

Leadership Case Study: A CEO Perspective

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### Introduction

For my leadership case study project, I interviewed Pastor Timothy Findley Jr., a leader whose exceptional skills I deeply admire. He has been my pastor and mentor for 17 years, shaping my own leadership development through both instruction and example. The skills I've learned from him have proven invaluable in my professional life.

Back in the mid-1800s, Thomas Carlyle argued that leaders were born, not made. This "Great Man" theory led early researchers to look for specific personality traits that supposedly made people leaders. However, Pastor Findley recognized leadership potential in me that I hadn't recognized myself, demonstrating that leaders aren't solely born but can indeed be developed. This aligns with modern leadership theory, which defines leadership as a *process*—an interactive event rather than a fixed trait residing within an individual. As Northouse (2021) suggests, "Leadership is not linear, but rather an interactive event and when it's defined that way, it becomes available to everyone."

### Biography

Timothy E. Findley, Jr. is the Senior Pastor of Kingdom Fellowship Christian Life Center, Board Chair of Life Development Corporation, Co-owner of Precious Memories Funeral Home, and CEO of ElderServe, the largest adult care program in Kentucky. For over 2 decades, Findley has remained committed to his mission of leadership, community advocacy, and social justice.

A few notable leadership accolades include:

- 2023 Health Equity Impact Award recipient from the CEO Optimize Conference
- Leadership Louisville Class of 2016

- Nominated KIA 2020 “Political Influencer of the Year”
- Recipient of LCCC Community Service Award 2020

### The Interview Process

My interview with Findley began with me directly contacting him and explaining the project's objectives. Following his approval, I scheduled the interview through his assistant and shared the questions in advance to ensure a productive conversation. We did the interview over Google Meet, and it lasted about an hour. He was kind enough to let me record it, which was a huge help. I didn't want to miss anything while trying to take notes, and it let me really focus on engaging with him.

### Interview Questions and Responses

My interview covered Pastor Findley's general leadership philosophy, experiences, challenges, growth, vision, and strategies. I wanted to understand his leadership style, how it changes in different settings, and his advice for new leaders. Below are some highlights from the interview, with a few questions and responses:

**Q. What do you consider to be the most important qualities of an effective leader?**

A. The ability to influence people and motivate. You can't lead if you don't have the ability to influence and motivate people.

**Q. What is your primary leadership style? How does your leadership style as CEO differ from your role as senior pastor? Or does it?**

A. Depending on the environment and culture of the organization or group your leading should dictate your leadership style. In my CEO capacity I am probably more directive. Things change over time; you can start off one way and become something else. More directive because I was

brought in at Elderserve for the purposes of them almost being closed. It required more of a directive style.

A leader's style should adapt to the specific context and culture of the organization or group they lead. My own leadership approach as CEO, for example, tends to be more directive. However, leadership styles can and should evolve. At Elderserve, I started with a more direct style of leadership because the organization was close to being shut down.

At Kingdom it's different. It doesn't need as much direct leadership now as it did in the earlier stages of ministry. Now that other effective leaders have been developed, a more supportive approach works better now.

**Q. What motivates you as a leader?**

A. Motivation for sure. Witnessing the growth and development of those I lead is my greatest motivation. While personal achievements are certainly rewarding, nothing compares to seeing others reach their full potential and embrace their own leadership capabilities.

**Q. How do you balance leading a church and two organizations/businesses and remain an effective leader?**

A. Strong teams are key. You can't do everything yourself; it's not sustainable. You must develop a solid team of individuals around you who can step into your blind spots, your weaknesses, people who are able to give you clear descriptions of what's going on within the organization without you having to be there. My effectiveness at both organizations and the church depends greatly on the support of healthy, high-functioning teams.

**Q. What has been your most significant leadership challenge, and how did you overcome it?**

A. Motivating people to go where they don't want to go but need to go. That's the most significant ongoing challenge. Not just motivating people but revitalizing and bringing back organizations from the brink of collapse. I make sure I involve people in the process and address people's questions and concerns openly and honestly.

**Q. How do you handle conflict within a team at Elderserve and is it different than you would at Church?**

A. The same. Instead of always jumping in to fix things myself, I now coach people on how to solve problems themselves. If they can't, then I or another leader will help them work things out. I want to build a culture of self-accountability.

**Q. Can you share a leadership experience that significantly shaped you as a leader?**

A. I once made a mistake by reacting without using emotional intelligence which involves understanding the whole situation, not just the words people say. Now, I don't get caught up in other people's drama.

**Q. How do you continue to develop your own leadership skills?**

A. Professional development is key. It's vital to learn empathy, especially if it's not something you're naturally good at. Reading, having a support group, and maintaining work-life balance are all important.

**Q. What resources (books, training, mentors) have been most valuable in your leadership journey?**

A. Outside of the Bible, which is my main source of spiritual and personal growth, I find Daniel Goleman's book on emotional intelligence very helpful. Also, having a group of close friends and pastors to connect with and share experiences.

**Q. What advice would you have to someone who wants to grow as a leader?**

A. Be prepared for the mistakes you will make along the way. One of the biggest confidence killers for new leaders is not being ready for them. Messing up is part of learning and growing as a leader.

### Leadership Characteristics and Assessment

The interview with Findley directly connects to several key concepts covered in the Leadership and Management course. By linking Pastor Findley's experiences and traits to leadership theories, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of both how leadership works in practice and the theoretical ideas behind it. This analysis demonstrates how leadership theory can help us understand real-world examples of leadership. Based on my interview and personal experience, I believe Findley's key leadership qualities are situational awareness, inspirational, emotional intelligence, and a team builder. Below is an in-depth assessment of his leadership characteristics, demonstrating the application of course concepts to support my evaluation.

#### **Situational Awareness**

Findley's leadership demonstrates a blend of adaptive, transformational, and servant leadership. He recognizes that his leadership style must change depending on the environment and situation and that leadership isn't one-size-fits-all which is a sign of a good leader. For example, he primarily uses a supportive style at Kingdom Fellowship because he has successfully developed effective leaders, whereas due to Elderserve previously facing closure, he takes a more directive approach. This aligns with Heifetz's adaptive leadership framework, emphasizing the importance of diagnosing the situation and adjusting leadership style accordingly (Northouse, 2021). Findley challenges people to grow by pushing them beyond their comfort zones. His ability to maintain focus,

identify complex problems, and develop solutions beyond conventional practices demonstrates adaptive leadership.

### **Inspirational**

According to Northouse (2021), transformational leadership occurs when a leader engages with others, fostering a connection that enhances motivation and morality in both parties. Findley inspires people with a vision and develops them into leaders, which are hallmarks of transformational leadership. He doesn't just manage; he inspires, and he's personally invested in helping others, including myself, reach their full potential. He makes it his mission to identify and develop future leaders which is a powerful characteristic. He consistently takes the time to invest in the growth of individuals, recognizing that leadership is a process. By developing leaders, his influence spreads and has a greater impact.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

During the interview Findley reflected on a past experience where he lacked emotional intelligence. His willingness to acknowledge past mistakes and learn from them demonstrates resilience and a growth mindset. As Northouse (2021) indicates, emotional intelligence can be developed through training that teaches leaders to identify and manage their emotions. Findley, acknowledging the significant impact of Daniel Goleman's emotional intelligence book on his leadership journey, reinforces this. He encourages leaders to anticipate and learn from their mistakes. His focus on empathy and understanding the "whole scenario" before responding or reacting echoes Goleman's theories.

## **Team Builder**

Findley manages to juggle multiple leadership roles effectively by prioritizing team building. He acknowledges that strong teams are the foundation for his success in leading a church and two organizations. This characteristic demonstrates his coaching leadership, where he provides guidance and support to develop the skills and abilities of his team members. His coaching style encourages team members to think critically and develop their problem-solving skills. In certain areas, specifically at the church, Findley believes in shared leadership, implemented through a team of associate pastors and ministry directors. He emphasizes a hierarchical team structure where he guides associate pastors, and they guide and support ministry directors and so forth. When necessary, these associate pastors provide direct leadership and then step back to allow others to lead which is described as “team leadership” by Northouse (2021).

## **Recommendations**

Based on my interview with Pastor Findley and the leadership principles discussed the following are some recommendations I could offer him and other leaders:

- Since he's already good at developing leaders, creating formal mentorship programs would make his impact even bigger.
- Given his multiple leadership roles, it would be beneficial to him to create succession plans for each organization. This will ensure smooth transitions and consistent leadership, if he leaves a position.



- Leaders should learn adaptive leadership, which means understanding the situation, taking a step back to see the bigger picture by “getting on the balcony”. It's about guiding change, not just fixing things.
- Leaders should focus on creating strong teams.
- Leaders should see mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Leaders should know different leadership styles and use the right one for the situation.

The key is to be flexible and choose what's best for the team and the situation.

## Reflection

My interview with Pastor Findley offered several lessons that can be applied to my own leadership journey. My key takeaways from the interview were:

1. Pastor Findley's own development as a leader and his ability to foster leadership in others (including me!) reinforces the idea that leadership is about continuous learning and growth.
2. His ability to adjust his leadership style based on the context highlights the importance of being flexible. Effective leaders don't have a single style; they adapt.
3. Findley's reliance on building strong teams emphasizes the importance of collaboration and shared leadership.
4. Setbacks are inevitable, but they can be valuable learning opportunities.
5. His emphasis on professional development, peer groups, and work-life balance highlights the importance of self-care and continuous learning. Leadership can be demanding, so it's crucial to have support systems and prioritize well-being.

By learning from these lessons and using them in my own leadership, I can keep growing and make a positive difference.

## References

Northouse, P. G. (2021). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage Publishing.