

The North Star of Leadership Essentials

BY SAFIYAH JACKSON

On March 3, my colleague and friend Mike Abel released a blog post [about three mutually important](#), yet entwined, paths to [Whole Leadership](#)—leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership. **Today, let’s spark a dialogue about one of them—leadership essentials.**

This is the definition offered for leadership essentials:

“Leadership essentials are foundational competencies necessary for leading people that are expressed in personal leadership styles and dispositions. These essential competencies include awareness of self, others, and the profession; communication and team-building skills; cultural competence; and ethical conduct. Essential leadership qualities include courage, empathy, vision, inspiration, authenticity, and passion. Leadership essentials are often developed through reflective practice. These qualities are embedded in everything the leader does and are necessary for both administrative and pedagogical leadership.”

As I ponder this definition, I wonder how the term and definition resonates with you. Should we use another term? What’s missing from the description? What are your stories of leadership essentials?

Here are a few of my ‘journal’ reflections of leadership essentials (LE) from March 3:

- 8am: Two hours after reading the LE definition, one of my favorite quotes popped up in a another blog: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” — John Quincy Adams **This quote captures the essence of LE.**
- 11am: Five hours later, I was working with colleagues to plan details of the 2016 McCormick Center Leadership Academies. Specifically, we were organizing vision board and reflection activities. This effort shows we believe **LE can be taught.**
- 8pm: I was enjoying one of my favorite pastimes—watching a theater production. I highly recommend the show *The Compass*. It left me thinking about how much **our own ‘north star’ or compass is central to LE.**
- 10pm: During the post-show discussion a patron offered these words, “As an audience member, I’ve never helped write the story, so when I heard my comments used in the show, my interest piqued.” This made me think, **if LE is about leading people, team-building, empathy, and cultural**

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competency, we must create spaces for team members to contribute their ideas AND see them in action.

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