

# CASE STUDY: LEADERSHIP

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### **Case Study: Leadership**

Joey Cohn is the acting General Manager of Pacific Public Media, which operates a regional FM jazz and NPR affiliate station known as 88.5 KPLU, and Jazz24, a commercial-free internet streaming station. Cohn has been employed with Pacific Public Media since 1987 in a variety of positions, and was appointed as acting General Manager in late 2013. Pacific Public Media is owned by Pacific Lutheran University, which is why the call letters bear the initials of the university. Pacific Public Media's main offices and studios are on the campus of PLU in rural Tacoma, WA and additional offices and studios are in downtown Seattle, WA.

KPLU has been on the air since 1966, and started as the original student radio station at PLU. In 1980, the station changed from a student run-station to a public radio station broadcasting classical music with local news and national news through NPR. In 1983, the station changed from classical to jazz, and has grown in listenership and coverage area since. (KPLU, 2015) However, on November 12, 2015, the Board of Regents of PLU announced their intent to sell Pacific Public Media to KUOW/University of Washington, in a deal that is expected to close by summer of 2016, just shy of KPLU's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. PLU President Thomas Krise stated the regent's decision to sell was because the broadcasting company is "a declining asset," even though the unit is financial stable and self-sustaining.

Mr. Cohn serves as the head of Pacific Public Media, in charge of both KPLU and Jazz24, and is accountable to the KPLU/Jazz24 members and the PLU Board of Regents. He splits his time between the broadcasting company's main office on the campus of KPLU and the offices in Seattle. Mr. Cohn provides the direction for the company and helps to keep it's 450,000 listeners happy.

In our textbook, leadership is defined as “the process of influencing others to achieve group or organizational goals.” (Williams, p. 289) Management, on the other hand, is simply “getting work done through others.” (Williams, p. 3) Influence, or inspiration, and simply churning out results can be miles apart in terms of communication in the workplace. Leading means to build coalitions, value the expertise and opinions of those you are working with, and creating an environment that motivates staff or volunteers to buy in to the goals of the organization and carry out tasks and activities that help accomplish these goals. Mr. Cohn is a leader. He talks with staff regularly. He runs the organization like a team, and values the input of his staff and, of course, the members of the station. Cohn has considerable influence on his staff because he has been with the company for a considerable amount of time, and most of the staff have, too. Cohn’s strength is his years of radio experience and longevity with the company, but perhaps a weakness of his was the lack of partnership with the administration and regents at PLU, which was the case under the previous general manager as well.

One could argue that Cohn manages by objectives, that is, “on the extent to which individuals meet their personal performance goals.” (DeNisi & Griffin, 2014) Cohn does hold his staff to the expectation that the stations will deliver great content, increase listenership, and be financially stable. KPLU’s Listener Services and Member Services divisions are known for the personal service they provide, a reflection of the culture at the company.

Leadership traits are often defined as “abilities, psychologic motives, or consistent patterns of behavior” that effective leaders commonly possess. (Williams, p. 290). Traits could include a positive demeanor, caring for employees, timeliness, and openness. Leadership styles are the ways that the traits are often manifested in a leader. An easy going demeanor, a smile and

a greeting for every employee conveys the positing, caring, and openness traits. Cohn speaks to every employee he walks by. He doesn't ignore anyone, and even in times of uncertain transition that the company is going through now, he is still an approachable manager.

One-on-one communication is just as important as organization-wide communication. Interpersonal communication helps to build teams and rapport within divisions of a company, and allows for information flow from staff to supervisors. Organization-wide communication is information that is shared with all of the staff, supervisors and management; it keeps everyone informed about what is going on.

Pacific Public Media staff and management were not notified of the university's intent to sell the company to another broadcasting entity until the day of the announcement and press release. The first thing Cohn did was have a face to face meeting with staff, and have the rest of the staff join via conference call to explain the few details he knew about. Later that afternoon, Cohn and Rebecca Jones, Marketing and Communication Manager, sent out an email to all registered listeners and members of the stations informing them of the acquisition and what to expect. Cohn has continued to meet with staff and make them aware of developments. Through my experience in retail, very few of my past managers would make use of communication channels such as email and face-to-face meetings, and would just leave us in the dark when it came to the state of the store (or company, for that matter). Again, because Cohn is much more of a leader than a manager, it is no surprise that he is going to great lengths to be involved in disseminating information and fighting for the future of his staff.

Joey Cohn is a great leader. He is approachable, kind, and wants the best for his staff, station, and listeners. These traits have definitely contributed to his long career in broadcasting and his longevity with Pacific Public Media.

## References

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