



Ten Solutions for Improved Leadership

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Leadership Skill # 1: Develop your people like you do yourself. Leaders set the tone in encouraging a culture of development. They are good role models for developing employees, they believe that development is important, and they make professional development a priority. The best leaders see learning not as an expense, but an investment. Untiringly develop your people and yourself.

Leadership Skill # 2: Clearly Communicate Expectations. Leaders use their communication skills to produce enthusiasm and foster an atmosphere of open exchange and support. They are adept at energizing people to see pathways that accomplish objectives despite challenging conditions. Leaders establish clear performance expectations and hold people accountable to deliver on their work promises to their team, boss, and stakeholders.

Leadership Skill # 3: Create a Learning Environment. The vast majority of employees crave a learning environment where they can learn and grow while performing their day-to-day duties. Many leaders understand this concept but fail to implement it due to time limits or competing priorities and never seem to get around to it. Great leaders know that for a project to end properly, it must begin properly and successful leaders will take the time to incorporate learning as an essential part of their normal job responsibilities and "blur the line" between learning and work. They create learning environments so that, on each work assignment, they can help employees creatively anticipate and find solutions to specific challenges.

Leadership Skill # 4: Develop Successors. Great leaders know that their most important job is to develop their successors and maintain the vision and legacy of leadership. The leaders who are most effective at developing their successors have employees who are more likely to stay, more satisfied with their job, more committed to the organization, and more productive. Choose those you believe have the values you wish to encourage and the talent to learn the leadership behaviors you believe are important to the future of your organization and then give them personal developmental attention. Yes, it takes time. However, remember your leadership mission: vision and legacy.

Leadership Skill # 5: Pass on your Skills and knowledge. Great leaders provide one-on-one coaching and mentoring opportunities and ensure that these new skills are related back to the overall organizational vision or strategy. Helping others grow in this manner contributes to a distributed sense of leadership at all levels.

Leadership Skill # 6: Encourage Commitment by Relating Interpersonally. Leaders set a vibrant high performance organizational culture through effective interpersonal relations, focused on real dialogue, lots of input, and honesty. Dialogue implies deeper conversations rather than one way information handoffs. Develop trust and people will follow you and demonstrating a true concern for the perspective of others and committing to listening rather than trying to convince is a major step in developing the kind of trust that makes good leaders great. An honest two way interactive dialogue demonstrates that you care and are willing to invest in hearing them out. When people see that you are committed to them, they will commit to you.

Leadership Skill # 7: Pass Along Job and Development Opportunities. The best leaders use their own experience to give employees advice about emerging trends, political relationships, career development, and yes...job openings and development opportunities. You may grow some people who will take their skills elsewhere based on your recommendations...and you've built life-long loyalty not only from them, but also from the rest of your team...they recognize your commitment.

Leadership Skill # 8: Become Knowledgeable About Employee Performance. Leaders are knowledgeable about their employees' performance, which builds considerable trust and respect. Most would say that this is a "no-brainer," yet only 30-40 percent of employees report that their managers communicate performance standards and provide fair and accurate feedback to help them do their jobs better.

Leadership Skill # 9: Provide Voluntary, Detailed, Immediate, and Positive Feedback. Most employees believe that formal performance reviews do not help on-the-job performance, yet they crave feedback, especially on strengths. Most managers view formal performance reviews as an administrative requirement rather than as a powerful lever to positively influence employee performance. Only 35 percent of employees rate their manager above average in providing feedback and report that they only provide general, non-specific praise. Great leaders catch their people doing something right and point it out to them in a detailed and timely fashion.

Leadership Skill # 10: Recognize/Emphasize/Leverage Strengths. Positive leaders are well known for recognizing, emphasizing, and leveraging strengths and what is working rather than the opposite approach of focusing on weaknesses and what isn't working. Focusing on success creates positive energy by recognizing and appreciating what is working, which produces greater engagement and momentum for change. That doesn't mean that you never discuss performance gaps...when you do, focus on specific suggestions for improvement or development related directly to job performance. The number one reason why people thrive in an organization is their immediate manager; unfortunately, it's also the number one reason they quit.

Bottom Line: Establish a performance management based organizational culture, although not from a command and control perspective, but one that involves a coaching environment and conscious attempts at continuous dialogue within work teams to achieve breakthrough improvements in manager-employee relationships and on-the-job results.