



The Handful of Things Leadership Should Get Right

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Written by Michael Quartararo

In more than 20 years of working in the legal business—the first third just working hard, the second third as an aspiring leader, and the last third at the director level—I’ve learned a thing or two about leadership, about operations, and about people and how to lead them. So, it frustrates me when I hear about a leadership vacuum literally sucking the life out of an organization.

It got me to thinking about what leadership means, and about the handful of things that leaders need to do right in order to be successful. I did a presentation on leadership at a trade show about a year ago. It was a very interactive session, so I also learned some things. One of the things we talked about was what it takes to be a leader? I thought I’d share some of the output from the discussion.

I’ve always defined leadership as the art and style of influencing others to achieve results. I don’t remember where I read that, nor does it matter. It’s pretty accurate in my view. Thing is, not everyone is good at it. Some of it can be learned; some of it is innate.

For those aspiring to leadership or for those who are in leadership or perhaps struggling in leadership, I recommend you consider the following themes:

Identify and communicate vision. Leaders give direction, establish key processes and expectations, and then they allow those they manage to figure it out. Almost anyone can be taught to perform administrative or rote tasks. Leaders look ahead to the future and see projects or initiatives as complete. The goal is to help others see the same things.

Find and see opportunities. Leaders look for opportunities. Where others see obstacles, leaders see opportunities. And they know how to align resources and focus their team members on meeting those challenges. It's one thing to be a great problem solver; it's quite another to know that with proper guidance and resources your team can reach the same resolution to the problem.

Lead by example. Leaders have to be someone others will follow, and therefore it is necessary to inspire and motivate team members. It is not always easy to rally enthusiasm and build esteem in others, but by being excited about the vision, mission or purpose it can be surprising how much that enthusiasm will infect the team and get them excited as well.

Coach, communicate and listen. Great leaders are not only knowledgeable about the work and know how to share their knowledge and skills, but they also excel at communication. Sometimes, the most important part of communication is listening. That's the part where the leader removes all

distractions and simply listens to what their team members (and others) are saying. And one of the most important things I think a manager can do is make sure their team has everything they need to do their job. Sometimes, if you listen closely, you may find someone is simply asking for something.

Share credit and accept responsibility. These kind of go hand-in-hand, and frankly, there's not enough of this. It's almost as simple as saying "thank you," but frequently leaders forget to do it. Leaders can personally build credibility with other leaders and, perhaps more importantly, among their team if when they experience a win, they give credit where credit is due. At the same time, good leaders don't blame others for losses. They do some introspection and assess what they could have done to prevent a loss.

In addition to these five themes, leaders are diplomatic and persuasive. They use tact and reasonableness and know the difference between a tack hammer and sledgehammer. Also, leaders need to be trusted—and this goes for subordinates as well as by superiors. If people are going to look up to you and believe that you can help them achieve something, they need to understand that they can trust you and have confidence in you. Lastly, leaders care about more than just results. They also care about those who follow them. Be kind and empathetic.

Tune in next time for more on leadership. For now, give your team a hug and thank them for the work that they do. Even great leaders neglect this at times.

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