

Leader Interview Final Report

George Hanns

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

### **Abstract**

The Digital Strategy team at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University has undergone a series of executive leadership and membership changes over the last two and a half years. Usability and Design Director Benny Jones has held a leadership role throughout this period, and his high emotional intelligence (EI) and utilization of situational leadership has helped to guide his followers through the periods of uncertainty that change often brings. This paper seeks to explain the components of EI and situational leadership through a literature review of prominent researchers' work and to show how Jones has displayed those leadership qualities effectively in leading his team.

## Introduction

The emotional effects of organizational change on employees – especially at universities – have traditionally been ignored (Becker, Beukes, A. Botha, A.C. Botha, J.J. Botha, M. Botha, and Vorster, 2004). However, a 2015 study at an Australian university sought to explore how department mergers affect employees’ emotions both in anticipation of changes and several months after their implementation. The research showed that before the move, employees were divided between those who found change exciting, those who dreaded the change, and those who viewed change as inevitable and were, thus, nonplussed. (Dasborough, Lamb, and Suseno, 2015). Six months after the changes, all of the employees who feared the impending change had left the university except one, who said that “morale-wise, (the merger) was a disaster.” (Dasborough, Lamb, and Suseno, 2015). The other two groups adjusted relatively well, though members of both groups felt some level of hurt for the colleagues that were lost and the relationships that were strained. The researchers called for leaders to be aware that different followers have their own feelings about departmental changes, so it would be best for leaders to apply their emotional intelligence to the situation and address followers’ needs individually.

In the last two and a half years, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University has undergone a series of presidential leadership changes, which have been accompanied by changes to the composition of the Digital Strategy team and the roles of many of its workers. Throughout this time period, Benny Jones has served in various leadership roles for Digital Strategy, and was thrust into the situation described above at the Australian university.

On May 31, 2015, Dr. John P. Johnson retired after 12 years as President of Embry-Riddle and was replaced by Dr. John Watret on an interim basis. Watret, who served previously

### A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

as Chancellor of Embry-Riddle's Worldwide Campus, held the role of interim president for 10 months before being replaced – again on an interim basis -- in April 2016 by Board of Trustees member Dr. Karen Holbrook. Finally, after an extensive search for someone to fill the role permanently, Dr. P. Barry Butler was named as Embry-Riddle's sixth President on Feb. 14, 2017.

As executive leadership has changed, so has the alignment in the university structure of Digital Strategy. In September 2015, Digital Strategy was moved from the purview of the university's Marketing and Communications Department to become part of Information Technology. At that time, Jones' role changed from being Director of Web Projects to being in charge of the newly formed Usability and Design team. The Digital Strategy Department saw some members shifted to roles in other departments, and several new teams were added to the mix.

Just over two years later – in mid-November 2017 – Digital Strategy was moved back under the university's Marketing and Communications Department, now led by Anne Broderick Botteri. She was hired in September 2017 to be Vice President of Marketing and Communications, a position that had been open since January 2017. As was the case when Digital Strategy was moved under IT, the makeup of the department was changed. Several teams stayed behind in IT, and two groups – including Jones's Usability & Design team – are being merged with university's existing Marketing and Communications teams. As Botteri further evaluates the members of her new team and their roles, more changes may come in 2018.

Throughout all of the changes and uncertainty, Jones has provided a steadying influence for his team, which consists of two usability analysts, two web designers, and one multimedia

### A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

designer. Jones was interviewed about his leadership style in his office at Embry-Riddle on November 20, 2017. Based on his answers and from observations of Jones throughout this period, it has become clear that Jones's high emotional intelligence/quotient and situational approach to leadership have proven to be effective, especially during often unsettled times. This report will examine theories on emotional intelligence and situational leadership, provide research related to their importance in leading teams, and then analyze how Jones uses situational leadership and his EI in leading his followers effectively.

#### **Emotional Intelligence**

Psychology began to examine the subject of emotional intelligence and its importance to leadership beginning in the 1990s with the work of Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso, and, later, Goleman. Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence and its accompanying theory in 1990, and they created a tool by which to measure EI as an ability. (as cited in Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004). The original definition from Salovey and Mayer (1990) was:

[...] the subset of emotional intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide's one's thinking and actions (as cited in McCleskey, 2012, p.77).

The authors expanded on the definition through the years, defining EI in 1997 as:

[...] the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions, to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions, so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. (as cited in Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004, p. 197).

The authors simplified the explanation of their model by dividing it into four branches of increasingly advanced psychological processes – perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. (Mayer, Salovey, and

### A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

Caruso, 2004). According to the authors, the first branch (perceiving emotions) involves reading into the meaning behind another person's body language and facial expressions. The second branch (using emotions to facilitate thought) involves a leader keeping a mental library of the emotions he has felt during situations and using that library to aid with the critical thinking process. In Branch 3 (understanding emotions), a leader shows the ability to examine an emotion, label it, determine why that emotion is being felt, and predict how the emotion will affect themselves and others. Finally, with Branch 4 (management of emotions), the authors describe how a leader has the ability to control his emotions or repurpose them in productive ways. (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004).

Five years after Salovey and Mayer's initial work, EI gained further popularity when Goleman (1995) wrote the book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*. (as cited in McCleskey, 2012). Goleman (1998) later applied the concept to business in a Harvard Business Review article in which he posited that effective leadership requires traditional qualities, such as intelligence and determination, but also requires a high level of emotional intelligence. Goleman divided EI into five areas – self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. (Goleman, 1998).

According to the author, a leader who possesses self-awareness knows herself inside and out, including her emotions, abilities, and desires. This leader is honest and confident with herself, understands how emotions affect her and others, often has a self-deprecating sense of humor, and is unafraid to talk about how feelings may affect her work. (Goleman, 1998). The second component of EI from Goleman (1998) is self-regulation, and an individual who possesses this quality controls impulsive behavior, does not let change or uncertainty bother him,

### A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

and can be a role model of integrity by not giving into temptation to be unethical or greedy. Motivation, in terms of EI, involves a leader who is driven by achievement rather than other rewards, will seek new ways to accomplish tasks, is committed to the organization, and will ask questions to better understand why something occurred. (Goleman, 1998).

A leader who shows empathy, according to Goleman (1998), is one who takes her followers' feelings into account during collaborative decision-making, is able to read body language of people – including those from different cultures, and often serves as an effective mentor/coach. The final EI quality from Goleman (1998) is social skill -- which he calls “friendliness with a purpose.” This is when a leader can make relationships and build rapport across the organization, which helps the leader to influence others to buy in to her idea or project. (Goleman 1998).

Goleman, Mayer et al., and many other researchers have declared EI an important leadership quality. In his 1998 book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman said EI mattered twice as much as IQ. (as cited in Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004). Goleman's study of 188 companies showed that nearly 90 percent of the difference between successful members of senior leadership and average ones was attributable to EI factors. (Goleman 1998). EI was also viewed as critical to leadership in works by Ashkanasy and Tse (2000), Boal and Hooijberg (2000), and George (2000). (as cited in Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, and Boyle, 2005). Kerr *et al.* (2005) used the Mayer Salovey Caruso emotional intelligence test (MSCEIT) to evaluate the EI levels of leaders and also surveyed their subordinates to determine supervisor effectiveness. These researchers found that EI related strongly to employee perceptions of supervisor effectiveness. (Kerr et al., 2005). Finally, Karnes (2009) said that a lack of emotional intelligence

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

in leadership contributes to a lack of empathy and potentially abuse of followers and disenchanted employees (as cited in Holt and Marques, 2010). There are many more examples.

In his role at Embry-Riddle, Jones credits emotional intelligence – specifically naming empathy, self-regulation, and the ability to read body language – as some of his biggest strengths as a leader. (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017). The interview with Jones also revealed several other qualities that relate to the definitions of EI from Goleman and Mayer *et al.* In the following quote, Jones touches on ethics and fairness (part of self-regulation); empathy (empathy); influencing followers by showing vulnerability (self-awareness in showing emotions, and social skills to get buy in from followers); and taking charge (self-awareness in being confident in one's abilities).

“A good leader needs to be ethical, needs to be fair, needs to be transparent, needs to be ... empathetic and show vulnerability. That one I think is probably one of the biggest traits because people buy into vulnerability. If they think you're a robot and not a human being, then they're not going to reciprocate. And they may not buy into you as much because people like authenticity. People like people that give direction and don't waver, kind of take charge, but take charge with empathy ...” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

Jones also shows self-regulation (Goleman's term) and management of emotions (the term from Mayer *et al.*) in not jumping to conclusions when a follower has done something wrong. He also potentially shows empathy when the employee voices his reasons for a failure.

“I like to ask questions because when you ask questions, you get to the root. ... It gives the individual an opportunity to tell their side of the story before you lay into them because you may not have all the facts. ... And you may uncover that there might be some issue at home. ‘Oh, OK, they're acting that way because they're getting a divorce. Or a dog just died, or whatever’ Then you can put on your empathy hat ...” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).



### A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

Finally, Jones's focus on body language – part of perceiving emotions from Mayer *et al* and empathy from Goleman – allows him to ensure that his message is being both understood and appreciated.

“(Reading body language) helps me to change the conversation, mid-conversation, if I need to. If I'm talking to someone and they're looking at me quizzically, then I know that they're not understanding. And then I'll try to change my approach with what I'm doing.” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

Jones also discussed how he recently interpreted the body language of someone new to the organization as being uninterested in what was being said during a conversation. He cautioned, however, that he may have not had a correct read on the situation.

“(It) goes back to the whole EQ, emotional quotient, can sometimes not be accurate because part of the body language observation is getting to know the individual. Once you get to know them and their tics and their quirks, then your assessment of their body language gets better. But when you have a new person you don't know, it could be hit-or-miss.” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

Jones not only seeks to learn the body language of his followers, but he gets to know their emotions, goals, and abilities so that he can tailor his approach to each of them using the theory of situational leadership.

#### **Situational Leadership**

Situational Leadership involves leaders adapting their style to his followers' development level, which is made up of the qualities of competence and commitment. (Blanchard, 2008).

Competence relates to the employee's skill/ability, whereas commitment is a combination of confidence in one's abilities and motivation to complete the necessary task. (Blanchard, 2008).

After a leader evaluates her followers' development levels, she can choose to use one of four leadership styles that vary in how often a leader focuses on directive behaviors (one-way communication where the leader tells the follower what to do) and supportive behaviors (two-

### A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

way communication involving collaboration and encouragement). Those four styles from Blanchard are directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating.

With the directing style, a leader is high on directive behaviors and low on supporting behaviors, meaning the leader gives orders, make all decisions, and supervises that a follower's work is done according to her wishes. (Northouse, 2016). This style is best used with followers with low competence but high commitment, meaning the task is new for them but they believe they are up for the challenge. (Northouse, 2016). The coaching style is high on directive and supportive behaviors, with the leader and follower sharing ideas and encouragement about the task, though the leader has the final say on how to proceed. (Northouse 2016).

These followers have a low to moderate development level but lack task commitment, so leaders work to provide both direction and encouragement. (Blanchard, 2008). The third situational leadership style is supporting, which is high-supportive and low-directive. These followers have medium to high development level and inconsistent commitment, so the leader's goal is to brainstorm with the follower and encourage them before allowing the employee to complete the task on his own. (Blanchard, 2008). The final style, which is both low supportive and low directive, is delegating. Followers who find this leadership style appealing are both high in commitment and competence, and leaders generally allow these employees to work on their own without intervening. (Northouse, 2016).

Jones – who said he has read Blanchard's book "*The One Minute Manager*" – uses the situational leadership approach with his team by getting to know his followers and then adapting his style. He said:

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

“Not every man is monolithic, not every woman is monolithic, and we're all gonna be different, and they may require different needs. Some people may require more time in the beginning. Others may not. You can just give it to them one time and they go off and they got it. In other words, you have to treat people as individuals and understand their individual strengths and weaknesses.” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

For example, Jones has changed his style with one of his employees over the several years that he has been his supervisor. When Jones was Director of Web Projects, this follower was new to project management, so Jones employed the coaching style initially before he became comfortable enough to change to a supporting or delegating role.

“So as an example, well, you were a web producer and we would meet every ... I think we met every week, and then we pushed it to bi-weekly. But I had to mentor, counsel, and give you the tools so that you could make your own decisions when you were in those situations, instead of relying on me.” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

Later, that same employee – now a usability analyst – began to show a higher competence and commitment but still needed some guidance from time to time. For this situation, a supporting style from Jones was more appropriate.

“You're a perfectionist. And I have to counsel you in a way that doesn't affect your work ethic but also doesn't get you and me in trouble.” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

In October 2017, Jones hired a new usability analyst who had graduated earlier in 2017 from Embry-Riddle's Human Factors program. For this new employee, Jones once again is utilizing the coaching style of situational leadership as she gets up to speed.

“I do have a new junior staff member. And I'm now realizing that I'm gonna have to really put back on my mentoring and coaching hat with that person. That's OK 'cause we knew what we were getting.” (B. Jones, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

While Northouse (2016) discusses several criticisms for situational leadership – including that its tenets have not been thoroughly justified by published research, ambiguity in the

### A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

evaluation of the follower development levels, and an argument that the situational leadership questionnaire is biased – the approach appears to be working for Jones. Despite all of the upheaval on the greater Digital Strategy team in the past three years, since Jones has been director of both Web Projects and now Usability & Design, the lone follower to leave his team retired to spend time with a new grandchild.

#### **Conclusion**

With Embry-Riddle’s Digital Strategy team once again undergoing a change in executive leadership, employees are understandably concerned about their future roles. Like at the Australian university mentioned in the 2015 by Dasborough *et al.* in the Introduction, some employees may be excited, some fearful, and some resigned to whatever changes may come. Recently, another leader’s anxiety over potential changes was expressed within earshot of the Usability & Design team, so the following day, Jones addressed the team to listen to their concerns and provide as much information as possible. He also met with some followers individually, who perhaps need more assurance or information. Among the “five big ideas” cited by veteran strategic management consultant Robert J. Alio as being what leadership boils down to are “there’s no best way to lead” and “adaptability makes longevity possible.” (Alio 2009). Jones lives up to those leadership rules at Embry-Riddle.

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## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

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### Appendix A

- George Hanns:            Alright. Okay. So what leadership roles have you held?
- Benny Jones:            I've been a web producer, a project manager, a director of a web project team, and currently I'm the Director of Usability and Design.
- George Hanns:            Okay. So what sort of formal leadership training have you taken?
- Benny Jones:            That is an interesting question. I would say nothing. However, I did attend the Embry-Riddle Leadership Enhancement Program, which has elements of leadership in the program, but doesn't necessarily focus on leadership, I would say. Now, there are other areas in my life where I've had to lead. When I was in high school, I was a quarterback. So I had to lead a team. And I was a quarterback for all four years of high school. I think, for me, it's an innate ability somewhat. Some of it is learned through trial and error, through my work as a web producer in having to be a one-man band, if you will.
- George Hanns:            Okay. I know you read a lot. What sort of leadership, let's say, materials have you read and what's really jumped out at you?
- Benny Jones:            I do like to read a lot. I have not read a lot, in the past year, for different circumstances. However, the one book that I will always reference is How to Win Friends and Influence People. That probably is the single most influential book that I have read that has influenced me throughout my career at Embry-Riddle.
- George Hanns:            How so?

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

- Benny Jones: It talks about how to deal with people. And whether you're taking direction or giving direction, you have to deal with people. And it gives you explicit examples on how to deal with people and specific circumstances. So for example, if you think you're getting in trouble, the book tells you how to be self-deprecating. And you want to make the person accusing you, for lack of a better word, of the thing, you want to show them that you have already reprimanded yourself in a way that they don't have to. And so that has been key. There are other things in the book that talk about how to approach people in a way that sets them at ease. It talks about how to approach people and let them know that you have their best interests at heart. And it's about approach, approach, approach.
- George Hanns: Okay. We'll go back to that in a little bit. So before when you were talking about when you were quarterback, first you said there was some innate things to leadership. So what innate qualities of leadership ... Well, do you believe that some people are just born with leadership skills?
- Benny Jones: Yes. So let me clarify. When I talked about innate, I meant, again to your point, some people are just naturally born leaders. And other people have to learn. They have to read a book and they have to learn how to be a leader.
- George Hanns: Where do you fit in there, do you think?
- Benny Jones: I think being a quarterback, you ... And maybe it was the whole athletics having an impact on me at an early age. Being a quarterback and being able to lead 10 other individuals every day, every weekend has certainly had an impact or could have made an impact. If I had not had that experience, I don't know. But I have certainly read books about leadership and leadership styles and how to deal with people in different situations. And books are nice, but the rubber meets the road when you're having to deal with people face to face. So did that answer your question?
- George Hanns: Sure. So what traits would you describe a good leader as having?
- Benny Jones: A good leader needs to be ethical, needs to be fair, needs to be transparent, needs to be ... What's the word I'm looking for? Needs to, at times, be empathetic and show vulnerability. That one I think is probably one of the biggest traits because people buy into vulnerability. If they think you're a robot and not a human being, then they're not going to reciprocate. And they may not buy into you as much 'cause people like authenticity. People



## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

like people that give direction and don't waver, kind of take charge, but take charge with empathy, if you will, and not be a schmo about it.

George Hanns: Can you give an example of a time where you took control but you also showed empathy?

Benny Jones: I should have looked at these questions ahead time.

George Hanns: I was empathetic and did try to give you the questions ahead of time.

Benny Jones: You were. You were. Give me the question again.

George Hanns: Sure. You said that it's important to take control as a leader, and correct me if I'm wrong, but also do so with empathy.

Benny Jones: Yeah. So when we had ... One of our staff members left and I had tasked one of our other staff members to do the photo shoot. And we did the photo shoot and the photo didn't turn out as well as I had expected it would. And during the photo shoot, I noticed that the person I had tasked wasn't really the one operating the camera. And that kind of took me back. So after that, I had a conversation with the staff member that I had tasked to take the photo. I told him how I felt about the photo and my expectations without being belligerent about it. It was more of a matter-of-fact conversation that was delivered with, I thought, as much empathy as I could muster. And he received it well and understood. And so that's my example.

George Hanns: Okay. That's good. How would you describe your overall leadership style?

Benny Jones: I like to build consensus. I'm a consensus builder I think. There are times when I need something done and I just need it done and, "Please go do it." But in general, I like to either help people arrive at the same conclusion that I have arrived at, or I like to use the wisdom of the crowd and gain consensus in either what they're thinking or what I'm thinking.

George Hanns: So in saying that, you joked. However, what do you do in a situation where the wisdom of the crowd, the consensus of those you are leading, is not what you think is the right thing. You joked that get people to come to your way of thinking, but what if everybody is on the different road?

Benny Jones: We have additional conversations. And I continue to have those conversations until I am satisfied with the outcome and the resolution.

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

And if there is not one that can be resolved or can be ... If there is not consensus, then I just make a decision and I deal with it and I live with it.

George Hanns: Okay. So you said in most cases, and correct me if I'm wrong, I'm trying to reiterate what you're saying and make sure I understand, if there's no time to build consensus or you can't build consensus, you said you'll just make a decision. So what would be an example of a situation where you just need to make a decision?

Benny Jones: Wow, we should have done this earlier. It's 4:20. What would be where I had to make a decision? Oh, man.

George Hanns: Or when would be a time where consensus isn't the right path to go down?

Benny Jones: Did they tell you to send these questions out ahead of time? That might be helpful. When would be a time when consensus is- So give it to me again.

George Hanns: Sure. So you said generally, you want to build consensus. And we're talking about your followers, the people that you are leading. When is a time when consensus is not the right way?

Benny Jones: You know what? Delaying this or belaboring this, I would say, whenever I just need to make a decision. If you have to make a decision without involving others- Oh, okay. I got one for you.

George Hanns: Okay.

Benny Jones: So we are working on the advisor pages with Amy Jeffs, and I had- Can I use names? Is it okay to use names?

George Hanns: Sure.

Benny Jones: Well, I'll just say staff member. I had a staff member working on the analytics. And that staff member is also redesigning the page. So the customer wants to know whether or not to move a certain section up higher in the page than where it is. And I wanna have that conversation with here without involving the other staff member. And that it is a case where I don't wanna have consensus on that. I wanna make the decision and have the discussion with that customer about the analytics and about where the section should go. So in that case, I made a decision not to include the staff on that.

George Hanns: Okay.

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

Benny Jones: Does that answer your question?

George Hanns: Sure. So how has your leadership evolved? So when was your first leadership position in the actual business setting?

Benny Jones: For me, my first leadership position was a web producer in 2008 when I was working with the colleges to redesign all their college websites. And I had to run all the meetings, meet with all the faculty, and introduce myself to them and establish rapport and get them to buy into what the heck I was selling. That was my first introduction to leadership. And I didn't have any direct reports, but I had to lead the web redesign through those colleges. So they were my customers, and I had to lead through that web redesign. And they had to have the confidence in me to do it. And I had to show them that I had the confidence and the wherewithal and the knowledge to do it. 'Cause otherwise, they would have just said, "Hey, get this guy out of here. He doesn't know what he's doing. He doesn't know what he's talking about."

George Hanns: Okay. So nine years ago. How would you say since then to now, how have you evolved?

Benny Jones: Well, as you transition from tactical to strategic, you do a lot more talking and a lot less doing. And you're still doing, but you're doing in a different way. Sorry, let me rephrase. You're doing a lot less tactical web stuff, and you're doing a lot more communicating whether it be phone, email, whatever the system is, a project plan. And you have ... So in 2008, it was just me. And I was still ... In 2008, I was making decisions and building websites and managing all the meetings and the emails. And fast forward to 2012 when ... No, 2014 when I became the Director of Web Projects, I did less of that tactical web stuff and more mentoring and counseling and training people up, giving them the knowledge that I know, so that they could be a mini me. That is the difference 'cause you want them to be you ... You want them to have the same methodologies, the same processes, so that they can be self-sufficient.

And you wanna train people up because the better they are, the better you are. And the less ... So as an example, well, you were a web producer and we would meet every ... I think we met every week, and then we pushed it to bi-weekly. But I had to mentor, counsel, and give you the tools so that you could make your own decisions when you were in those situations, instead of relying on me. Because I had to not only manage my own projects, but I had to manage all the projects through you guys. And so it

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

would have been impossible if I didn't have competent people that were able to do that on their own.

George Hanns: Getting to your followers, the people you are leading. What do you think makes an ideal follower?

Benny Jones: That is a great question. I don't know if I like the word follower, but let's go with it.

George Hanns: What word would you use?

Benny Jones: Well, in the context of this conversation, I would use ... Okay, follower, I see your point. Let's go with follower.

George Hanns: Okay.

Benny Jones: It just sounds like I'm the Messiah or something. Follow me. So a good disciple ... No, a good follower is a person who can listen, take directions, ask good questions, and then go off and think on their own. I highly covet and prize being able to take the information and use what you been counseled, mentored, and trained on, and then being able to execute through using your own knowledge and skills. What irritates ... I shouldn't use that word, but I've already said it on tape. That what is a challenge for me is the constant comeback because that would just wear me down. It will wear anybody down.

Because number one, it's an interruption. Number two, it's just a pull on my energy. So when you're training people up and counseling and mentoring them, it is like teaching. If you've ever spoken to a teacher, when they get out of the classroom, they're just like, "Ugh." Some of them, not all of them. Some of them are energized through teaching, but people have different personalities. So if we have a scheduled meeting every week where we're going through stuff and then ... It's not saying you can't come back and ask questions. But my expectation is for you to then go do your thought ... Work through it on your own, do your own problem solving. So anyways.

George Hanns: Okay. So what do you think your biggest strengths are as a leader?

Benny Jones: My emotional quotient. I think that can be a detriment too 'cause I can be oversensitive. So that is a positive and a negative, but my emotional-

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

- George Hanns: Explain.
- Benny Jones: So how is that a good thing? So if there's change occurring in the organization, I might over-analyze that as opposed to letting things happen and dealing with them as they happen.
- George Hanns: Analyze in terms of how it affects you? How it affects your team?
- Benny Jones: All of that. Yeah. I've always been great at being able to discern change and being ahead of the change. At my other jobs, I could always smell change and I could always get ahead of it. But sometimes that is a negative feature of your personality as well because you can become paranoid. For example, when I did the 360, I received feedback and I made assumptions about who I thought had sent what. And I formed opinions based on nothingness. I had interactions with them, but I could have been wrong. So my emotional quotient thing might have been spinning up out of control. Anyways, what else?
- George Hanns: Sure. Okay.
- Benny Jones: Was I supposed to give you more?
- George Hanns: Well, you talked about strengths and weaknesses in the same thing. Anything else that you wanted to add?
- Benny Jones: What was the question?
- George Hanns: What's your biggest strengths and weaknesses?
- Benny Jones: For leadership?
- George Hanns: Yeah.
- Benny Jones: Another strength would be, I think I listen, but again, everybody has their own mental model. When you're listening to people talk, person A ... If three people are in a room, A, B, and C, and A is talking, B could hear something different than C. So I would say listening, my emotional quotient, my ability to read body language, and of course, correct-
- George Hanns: That's exactly what I was gonna bring up if you didn't. So how do you utilize reading people's body language? How does that help you as a leader?

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

Benny Jones: It helps me to change the conversation, mid conversation, if I need to. If I'm talking to someone, and they're looking at me quizzically, then I know that they're not understanding. And then I'll try to change my approach with what I'm doing. So recently, we were speaking to our new boss and I was watching her body language as somebody else was talking. And she was fidgeting, and I thought, "Hmm, that's strange." And so I noticed that.

George Hanns: That's strange meaning perhaps she wasn't interested in what somebody was saying? Or wasn't comfortable?

Benny Jones: Wasn't comfortable what somebody was saying. At least that was my interpretation, which goes back to the whole EQ, emotional quotient, can sometimes not be accurate because part of the body language observation is getting to know the individual. Once you get to know them and their tics and their quirks, and then your assessment of their body language gets better. But when you have a new person you don't know, it could be hit or miss. But the more you get to know someone, the more you can kind of sit back and observe and make a better assessment. However, there are certain tells that are universal in body language. And you can see those tells in people. You can see anger. You can see frustration. You can see boredom. You can see confusion. Those are all universal that you should be able to sit back and observe someone and go, "Okay. They're not paying attention."

So when I'm doing public speaking, I'm looking in the crowd. And I'm trying to observe where I'm losing people. And I might change up right there. Or I might do something that is unexpected to kind of energize them or wake them up out of the thing that they're in. Or I might go stand right in front of them and talk to get them to go, "Oh okay, he's right in front of me." So those are the kinds of things that I do when I'm assessing body language.

George Hanns: How do you feel is the best way to get the most out of an individual?

Benny Jones: That is a good question. So this comes back to not treating everybody the same. And it's challenging as a manager because you have to get ... It's not really challenging, but managers should get to know their direct reports individually. Like I know there is a certain individual on our team, we have two totally different communication styles. I know that because I watch his body language. And I know that we have to be patient with one another because I know we're just not on the same page. And so I take care when I'm talking to that individual to make sure that he understands

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

what it is that I'm talking about and he walks away not feeling affected by what I'm saying.

So get to know your people. Not every man is monolithic, not every woman is monolithic, and we're all gonna be different, and they may require different needs. Some people may require more time in the beginning. Others may not. You can just give it to them one time and they go off and they got it. In other words, you have to treat people as individuals and understand their individual strengths and weaknesses. And work with them on that. So for example, with you, I know that you're a pseudo ... No, there's no pseudo. You're a perfectionist. And I have to counsel you in a way that doesn't affect your work ethic, but also doesn't get you and me in trouble.

George Hanns: Yes, I've heard that.

Benny Jones: Yeah, so there's that part of it.

George Hanns: And I think this person has improved on that, yes?

Benny Jones: Yes. Yes. Yes, you have.

George Hanns: Describe a situation where you've had to deal with the conflict with somebody you're leading. Are we on time?

Benny Jones: No, we're fine. I was looking for the imparter thing.

George Hanns: How would you deal with a situation when you have a conflict with one of your followers?

Benny Jones: I like to deal with conflict head on. What's interesting is there are people ... I was gonna say ... Never mind, let me keep going. I lost my train of thought in all of that. But give it to me again.

George Hanns: Okay. How would you deal with a situation when you have a conflict with a follower?

Benny Jones: Oh, with a follower, not with a direct report. Oh, with a follower. Sorry, with a team member or a customer.

George Hanns: Someone perhaps somewhere else. Gotcha.

Benny Jones: A follower.

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

George Hanns: Yes.

Benny Jones: I like to deal with all conflict face to face. That's the only way to deal with it. Some people are comfortable with it, some people are not. It can be challenging. But I think if you ... Notice what I did. I did this. It's like with the photo incident. Let's have a chat. Here's what I like to do. I like to ask questions because when you ask questions, you get to the root. You can get to the root, and you can understand behavior. And that can shed light on a lot of why people are doing the things they're doing. It gives the individual an opportunity to tell their side of the story before you lay into them because you may not have all the facts. Once you get all the facts ... 'Cause you're gonna come to the table with some preconceived things and some information, which may not match up to what they already have.

So you wanna give them an opportunity to tell you their side of the story. And you can ask more questions. And you may uncover that there might be some issue at home. "Oh okay, they're acting that way because they're getting a divorce. Or a dog just died," or whatever. Then you can put on your empathy hat as opposed to going in on somebody without having all of the facts and the details. So I like to ask questions. It gives me an opportunity to learn. It gives them an opportunity to share their side of the story, if you will. Did I answer your question? I think I went off track a little bit.

George Hanns: No. So you deal with it head on, you ask questions. Then what?

Benny Jones: Well, I like to have a conversation. So I think where you're going is how do I reprimand someone. Is that where you're going with the question?

George Hanns: Not necessarily. But let's answer that.

Benny Jones: So I like to-

George Hanns: If someone needs to change something that they're doing. So let's go with that.

Benny Jones: Good question. So again, you wanna understand why they're doing what they're doing. Then you want to be empathetic. And another good book by the way is The One Minute Manager by Ken Blanchard. And our partners could read that book too. So you wanna give ... If you're gonna correct somebody, you wanna give them a positive attitude, then you wanna correct them after that. Because if you give them negative, negative,



## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

negative, they have no place to go. They only go down. Their morale goes down, their confidence goes down. Then you've lost them. So, "Hey, you're doing this great, but let's work on this right here. Let's work together and work on that."

Now, if they continue to repeat that thing, then you have to start documenting things. "So and so, you're still doing this great, but you're still having a problem over here. So how can I help you? What do you need? What's going on?" And again, I'm asking questions because maybe I don't have all the facts. Maybe I don't know what's going on. "What's going on?" "My foot, I got a cut on it." Whatever. "My dog is so and so." "My daughter is acting up in class and I can't focus." Okay. Alright. So now empathy hat comes on. They're having problems at home. They can't focus at work. Or whatever the case may be. If there just being obstinate, then you have to take the next step, which is to document, put them on a performance improvement plan, write it out, make sure that they understand the next steps if they're not complying, not doing the right things, et cetera.

George Hanns: Tell me about you as leader ... We have two more.

Benny Jones: Okay.

George Hanns: Two more.

Benny Jones: My energy level is going down.

George Hanns: We got two more here. Let me switch these two. So tell me about a time where your team failed, didn't get it done to whatever level. What could you have changed?

Benny Jones: Failed anything?

George Hanns: The people you lead, your team, they failed in something. What would you have changed? Tell me about the time. And then perhaps think about what could have changed.

Benny Jones: So when I think about pro-ed, I think... That was a mess to begin with, as you know already 'cause it changed hands. We did work that we did not get buy off from the customers on, which just kind of set up the rest of it. And what I would do differently is, in that particular situation, we would start ... In what we do in the web, and what I would recommend in our

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

next project is start with content first. Content will drive everything else. But we have a tendency here to start with design and then we design around the content.

But by starting with the content, A] you have the content, which became a problem in this project as we bore through it. The project manager did not raise the flag when he should have about the content issue. The content manager did not raise the flag when he should have about the content issue. And so when the site was at 80, 70%, we had a content problem. And if I could do things differently, we would get the content first and we would design around that. And we would do minium viable product. And that was a lesson learned in that particular situation. This is a particular situation, but you asked me.

George Hanns: As a leader, besides this specifically, is there something you could have done besides that particular decision with content.

Benny Jones: Okay. You're putting this back on me.

George Hanns: I asked for your team, and we could use a different example.

Benny Jones: As a leader, I could have communicated with the customer that the project would not move forward unless we get content. That would have set the expectations. But we did not do that, and the project moved forward and then we had a bunch of pages without content in the end as you already know. And so I think that's where our new transition into marketing and communication will hopefully get us on the right track with starting with the content first, but we'll see.

George Hanns: On a better note, your biggest source pride as a leader?

Benny Jones: Biggest source of pride as a leader? I have a group of good staff members that I enjoy working with. They're all talented. And they do great work for the University and for themselves. I do have a new junior staff member. And I'm now realizing that I'm gonna have to really put back on my mentoring and coaching hat with that person. That's okay 'cause we knew what we were getting. But yeah, I think my biggest source of pride is the people, the people that I work with. They're a good group of folks. Although, there are times when I wanna get through a stand-up meeting, they wanna talk. It's like, "Dear God, I just wanna get through this stand-up meeting." Anyways, does that answer your question?

## A.511.8.3.GA LEADER INTERVIEW FINAL REPORT

George Hanns: Sure. So anything else about leadership that you wanna- You as leader? In a nutshell.

Benny Jones: Leading is hard. Not everyone is comfortable leading. I think ... I don't know where I wanna go with this. Not everyone is cut out to be a leader. Not everyone wants to be a leader. Oh, not everybody is going to be your friend. When you become a leader, people aren't going to like you. You gotta be able to work through that. Based on your style and your personality, there are gonna be some haters. There are gonna people that just don't get along with you for whatever reason it is. You just gotta be able to push through that. And you're gonna have to work with them. You're gonna be in the same room looking at them. They're gonna be looking at you. And you just gotta smile and keep it moving and keep it professional and ethical.

And I think if you do that, your character will always shine through. People will always know that if it comes down to it, that you are not the thing that someone is saying you are because they know you for something different. And as a leader, you need to be the change that you want to see in your people. And you need to lead by example. You cannot or you should not say something and do something else because then you will lose credibility with your staff. So I always keep that in mind.

George Hanns: Alright.