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Abstract

This paper will discuss the movie, *Gleason* and an analysis of the leadership skills exhibited in it. (Gleason, 2016) Steve Gleason is a local hero in New Orleans and a former football player. After playing college ball at Washington State, Gleason was considered a low value player, but he eventually found a home with the New Orleans Saints in the National Football League. He was a valuable special teams player for the Saints and he even had a legendary punt block against their rivals, the Falcons, right after Hurricane Katrina. He was always beloved by the people of New Orleans after that game winner. Sadly, Steve was later diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS, at age 34 in 2011. ALS is a disease that drastically interferes with nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord causing swaths of Neuropathic pain and complications. To make matters more tragic, Steve and his wife, Michel, discovered that she was pregnant with their first child shortly after the diagnosis was made. The awful prognosis for the disease, compounded exponentially by the stress of expecting their first born in the midst put a tremendous strain on the couple's character and their marriage. Michel assured Steve that she would take great care of both him and their child no matter what. She had to work tirelessly to accomplish this as, over time, Gleason's disease progressed, and he became too ill to move or do anything for himself. This upset Steve as he did not want to be a burden and had to battle bouts of depression along with everything else. All these factors constantly folded in on themselves making the situation harder and harder for Steve and Michel. However, through all the pain, strife, and Steve's eventual paralysis, the couple has remained strong and are fighting for the best life possible for their family to this day.

Which of the six Leadership traits described in the text does Gleason and or Michel demonstrate?

According to the text, the six leadership traits are integrity, confidence, intelligence, determination, charisma, and sociability. (Northouse, 2018. Pg.61) It is certainly arguable that Steve and Michel demonstrate all these characteristics at some point in their journey. However, I believe that Steve most exemplified determination and charisma. He was a strong man and a provider who was told that he would be debilitated and/or dead within a decade just as he was about to bring a new life into the world. He did not just roll over and slide into depression. He was determined to live his life to the fullest and give his baby the gift of knowing seeing their father before the disease set in. He creatively documented a series of messages and home movies to his child to showcase his charisma and lively attitude while he still had energy to showcase it. They were also used to put together the *Gleason* documentary. These videos show Steve's incredible character and the ugly nature of ALS. This perseverance never stopped as he battled through pain and adversity to be there for his family. Steve Gleason's efforts do not stop at his family though, as he has since set up foundational work to search for scientific treatments for ALS as well as to help those who have been diagnosed.

Michel is an extremely strong individual who shows great leadership skills throughout the film. She is thrust into the leadership role of her brand-new family as her successful husband is slowly crippled by illness as her baby is going through formative years. In my opinion she is a sterling example of integrity. She never shied away from any of the responsibilities and faced the harsh challenges that plagued them. Many people would have been too scared and forced to run away or seek exorbitant amounts of help. Michel rose above that and selflessly shouldered much of the weight for her family.

Do Steve and Michel exhibit positive psychology? Yes, no, sometimes? Provide examples.

Steve and Michel underwent massive changes in lifestyle during the events of the movie. Positive psychology is the study of what makes life worth living and the Gleasons' lives and the reasons for them shifted very quickly. (Northouse, 2018. Pg.105) There were times in which their emotional state dipped, and they lost positivity as virtually anyone in their situation would. With all the changes compounded by the battle with ALS it was impossible to never falter. There were times in which Steve's pain and frustration would get the best of him and this would hurt Michel because there was nothing that she could do to take it away from him. However, their attitudes always lifted back up to their baseline of optimistic determination. They helped one another stay strong and keep on their footing. They have now found rejuvenated passion in living their lives to their highest potential and helping others that are fighting the same cruel disease.

Do Gleason and or Michel exhibit any of the Leadership styles mentioned in the course textbook? If so, which ones? Provide examples.

Before the disease, they exhibited a loosely Laisses Faire style. (Northouse, 2018. Pg.150) They had a lot going on, but they were not trying to lead anyone or anything. They were taking care of their small circle and leaving everything else alone as most people do in their day-to-day lives. However, once Steve got his diagnosis and the news of the baby, they shifted away from this hands-off approach and became much more involved with pretty much every facet of their lives. This was authoritarian at times but exhibited more democratic values. They do

everything that they can for their new family as well as taking on leadership roles in New Orleans and in the ALS community.

Do Gleason and or Michel demonstrate a task oriented or relationship-oriented style of leadership? Does he demonstrate both? Provide examples.

Steve and Michel exhibit a relationship-oriented style of leadership as they primarily focused on themselves and one another. They went about life living for themselves and focused on the relationships they had with the people closest to them. (Northouse, 2018. Pg.176) However, after the diagnosis and baby they became much more task oriented. They had to make this switch in order to survive and keep their sanity. They had to focus on Steve's treatments, his comfort, the foundation, and the baby. There were deadlines and necessities tied to these things every single day that needed to be met to stay afloat. (Northouse, 2018. Pg.181) Just getting through the day was a difficult task that needed to be focused on for Steve at times. They slowly learned how to excel at this style and became very successful in it. While they switched from a relationship style to a more task-oriented approach, Steve and Michel somehow found a way to strengthen their relationship through it.

Has your definition of leadership changed since the beginning of the semester? If so, how?

Before the semester began, I associated leadership with an authority figure like an official or a boss. Since then, I have come to realize that a leader is anyone that strives to inspire others to do better in any aspect of life. This can be in any field of study, in the workplace, at school, at

home, or in public. You can inspire others to do better by leading the way and showing positive results by helping people. A good leader can even inspire people that do not know them or only see them in passing. This is achieved by not only doing the right things but doing them in the right ways. “Everyone, at some time in life, is asked to be a leader.” (Northouse, 2018. Pg.26)

If life threw you this curve ball, how would you respond?

Steve Gleason was dealt an unreasonably difficult hand when he was diagnosed with ALS. This fall from normalcy to disparity was further exaggerated by the fact that he was about to have his first-born child and because he had led a glorious life previously. He went from being a professional sports player and a local legend to not being able to take care of the most basic needs of himself and his family. It is impossible to know how anyone would respond to such a tragedy, especially when weighing the timing and details of the disease. I ultimately hope that I could have accepted and handled this situation with half of the grace, strength, and character that Steve and Michel Gleason did. “Character enables a leader to maintain his or her core ethical values even in times of immense diversity.” (Northouse, 2018. Pg.432)

References

Northouse, P. G. (2018). *Introduction to leadership: Concepts and practice. (5th ed.)*. Sage Publications.

Tweel, C. 2016 *Gleason*