Case Notes

# Chapter 1: Understanding Leadership

# Case 1.1: King of the Hill

## Case Summary

This brief case study explains the culture for leadership created by high school swimming coach Denny Hill. Over a 40-year-career, Denny has created a culture of success for his team, through clearly defined roles across all grade levels, freshman through senior. By cultivating a culture of excellence along with high expectations, Hill has been successful in his approach to coaching. Equally important is the notion that Hill does not explicitly focus on winning – instead he focuses on preparing to win, which instills the leadership traits associated with winning for his swimmers.

Case Analysis

This case clearly relates to the six “isms” of leadership defined in Chapter 1 of the text. Readers of the case can relate Denny Hill’s leadership model to all six of Northouse’s characteristics of leadership:

* Leadership is a Trait
* Leadership is an Ability
* Leadership is a Skill
* Leadership is a Behavior
* Leadership is a Relationship
* Leadership is an Influence Process

Readers of this case might turn to these characteristics in defining the leadership characteristics that have made Denny Hill successful over his career. Readers may also turn to the *Universal Leadership Attributes* identified in **Table 1.1** of the text as attributes that have contributed to Hill’s consistent success. In addition, this case (and chapter) identify key concepts which will be covered more in-depth throughout the remainder of the text chapters.

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

*1. What leadership* ***traits*** *account for Denny Hill’s success?*

Denny Hill appears extremely confident in the system that he has created, which is transferable across team members, regardless of their ability. Hill also appears to be empathetic to his swimmers, despite long practices and grueling workouts. Hill also demonstrates expertise and tacit knowledge on what his swimmers must do to be successful, both in and out of the swimming arena.

*2. How would you describe Denny Hill’s Leadership* ***abilities****?*

Denny Hill could be considered naturally gifted in creating a system and a culture that fosters success for his students. Hill’s four roles for each level of students could parallel the approach used by coach John Wooden in his four laws of learning (explanation, demonstration, initiation, and repetition). Hill is teaching his students a system, and believes that if the students commit to this system, they will be successful.

*3. Leadership includes administrative skills, interpersonal skills, and conceptual skills. How does Denny Hill stack up on these* ***skills?***

Denny Hill clearly has an administrative system in place that contributes to the success of his swimming teams and also to the organizational culture of the team. His administrative skills are present in both the set-up and execution of his yearly organizational rituals for his swimmers.

Denny Hill demonstrates interpersonal skills through his ability to provide support for his swimmers. Having an open-forum also fosters and facilitates his swimmers to develop their own interpersonal skills.

Denny Hill’s conceptual skills might be more implicit than explicit; it could be argued that the regimen utilized in the beginning of the season not only is a bonding experience, but also instills the work ethic necessary for success throughout the season.

*4. How does Denny Hill integrate task and relationship* ***behaviors*** *in his leadership?*

The behavioral dimension of leadership is concerned with how leaders act toward others in various situations. Denny Hill’s coaching style is task-driven with a focus on ensuring that his swimmers know and understand their roles while still maintaining a quality of excellence associated with their team. Relationship behaviors are very process-oriented, as Hill uses his “Hell Week” approach to allow all swimmers, regardless of grade level, to feel comfortable with other group members. This is also evident in the influence that each of the upper-class levels (seniors, juniors, and sophomores) have in the behavior and accountability of all other members of the team, including the coaches.

*5. From a relational perspective, how would you describe Denny Hill’s leadership?*

According to Rost (1991), leadership is a process of collaboration that occurs between leaders and followers. Denny Hill has created the necessary benchmarks each year in his coaching model that foster collaboration and allow all participants to have a voice in their team. This further reinforces the concept presented in our textbook that, “leadership is not a linear one-way event, but rather an interactive event.”

*6. In what way does Denny Hill’s coaching exemplify leadership as an influence process?*

The perspective of leadership emphasized by Northouse in this book is that “***Leadership*** *is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”* Denny Hill believes in the notion that all personnel involved in his swimming program are working together to achieve a common goal. While winning is not the inherent focus, it comes naturally because by preparing his swimmers to win, both the leadership and management skills that Hill stresses in his approach come natural and more often than not lead to winning and success.