

Leadership Credo Workbook

Complete guidance for developing your Leadership Credo

WHU Otto Beisheim School of Management

FEW.OS — Leadership for the few who build what lasts

What is a Leadership Credo?

The Leadership Credo is the capstone of your leadership development. It is about sharing:

- Who you are as a person
- What you stand for as a leader
- Your core principle of leadership illustrated through a real story

The ultimate objective: Clarify your own beliefs about leadership. This is not about convincing others. Your beliefs are in jeopardy only if you don't know what they are.

7 Core Guidelines

1. Choose *THE* Core Principle

Rather than crafting a list of leadership virtues, pick the ONE key leadership belief most relevant to you.

- This is your "guiding star" of leadership
- If you can't name it in a sentence or two, the impact is reduced
- Examples: "I will not enable chronic irresponsibility" / "Vulnerability creates trust"

2. Tell a Story

Be specific. Ground your belief in the events of your life.

- Your story need not be heart-warming, funny, or gut-wrenching
- It needs to be REAL and YOURS
- Story must tie directly to your leadership principle

3. Be Brief and Concise

Focus on ONE core belief. Your oral credo should not exceed 10 minutes.

- Max 1200 words written script
- Max 10 minutes oral delivery
- No tangents or lists

4. Name Your Belief

If you can't name it clearly, the impact on you and your audience will be much reduced.

- Start with: "I believe that..." or "I stand for..."
- Weak: "I believe in good leadership"
- Strong: "I believe in holding people accountable to their own potential"

5. Be Personal

Make it about YOU. Speak in the first person ('I', not 'you').

- Find the words, tone, and story that echo YOUR belief
- Trial your credo repeatedly until it sounds authentic
- It should sound like how YOU actually speak

6. Be Positive

Say what you BELIEVE, not what you don't believe.

- Avoid dogma, preaching, or editorializing

- Focus on conviction, not criticism
- No lists or sermons

7. The Power of One

Be clear about the ONE message you want your audience to remember.

- Bottom-line clarity
- Everything should serve this single core message
- Clarity over complexity

Storytelling Principles

Storytelling is the heart of a compelling credo. Here are 6 proven techniques:

1. *Use Pictures*

Allow your audience to picture the situation in their imagination.

Use specific sensory details (what they saw, heard, felt), not abstract description.

2. *"Zoom In"*

Switch into direct speech or zoom into a specific conversation.

Example: "My father said to me, 'You can't fix this for him'" vs. "My father told me something important".

3. *Make "The Monster" Big*

The bigger the problem, the more compelling the solution.

What was at stake? What was the cost of NOT following this principle?

4. *Work with Contrasts*

Use opposites to clarify your point.

Before vs. After. What I thought vs. What I learned. My default vs. My principle.

5. *"Pars Pro Toto"*

Use a specific example to describe a general point.

One concrete incident stands for a broader pattern. Instead of "I learned to trust people," show: "When I let my team handle the crisis, they solved it in 2 days."

6. *"Inclusio" (Closure)*

At the end, pick up a keyword, theme, or person you introduced at the beginning.

Creates narrative closure. Example: Start with "My father taught me..." and end with "Now I teach my team..."

How to Structure Your Credo

To make your credo easy to listen to, use one of these two structures:

Type A: Principle First

- **Start:** Name your guiding principle directly ("I believe that good leadership is...")
- **Middle:** Share the personal story showing WHERE this belief comes from and WHY it matters
- **End:** Explain HOW you apply this belief in your work today
- **Close:** Acknowledge challenges in living this principle

Type B: Story First

- **Start:** Tell the personal story (creates curiosity)
- **Middle:** Reveal the guiding principle the story illustrates
- **End:** Explain HOW you apply this belief in your work today
- **Close:** Acknowledge challenges in living this principle

Type B works best when your story is compelling enough to draw listeners in with curiosity.

Key Point: Both structures include the same 4 elements — Principle, Story, Application, Challenges. Choose the structure that best showcases your authenticity.

How to Find Your Credo

Developing a credo is not easy. Most students report difficulty finding their ideas. Try these approaches:

Step 1: Reflect on Your Guiding Principles

Throughout the program you've been encouraged to reflect on your leadership values.

- Write a long list of guiding principles that come to mind
- Which values feel comfortable to talk about?
- For which value do you have a distinct experience in mind?
- Narrow down to 3 top candidates

Step 2: Ask Others

Seek feedback from people who know you:

- "In your opinion — what really matters for me? What do I stand for as a person and as a leader?"

Step 3: Review Your Life

- Look back at your lifeline: What were important turning points?
- What lessons did you learn?
- Which funny, challenging, or tragic events have taught you something?

Step 4: Identify Key Influences

- Which people had tremendous impact on who you are today?
- What did you learn from them?
- How have they shaped your leadership beliefs?

Step 5: Reflect on the MBA

- How has the MBA program challenged you?
- What important guiding principles have you reconsidered?
- What beliefs have been reinforced or changed?

Technical Specifications

Written Script

- Length: 800–1200 words
- Format: Script (as you would say it)
- Style: First person, conversational

Oral Presentation

- Duration: 8–12 minutes
- Format: Speech (no PowerPoint slides)
- Pace: ~120 words per minute

Word Count Calculator

If you aim for 10 minutes delivery:

- 10 minutes × 120 words/min = 1,200 words
- 9 minutes × 120 words/min = 1,080 words
- 8 minutes × 120 words/min = 960 words

What to Avoid

- PowerPoint slides
- Lists or bullet points (spoken version)
- Generic advice or preaching
- Multiple principles (focus on ONE)
- Editorializing or dogma