Personal Leadership Statement

Rachel Hoffman

As a leader, you are responsible for the work environment and team dynamics of your people. This is why it is crucial that a leader have a clear vision for them and their team. This vision comes from knowing their personal values, standing by those values, and checking back in with them over time. **As a leader, I aim to create an inclusive, intentional, and innovative environment.** These are grounding principles that may show up in different ways based on the specific position and team they are being applied to. I believe values should always be discussed with the team at hand so that they are known by all, and may be modified to suit the needs of the team.

Inclusive

Don't let your most valuable players sit on the bench all game. A leader should know how to make their entire team feel included in any given project, and in the company overall. Inspire your people by sharing victories and keeping them in the loop on big pitches. Offer up chances for anonymous feedback, giving an outlet to people who may not feel comfortable sharing concerns face-to-face. No one should feel left out, and every voice should be heard and valued.

There is no way to build a diverse team without an inclusive environment, and there is no way to capitalize on the diversity you may have without inclusive values. Welcome those with vastly different opinions, and welcome the discord that that will bring to your team. You just may find a better way of doing things. And draw out the voices of those quieter team members you already do have. Everyone has a perspective to share, but it can be difficult to find the courage to express it. Leaders must create the optimal environment for open discussion.

I learned this lesson myself from being that team member that didn't speak up. Back in college, I was on a team of UX researchers working on a survey to get feedback on a product. I watched as the person who was writing the survey quickly typed out some preliminary questions. "Those look good?" They asked. Everyone else nodded, and I said nothing. This person had asked for the gender of the recipient, and only provided "male" and "female" as the options. I was immediately thrown by this, but I looked around and no one else seemed to notice. I told myself it wasn't a big deal, but went on to feel guilty about it. I had my name stamped on that survey that went out to tens of users, and I hated the thought. I didn't feel heard in the group and so I did not share my perspective.My team was

not able to capitalize on my knowledge because of my own cowardice; but an inclusive team environment can change all that.

Intentional

As a UX architect, I know better than most that the best systems are designed with their users in mind. It's what makes things function in a way where they'll actually be *used.* As a leader, any strategy I employ must be intentional. This means I need to know my team. I need to know their strengths and weaknesses, both as individuals and as a team. This is the only way to be able to lead properly. It takes a patient listener who can talk to their team and check in on them.

An intentional environment is all making well-informed decisions. This extends beyond knowing your team, but also knowing the realities of a situation. Hope is a good thing, but it needs to stay away from deadlines. As a leader, it's important to look out for your team and advocate for them. Allow the timeline to do things properly, and avoid rushed output and/or burnout from your team.

Innovative

Creating an innovative environment takes some leeway from the higher ups, but it's something that I think is important for a leader to advocate for. Innovation requires failures– it feeds off them. This is why innovation can seem counterproductive, but really it proves why a step backward is often necessary to an overall productive workflow.

Innovation keeps businesses alive. The same old product or service is only going to get you so far. It's innovation that makes generational products that last long after version 1.0. As leaders, we do not punish failures, only teach from them. Failure is growth, and if we account for them in the original project timeline, then your team can breathe easy and not have unnecessary stress hanging over their work.

Encouraging innovation means encouraging new ideas that push the pre-set limits. It has the potential to come up with better ways of doing things that have been done the same for years. This is a vital concept for a company trying to deliver the best product. It can even be used as a tool to promote diversity. Innovation encourages diverse opinions and ideas. A hivemind team will not survive in this environment, but a diverse one will face much better odds.