadership dynamics. Table 1 details the list of participants, including their leadership positions, and the interview medium.

Table 1. Interview List - *By order of interview sequence*

Guest Name	Title, Company	Interview Medium
Derrick Willard	Head of School, Ravenscroft School	In Person
Liz Grandchamp	Owner/Operator, Grandchamp Hospitality	In Person
Jan Knox	VP for College Advancement, Guilford Technical Community College	Zoom
Doug Morton	Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities, NC State University	In Person
Arielle DeSoucey	Wine & Spirits Specialist, Civil Wines	Zoom
Peter Millerhagen	Associate Leadership and Organizational Development Consultant, FMI Corp.	Zoom
Maggie Kane	Founder and Executive Director, A Place at the Table	Zoom

The conversations were recorded and transcribed using Fireflies.ai transcription software to review direct quotes. GarageBand, an audio editing software, was then used to add in introductory music and context. See Appendix C for access to the recordings of each podcast.

Multi-sector Evidence of Hospitality Leadership

The conversations with podcast guests revealed a diverse application of the tenets of hospitality leadership. The following illustrates where each tenet was present in the leadership efforts of seven leaders across the fields of hospitality, education, and construction.

Perception

In hospitality leadership, the concept of perception plays a critical role in identifying and addressing the needs and concerns of both employees and guests, even when they are not explicitly communicated. Perception involves an intuitive ability to accurately interpret and respond to the subtleties of people's needs (Shum et al., 2018). This emotional awareness and critical thinking capability enables leaders to discern nonverbal cues, mood shifts, and underlying concerns, ensuring that responses are both appropriate and timely (Shum et al., 2018).

One of the intrapersonal competencies embodied by perception is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EI), particularly the aspect of perception within it, can be thought of as an essential subcategory of the broader spectrum of perceptual skills required for effective leadership (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). This facet of EI involves the nuanced ability to discern and respond to the unspoken emotions and needs of others, which is critical in settings like the hospitality industry where anticipating customer needs and managing employee dynamics are notable (Côté, 2014). In hospitality, similar to the scenarios outlined in Côté's research, leaders must excel not only in managing logistical or operational challenges, but also in navigating the emotional currents of their teams and clientele. This aspect of leadership is illustrated in books like *The Starbucks Experience* where the focus is not just on delivering a product but on crafting an environment that acknowledges and caters to the emotional journeys of customers. Similarly, in the book *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara, which inspired this project, almost every narrative underscores the importance of accurately assessing situations for effective response.

This idea resonates deeply with effective leadership, highlighting the necessity for leaders to precisely interpret circumstances and prioritize what is most crucial. With perception, comes the ability to respond positively. For example, interviewee Arielle DeSoucey shared in her podcast episode about perception in her work environment:

“When I sell wine now, I have to go into various places with people who might be super busy, they might have had their line cook call out... they might have a sick kid at home, and so they're trying to rush through the tasting... To be perceptive and to realize when to stop and when to keep going is incredibly important in sales, particularly with wine...perception is huge in terms of sales, authenticity, I mean.”

Perceptiveness is a crucial skill across the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational dimensions of this paradigm. The emotional intelligence required to navigate one's own feelings, gauge the emotional state of others, and assess the overall mood within an organization profoundly influences leadership effectiveness. Although, Derrick Willard shares a more intentional way to perceive these attitudes:

“Sometimes to get to root causes, we have to ask a bunch of questions...have you ever heard the ‘five why technique’? You know, you just keep asking ‘why’? Like a two year old until you get at what's deeper...I have found that has served me well that if I can try, if I can force myself to maintain curiosity versus leaping to judgment, I might get to something I can't see....Because reading the room, I might see behavior, things that are observable and explicit, but I may not know what's implicit, what's hiding, unless I'm really curious.”

This self-awareness enables leaders to delve beyond superficial interactions and uncover deeper motivations and concerns, fostering a more insightful and empathetic leadership style. By cultivating a culture of curiosity and open inquiry, leaders can effectively address both overt and covert challenges within their teams, promoting a more inclusive and understanding work environment. Enhancing our understanding of *perception*, particularly exploring how it can be cultivated and taught, could significantly amplify the impact of other leadership tenets.

Empathy

In the realm of hospitality, empathy transcends mere customer service; it becomes a key facet of transformative experiences. Recent studies underline empathy as not only a skill but a leadership imperative that enhances organizational performance (Elche et al., 2020; Murari & Kripa, 2012). It is known that servant leaders who prioritize the well-being and development of their team, naturally cultivate an empathetic workplace (Elche et al., 2020). This leadership style is particularly resonant in hospitality, where the well-being of employees directly influences the quality of guest experiences (Guidara, 2022). Such leaders are seen not only as managers but as caretakers of their community's culture and well-being, which is crucial in high-touch service settings like hotels, restaurants, and leisure facilities (Guidara, 2022). Moreover, the study in the *IDEO: Human-Centered Service Design* case exemplifies how empathy drives innovation in service design by focusing on the human experiences at every touchpoint (Brown & Katz, 2009).

Peter Millerhagen, reflecting on the impact of empathetic leadership, elaborates on how deeply understanding and supporting employees can impact workplace dynamics:

“Some of my favorite leaders in my career and in my life have been ones that really put themselves in your shoes and understand how you feel and what you're thinking, and really ask like ‘what barriers can I remove in order to make your life easier?’ I really try to do both of those things: understanding with empathy, where someone's coming from, what expectations or experiences they might have and then also [asking] ‘how can I make your life easier?’ I'm not just here to bark orders at you.”

This empathetic approach is critical in hospitality settings where customer satisfaction hinges on the emotional engagement of the service provided. These insights collectively suggest that empathy within hospitality leadership is not merely about understanding and sharing the feelings of another but is a strategic lever for enhancing experience quality and organizational effectiveness. The type of empathetic interaction inherent in hospitality settings serves as an exemplary model for employers across all industries, suggesting that cultivating such empathy within their teams can lead to similarly transformative results.

Liz Grandchamp discusses the transient nature of the hospitality industry and its implications for leadership in our interview, particularly emphasizing the importance of empathy in the interpersonal dimension of the paradigm (Figure 1). She notes that in the hospitality sector, many positions are seen as temporary or transitional, which can affect employee commitment and reliability. She says “more often than not, people who are here for a seasonal job and they're servicing because they have to service that job, not necessarily because that is like their end all be all....” She shares how this is particularly significant in food cities like New York or San Francisco, where the industry is viewed as a viable long-term career path and employers may seek to hire staff with a deeper commitment to their roles. She continues, “so many more people are in the restaurant industry as their career, not just the job...” In this context, Grandchamp discusses the importance of empathy by acknowledging the individual circumstances and motivations of employees who may be in the industry temporarily. She argues that understanding and empathizing with employees' situations is crucial, especially to prevent feeling taken advantage of when flexibility and compassion are needed. For example, while being supportive and empathetic, leaders must also guard against the potential for such understanding to be exploited. She says “you have to watch the line of not being taken advantage of because everyone can have an excuse... You want to be empathetic and you want to be understanding, but you also want to make sure that you're not being taken advantage of.” Her insights suggest that empathy, when applied judiciously, helps build a culture that respects both the personal and professional needs of its diverse workforce, enhancing loyalty and performance regardless of the employee. This tenet of *empathy* is essential for leaders to effectively respond to diverse situations, aligning closely with the dynamic needs of both employees and the organization.

Personalization

Personalization in leadership involves tailoring interactions, communication, and management approaches to the individual characteristics, needs, and preferences of employees and customers. This tenet is fundamental in fostering an environment where individuals feel valued and understood. In the hospitality industry, the ability to personalize affects both the employee and customer experiences and is key to achieving excellence in service. As per Pine and Gilmore, our world is moving in a direction of an experience economy, where the consumer is seeking something unique and memorable—something *personalization* enables.

In the hospitality industry, personalization manifests in subtle, yet impactful, ways. It can be as simple as remembering a guest's name during a second meeting, preemptively baby-proofing a rental property for new tenants, or celebrating an employee's birthday with a gift card to their favorite restaurant. These thoughtful gestures significantly enhance how individuals—be they guests or employees—perceive their importance to the organization. By extending the principles of personalized service to our employees, treating them with the same care as we do our guests, we can cultivate a work environment where employees feel genuinely valued, fostering a greater willingness to excel in serving clients.

Derrick Willard emphasizes the fluidity of leadership, challenging the notion of a static leadership style with his observation, “...Often people are like, what's your style? And I actually think leadership is often too situational to say you have one style...leadership is situational.” This insight shows the necessity for leaders to adapt their approach to fit the demands of each unique situation, whether that means embodying the roles of a "pastor," "diplomat," or "general” depending on the situation. Complementing this perspective, Jan Knox emphasizes the importance of communication adaptability in leadership. She points out, “The one thing that I have learned about having the best performing team is that you have got to personalize your

message in a way that resonates with each person. Because no one receives information the same way. No one's going to communicate the same way.” Her comment highlights the critical need for personalized communication strategies within teams to ensure messages are understood and effective. Knox goes on to share about how this personalization piece connects to coaching and developing leaders on her team:

“That has really been something I have focused on doing, is personalizing how I work with people, but also coaching the people that report to me and down the chain on how to do that with employees that don't think and do things the same way they do. If we all operate like that, we're not going to grow. There's not going to be any innovation. We're going to be doing the same thing over and over again. And maybe you're hitting the goals all the time consistently...It's not going to feel as good for people on your team. It's not going to feel as good for the people you serve.”

Together, these insights demonstrate that effective leadership and communication are highly contextual and tailored, impacting not only leadership styles but also interpersonal interactions within a team. With these personalization efforts, teams grow in their innovation and personal development, creating a dynamic where the sum is greater than its parts.

Altruism

As leaders, the embodiment of an organization's mission can profoundly influence both motivation and the overarching work environment. Simon Sinek, in his book *Start with Why*, illustrates that when leaders articulate the 'why' behind their actions and organizational goals, this clarity not only fortifies their own sense of purpose but also imbues their teams with a strong directional focus (Sinek, 2008). This understanding fosters a great sense of purpose that acts as a catalyst for passion, which is contagious and can inspire entire teams to heightened levels of commitment and perseverance in overcoming challenges (Sinek, 2008). Moreover, effective communication of this purpose helps sustain enthusiasm across the organization, ensuring that

such energy is not merely ephemeral but a consistent driver of organizational growth (Sinek, 2008). Maggie Kane shares more on this idea of purpose being an element of altruism:

“I think you have to be community-minded...you have to think of the greater community...you have to have vision too...[you’ve] got to have a vision that folks follow or that drives yourself as the leader...I would actually stretch out to say like vision and mission focused, you know—what's your purpose? What's your greater mission? And you got to have that, that purpose of why you're doing this.”

Leadership often manifests in *altruistic* endeavors, whether through improving infrastructure (e.g. in the construction industry), aiding in the personal growth of individuals (e.g. in the education industry), or elevating customer experiences (e.g. the hospitality industry). This altruistic approach not only enriches the work environment but also fosters a work culture where employees are empowered to provide exceptional service to clients and the broader community. The spirit of altruism guides people to work because, commonly, they want to make the world a better place and they can do that through work. When leaders actively communicate and embody the altruistic purpose of their organization, they ignite a shared commitment among team members to strive toward these collective objectives. This shared sense of purpose not only motivates employees but also fosters a deeply collaborative environment where every individual is driven to contribute meaningfully. Doug Morton shared:

“The facilities division has almost 900 employees. And our job every day is to solve a problem that our customers can't solve by themselves and to help them continue to do what they're doing...we know that the College of Agriculture, Life Sciences or Engineering or Design all can continue to do their craft if we help them. So we're in the background, but we know the connection to that other side, to that outcome. So it's fulfilling... I do think it's all about service... this is a public service profession, engineering in general, but civil engineering specifically. There's very little that you do there that brings in lots of money, and so that was not the motivation at all. It was like, I can make other people's lives better, whether that's in the transportation world or the vertical construction world or utility servicing all those things at the end of each day. The hope is that you've improved somebody's modern life.”

This altruism, when linked with purpose, naturally leads to passion, a force that further energizes and unites teams. Passion instills a dynamic environment where leaders and their teams are not just motivated, but invigorated by a profound engagement with their responsibilities, drawing on the field of psychology and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly the concept of self-actualization, leaders who passionately engage with their work can attain a state known as "flow." This state is characterized by a complete immersion in activities, driven by intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Such deep engagement not only enhances personal satisfaction but also propels leaders and their teams towards realizing their full potential. In this peak state, individuals experience profound fulfillment, which can catalyze their journey towards self-actualization—the pinnacle of Maslow's pyramid (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In professional settings, leaders who foster environments that encourage the pursuit of passion and facilitate flow experiences can boost organizational effectiveness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). They cultivate workplaces where employees not only feel motivated but are also more likely to experience enhanced job satisfaction, creativity, and productivity. Aligning individual passions with organizational goals fulfills higher psychological needs and drives sustained innovation and growth, epitomizing the profound impact that well-harnessed internal motivations can have in leadership and organizational dynamics.

Authenticity

The final tenet of hospitality is authenticity. According to Pine and Gilmore, “authenticity is the new consumer sensibility. No matter the offering—commodity, good, service, experience or transformation— customers will judge it based on whether or not they view it as authentic— that is, whether or not it conforms to their own self-image” (2014, p. 28). Authenticity in leadership goes beyond the mere execution of tasks; it involves the congruence of one's values with their

sincere actions and communications. In the context of hospitality, where every interaction has the potential to impact the customer experience, the authenticity of leaders ensures that the organization's values are consistently reflected in its services (Wang & Xie, 2020). This alignment fosters trust and reliability, both internally among staff and externally among clients (Wang & Xie, 2020). Podcast guest Peter Millerhagen shared:

“I think it's really easy when you're in a new situation to kind of show up in a way that you think people want you to show up and kind of follow a model or an example that was set out before you. And for me, in my leadership journey, that's always been really hard because that's when maybe some of the imposter syndrome sets in, or maybe you really question what you're doing. And I think showing up genuinely, as yourself is just a really great strategy and allows other leaders to do the same.”

Millerhagen's interview further personalizes the idea of authenticity, presenting it as a counter to imposter syndrome and a method to cultivate a genuine leadership presence. His perspective posits a real-world challenge leaders face—balancing the expectation to conform to pre-existing models while also needing to remain true to their authentic selves. Millerhagen's reflections emphasize the crucial connection between a leader and their team, highlighting that when leaders model genuine self-representation, it creates a space where employees feel safe to express their own identities and opinions, fostering a culture of open communication and mutual respect. This level of interpersonal honesty is fundamental to building a cohesive team that values authenticity, enhancing both employee morale and overall organizational integrity.

Despite theories in sociology like impression management and formation, role-making, and self-categorization theory, which suggest a manipulation in how we present ourselves, the tangible benefits of authentic leadership are clear (Goffman, 1959). Research by Ausar et al. confirms that authenticity in leadership correlates with crucial organizational outcomes such as “empowerment, job satisfaction, job performance, and profitability” (2016). Liz Grandchamp builds on Millerhagen's thoughts from the perspective of the hospitality industry:

“I think staff want someone that's authentic and they want...the culture of the restaurant [not just to be] for the guests, it's for the ones that are inside...Because it can't just be really cool to come in and get great bar service. I want to feel that with my co-workers as well. So I would say authenticity is probably one of the [strongest tenets].”

Grandchamp's insights convey the significance of authenticity in creating a supportive workplace atmosphere where both staff and customers feel genuinely valued. This direct approach helps ensure that the organizational culture is not only appealing to patrons but also enriches the work environment, reinforcing the importance of authentic interactions across all levels of the business. Unsurprisingly, a majority of the interviewees also chose “authenticity” as the tenet that spoke most to them. Consequently, authenticity in leadership significantly enhances the experience and satisfaction of employees while, in turn, enhancing customer experiences (Gatling et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This work aimed to address a gap in existing leadership literature by illustrating how hospitality leadership principles—traditionally confined to service-oriented industries like hotels and restaurants—hold transformative potential across a broader spectrum of industries. While existing studies have largely focused on leadership within specific industry contexts, this research explores the application of hospitality leadership as a universal paradigm capable of enhancing organizational culture, employee engagement, and customer satisfaction in sectors as diverse as education, construction, and consulting. This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches the understanding of leadership but also champions a broader application of these principles, providing a robust framework for organizations seeking to innovate their leadership practices in response to evolving market demands and the growing importance of exceptional service delivery.

Using the medium of podcasts, I have explored the role of hospitality leadership within various sectors, revealing how foundational principles such as *perception*, *empathy*, *personalization*, *altruism*, and *authenticity* enhance organizational dynamics and customer experiences. The themes explored in this work contribute to the ongoing critique of existing leadership literature, particularly by challenging the dominance of conventional leadership models that often overlook the complex, emotional and experiential aspects of leadership practice. By focusing on the relational and service-oriented nature of hospitality leadership, this research highlights the need for a broader understanding of leadership that aligns with contemporary shifts towards service and experience-driven economies.

While this work has extensively explored the influence of hospitality leadership across varied industries, it underscores an important area for further academic pursuit: the operationalization and measurable impact of hospitality leadership on organizational performance and employee well-being. Future research could benefit from empirical studies that quantify the effects of such leadership practices, potentially using a mixed-methods approach to capture both qualitative insights and quantitative data. Additionally, further investigation into how these leadership principles can be effectively integrated and sustained in non-hospitality sectors would provide deeper understanding and broader applicability of hospitality leadership. This could include longitudinal studies to track the long-term benefits and potential shifts in organizational culture that these leadership practices foster.

In conclusion, hospitality leadership represents a nuanced paradigm shift in the understanding of effective leadership. This approach focuses on uplifting the employee so that they can excel. As industries continue to evolve in response to more complex consumer systems, the principles of hospitality leadership provide a robust framework for fostering resilience,

innovation, and genuine service excellence. The broader significance of this leadership style, therefore, lies in its capacity to humanize organizational practices and create lasting impacts on both individuals and their communities.

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Appendix A

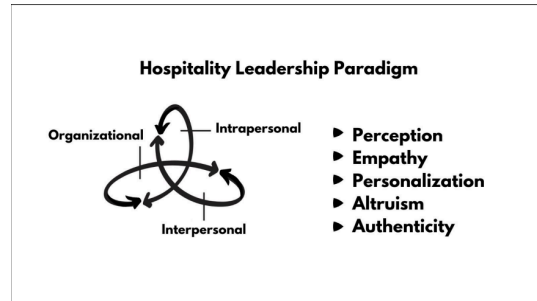
The Hospitality Leadership Podcast - Question List

- Describe your current leadership position—what do you do and why?
- How did you get to this place/position? What has been your career journey?
- Do you have a personal leadership philosophy? If so, what is it?
- Do you have any examples or stories in your career that exemplify this philosophy?
- I will take us through the 5 tenets of my proposed framework of Hospitality Leadership:
 - Perception
 - Empathy
 - Personalization
 - Altruism
 - Authenticity
- Of these tenets, which speaks most to you? How have you applied any of these to your leadership role?
- Do you think “Hospitality Leadership” can be taught? Or are people born with this skill set?
- What is one tenet that you would add to this list?

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list; there will be deviations from these questions as we go through and I may ask to unpack some answers a bit deeper. We'll spend the most time on the bolded questions.

Appendix B

Supplementary slide deck shown during interviews



Hospitality Leadership is the practice of **inspiring** and **developing** teams to create exceptional, **people-centered experiences**. This model of leadership demonstrates that by nurturing and **valuing** employees, organizations can deliver extraordinary **service**, making the hospitality industry a benchmark for leadership excellence across all sectors.

Perception

The intuitive ability to accurately interpret and respond to the subtleties of peoples' needs; this awareness and critical thinking capability enables leaders to discern nonverbal cues, mood shifts, and underlying concerns that may not be explicitly communicated.

Empathy

The keen ability to understand and share feelings and perspectives; actively engaging with and responding to emotional and experiential realities.

Altruism

The driving force that aligns an organization's activities with its ethical, social, and service-oriented goals.

Personalization

Creatively tailoring services to uniquely fit preferences to elevate ordinary interactions into memorable experiences. By focusing on detailed insights and nuanced observations, leaders create deeply engaging and personalized encounters that go above and beyond.

Authenticity

The genuine expression and consistent application of a leader's true values, beliefs, and principles in their interactions, decision-making, and management practices.

Appendix C

Interview List - *By order of interview sequence*

[Hyperlink to all podcast episodes](#)

Name	Title, Company
Derrick Willard	Head of School, Ravenscroft School
Liz Grandchamp	Owner/Operator, Grandchamp Hospitality
Jan Knox	VP for College Advancement, Guilford Technical Community College
Doug Morton	Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities, NC State University
Arielle DeSoucey	Wine & Spirits Specialist, Civil Wines
Peter Millerhagen	Associate Leadership and Organizational Development Consultant, FMI Corp.
Maggie Kane	Founder and Executive Director, A Place at the Table