

Leadership

006



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This is the outline for the leadership series. Here, each section is briefly introduced to give you an idea what you can expect in this series of articles.

Understanding What It Is

Leadership is something that can easily be explained, but it is very difficult to put into practice. It's important to understand what it is and the various things that make up leadership.

Know Yourself and Your Capabilities

In order to put the areas of leadership into practice once you do have an understanding of it, you need to look at yourself and your own capabilities so that you know what areas to develop, use and avoid in your leadership style. The characteristics of your own personality will also greatly impact your leadership and you should know how.

Skill Development

Any leader is going to realize that they cannot be everything they want to be without a lot of development of their skills. No matter where you are in your leadership abilities, there are always skills to learn, new ones to develop and refining to do on the ones you have.

Remember, It's About People

Human nature is important to know, understand and handle as a leader. Every step you take as a leader will need to be done with one important fact in mind, it's all about people.

Willingness to Take Risks

Leaders drive change and they inspire others to follow them by challenging new things and persisting through it to a point of success. That willingness to take risks is a critical aspect of leadership to explore.

Accepting Mistakes

Leaders are not better at things than others, they are not smarter, they are not lucky and they are not born that way either. They are however able to learn and accept their mistakes without mistakes holding them back from continued leadership.

Give Direction

Leaders can only lead if they give some direction or example for others to follow, otherwise it's not leading.

Humility

Finally, my final area to cover of leadership is doing all this while staying humble. Great leaders are humble in their work, lives and leadership and it enables them to be lasting leaders well beyond their time and direct role of influence.



In order to understand leadership it is important to realize that leadership is not about a specific set of traits or characteristics. It is about trust, relationships and guidance between someone leading and others following.

Many studies have been done and none have led to any definitive list of attributes that one must have to be a good leader. However, leadership does have a series of actions and behaviors which is what I hope to focus on in this series.

Qualities Of Leadership

While there are not specific characteristics that define a leader, there are a number of qualities of leadership that can be seen valuable in leaders. These include integrity, honesty, humility, courage, commitment, sincerity, passion, confidence, positivity, wisdom, determination, compassion, sensitivity, and a degree of personal charisma. These are not things that make a leader, but they tend to be some of the qualities of a leader and are often shown by their actions.

Leadership Style

Leadership doesn't require or expect you to behave in a specific way or have a pre-defined set of leadership qualities either. It has many styles and the only really important thing about leadership styles that is important to know is that you must practice your own style. You cannot copy someone else's or learn a specific style, it must be something that comes natural for you. There is no right or wrong style and so you must embrace a style that works for you as a leader and one that you can value.

Some of the styles are based similarly to personality styles or behavior based styles, such as the Meyers Briggs ([take a free test here](#)) or DiSC ([more info here](#)) profiling models, respectively. There seems to be three main styles of leadership:

- Authoritarian / autocratic
- Participative / democratic
- Delegative / free-reign

Good leaders will use all three styles depending on every situation with only a minor bias to their natural style. Poor leaders will generally stick with one style and not adjust for different situations limiting their influence greatly.

Regardless of the style applied, a leader's approach can be one with a focus on rewards that are positive to motivate or they may use penalties to frighten (which is also a motivator) action.

Lead By Ideas

While leadership is largely about behavior, that behavior will never be different from others' without the ability to act on new ideas. A leader's ideas direct their actions, decisions and new behaviors. Ideas are the only way to challenge things we currently do and belief and a great leader is able to shift and motivate people from a static life to one of great transformation changing views, beliefs and values. All these changes ultimately lead to new actions which is what leadership is driving to change!

Ideas are what enables a leader, as its ideas that are forceful to others and its ideas that will engage others to see from new perspectives and take on new possibilities. These ideas are how a leader finds its followers and how they find a new path to follow.

Leadership

So, to me leadership is about inspiring and motivating others either deliberately or passively by your own way of doing things. It is about steering not only your own path towards something, but also the path of any number of followers that value something about you enough to follow. The variations here are endless but all leadership requires this at some level.



This next topic about leadership takes what you know from the last article ([Leadership - Understanding What It Is](#)) and looks at how those areas of leadership can be utilized within the boundaries of your own personality and capabilities.

Don't Fake Who You Are, Just Be You

The last thing you should do to be a leader is to pretend you are something you are not. You should never fake or display a specific personality in order to be seen as a leader. A lot of people do this thinking that leadership is automatic if you have a specific set of personal characteristics but that is simply not true. The individual person and unique personality makes more of the leader than any specific qualities or character traits. Leadership is something that has to come from the person you truly are. Now that can be changed over time which I'll cover more in a later article but you can't fake it without a genuine change in your [core values](#) and beliefs.

So of course bringing up values and beliefs is an important part of knowing yourself and that extends deeply into a leader's character. One trait that I've learned that is common of great leaders is that they hold true their values and beliefs. This is only possible if you actually know those values, display them and let other people see them revealed by your actions. Many traits are related to this core principle and that is why I believe you cannot pinpoint specific characteristics. These 4 are the ones that stand out the most for me in someone who holds true their values:

- Integrity
- Honest
- Courage
- Confidence

"No man is fit to command another that cannot command himself." (William Penn)

Know Your Limits

Not only is it important to know some of the principles your character is built upon, it's also important to know your limitations and what you are not. Leadership has many stereotyped expectations and there is little to gain by trying to fit some area that just doesn't suit you. The different styles of leaders need to fit your personality and you shouldn't force yourself to portray characteristics you simply don't have. Yet. The limits you have now are certainly something that can change with time but leadership is hard enough in areas you are good at, let alone attempting to falsely mold yourself into areas you know are beyond your limits and capabilities.

Be Open About Your Capabilities

There is nothing wrong with being open and honest about where your leadership skills fall short. Honesty in addressing your capabilities are a sure way to gain a trusting and respectful eye from others and helps to stay far away from the perception that you have a big ego (a leader's natural arch-nemesis). A leader will not only recognize their own limits and inabilities, they will look to find new ways to fill those gaps. A mindset to support continuous improvement and admittance of needing help with that is important as it allows a leader to accept imperfections in themselves and in people with their own shortcomings.

Self-Analysis Tools

Whether you think you know yourself well or not, it's very helpful to use various techniques and resources to self assess where you are at as a leader, what style you have and what skills or capabilities you need to put priority attention to for improvement. Personality tools can be helpful here but since I believe that powerful leadership can occur from any personality type, they tend not to look enough at action and influence with others, which is where leadership really counts. I have found these techniques to work best for getting an accurate self assessment when it comes to leadership.

Talk to Close Friends and Family

You can always trust your closest friends or family to be brutally honest with you but keep in mind they might not ever tell you anything bad thing about you, until you ask. So, ask! Be specific to ask about leadership traits and how they see you leading. If you have little experience ask how they feel you would lead best if given the opportunity. Does it match your own ideas?

Colleagues

Ask your peers, your boss and any mentors or role models you may have for them to give you an honest opinion about how you express your values and what leadership characteristics they see and don't see you demonstrating. Remember it's not the knowledge, it's the practice of what you can demonstrate. Use the same specific questions as with close friends or family here. Ask

specifically about leadership. You might want to look at leadership in a specific role for your workplace or future role.

Surveys

There are hundreds of surveys available online, in books, at seminars or in courses that you can take to help evaluate yourself. Here is one simple but very useful survey I found online to help [evaluate what your natural leadership style is](#) . From the same site, [here is a survey to assess how you are doing as a leader](#) now. There are many more online if you do some searching, these are only a quick starting place.

I'd love to hear about any other tools, resources and methods you have used or can suggest to evaluate yourself and your leadership skills.



This is one part of a whole series on leadership. Check the [leadership introduction here](#) for all articles in the series.

Skill development is crucial to advancing your leadership ability and a strong focus on specific leadership skills can not only shore up any shortcomings but can also massively boost your abilities as a leader. Not a lot of people take their own initiative to develop their skills but this is one area that is very easy to do for a leader. You've probably all heard the saying that leaders are made, not born and it's all to do with developing the right skills to become a leader. Anyone can do it and then apply those skills in a style that suits them.

Whether leadership is all new to you or you have years of experience, there are always areas to improve your skills and so putting some attention to the development of those is important.

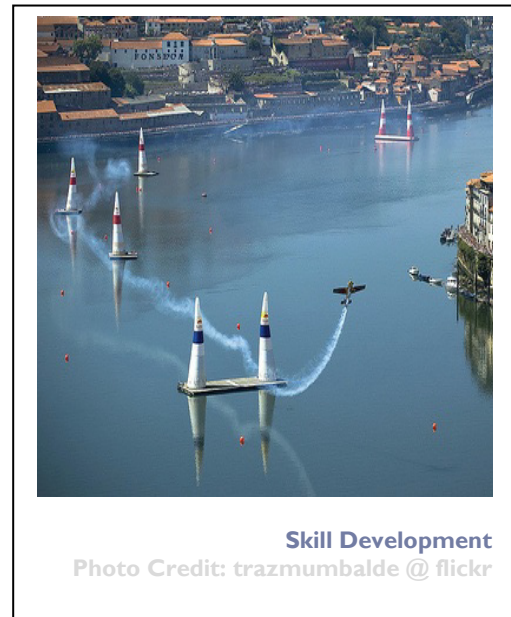
Reading

I cannot promote this one enough and unfortunately it is a task that few people actually make common in their lives. A sad fact that reoccurs in North American surveys is that nearly 60% of all adults never read another book after high school and more than 80% did not read a single book in the past year.

Reference: http://www.readfaster.com/education_stats.asp

Reference: <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/stats/readingstats.html>

I was [one of those statistics](#) until about 3-4 years ago when I found and tackled reading a couple of leadership books. I had never realized how much there was to learn in books as I had always read the wrong books. They just didn't interest me and I was typically bored before I could finish a few pages. With finding books that actually helped to train and development my skills, I was able to experience a new love for books and I've ramped up my reading to where I've read over 30 books this year alone! I now consider books to be one of the best resources for new knowledge that exists. And yes, I still rank them far higher than the internet, so if you read my blog but you don't read books, then please find a book of interest from my many book reviews and don't come back until you finish it!



Reading is a fantastic way to develop new skills and master the ones you already have. It gives you access to learn from experts in any subject and it is a cheap and quick way to experience and take in a lot of knowledge that would be very time consuming and costly to learn the hard way by trial and error. Of course reading expert books can't replace personal experience, especially with something as personal as leadership, but it can easily give you ideas, a foundation of knowledge and a massive jump start into an area that is so huge, a lifetime can easily be spent developing it. That area is of course leadership.

Continuous Learning

Considering the scale of leadership and simply how much there is to learn, it isn't something you just learn once and then be done with it. It requires you to be learning and developing your skills further and further. A leader will never stay a leader if they are not able to progress themselves and so continuous learning is an excellent way to not only stay ahead of a group of followers but

it is also useful to spark innovation, creativity and changes in a leader's style or approach that makes them more effective.

Adapting and Changing

Refining your skills inevitably leads to realizing that there is room for change. Room to adapt and adjust your methods to fit new people, situations or simply because of a change in leadership knowledge. The ability of a leader to change is easily detected by followers and quick adaptations can be very inspiring. Not only the adaptation itself, but also in the results those changes can bring about.

Aside from the inspiration or motivation that change can feed to others, it is also necessary in a competitive world. Adapting to the rapid changes is a best way to stay ahead and for a leader this is not only with external factors in their area of influence but also the areas within it. Adopting an acceptance of change so that new areas are looked at as opportunities instead of problems or roadblocks allows a leader to carry things through any transitions.

As these changes occur, the skills required to stay effective as a leader will also change. A good leader accepts this and not only looks to get through the change, but to also lead the change itself. Since the change is inevitable for survival, why not continue to develop your skills and take the change on, head on as a leader.



It's impossible to cover the topic of leadership without focusing on people. You can [learn about leadership](#) , [understand yourself](#) , [develop your leadership skills](#) and have all the right things in place to be a leader, but it's all for nothing without remembering that leadership is all about people. It's about having influence with others and about the relationships and connections you build as a leader. These skills are the people skills needed for leadership and there are five major areas I've learned that make up those people skills.

1. Awareness

Wake up! You need to be aware of things around you as a leader. You need to be more alert to opportunities, to easily see change and to recognizing solutions easier than the next guy. These will enable you to be thinking and discovering just ahead of your likely followers and gives others that perception of being first. Little things here can make a big difference. Just putting more attention to things can easily bring the small percentage increase on a consistent basis that will help you deliver more and more ideas and content before others. Presenting your thoughts first, offering to take on new challenges and noticing change before others will not only have you demonstrating your willingness to lead but it will give you opportunities that others miss out on that you can further develop and prove your skills with.

Not only is being aware of opportunities important but also the interactions with others. Being aware of when others need help, are struggling or feeling left behind is the best time to show leadership by helping, waiting or encouraging them to continue. This capacity to see what is going on with the people around you demonstrates great leadership. Look for times you can give decision or choices to others or even hold your own ideas to ensure those presented by others feel more important. Often a few simple steps here can gain long term followers as they begin to respect you without seeing you in their way. You can still lead people without slowing them down and by being aware of these signals with others ensures you do not step outside the boundaries of good leadership.



2. Impactful

This can be the most difficult people skill to develop as a leader as it is often counter to what is first believed. I'm suggesting here that you need to have impact with others without authority, without position power and without necessarily having the respect or experience to immediately convince someone. Impact is about earning respect but doing it in a way that you demonstrate your values and leadership characteristics. Some of those techniques are:

- Trusting others

You must build trust as a leader. Do this with honesty and sincerity with others. Offer trust before it is deserved whenever possible as this will gain favor in return that far outweighs the negative impacts from not trusting others as a leader. Look for places to trust others, tell them

you trust them and then show them by accepting their ideas and accepting the consequences without blame.

- Welcome good conflict

Conflict can easily be a bad thing if it becomes personal or in any way an attack (physical, verbal or mental). However, it can also be a huge team builder if done well and it quickly lets a leader demonstrate their ability to work on difficult problems with others no matter what. Conflict in this sense is as simple as disagreeing on decisions or methods to use and it sparks discussion. Look to draw out both sides and seriously weigh the pros and cons of each side of a conflict before trying to move ahead. Get people to think of all consequences and thank people for participating in any disagreements.

- Be dependable

If you want to have impact on people, you must be dependable on what you say you will do. Be ruthless in completing any commitments you make and make yourself available to help as often as you can. This lets others depend on you and proves that you can deliver what you say. Be careful not to make commitments you cannot keep and don't ever make commitments for others unless they are involved.

- Show confidence AND openness

As a leader, you want to have impact on others by stepping ahead and having them trust you and depend on you to steer things forward. You must have confidence in those decisions to convince others to come along and you must also balance this while remaining open minded enough to ensure you are not going down a path, dragging others with you that leads nowhere.

3. Recognize Behavior Patterns

I considered whether this section should be on its own or otherwise part of adapting and communicating but I thought it deserves its own attention, especially when covering leadership from the people perspective. I love examining others from the perspective of behavior instead of my own interpretations or opinions. Behavior is real and is always something you can see or hear from someone else. It is about what they did or said and not a personal character judgment. There is no value in judging others and will never help you as a leader so it's much wiser to use behavior as a foundation for examining others instead of any personal opinions. Look at what they did and consider that, instead of what you might "think" or "imply". Judging others is very dangerous and will completely destroy your ability to lead. It will blind you, guide you by prejudice and create voids in relationships that are difficult to ever close back up. By using behavior, you can look at something as a single action, not a flaw or personality problem and get past it. This is not only with others, but yourself as well. If you put judgments on yourself, you will find you impose the same limitations on yourself.

Here are a couple of previous articles I've written about judgments and the dangers of it.

- [Happiness Suffers from Self Judgments!](#)
- [Don't Judge Others, Be Helpful Instead!](#)

Understanding others of course requires awareness like the section above but it's much more than that. There should be a deep understanding of people in order to enable that awareness and allow communication. I highly recommend learning the [DiSC behavior](#) model and seeing how it fits into understanding other people better. It's made a huge impact to me as a leader and I find it far easier to apply than other personality types. Seeing real things with real behaviors is a key step to finding change as a leader and to then work on changing those behaviors. Remember, you can't change someone's personality, but you can certainly change some of their behaviors. Plus it is a whole lot easier and more enjoyable since behavior is easy to see.

4. Communicate Meaningfully

Since leadership is really about people, you have to look closely at communication to be a great leader. Some think there is a specific type of communication style or method that is best for leadership, but I really don't think that is necessary or required. I think that communicating well simply means to get through to other people in a way that you impact them and can build the trust and relationship needed for you to successfully lead them. If that is happening, I don't think there is a right or wrong way to make that happen, I think it depends on the individual as a leader and any followers. Everyone communicates in their own way and so being genuine and personal is the important points here. Does it help to be regularly communicating, laying out direction, having clarity and to be a good well voiced speaker? Sure, but I don't think it limits you to not be those things either. Put attention to communicate your meaning, involve followers, give them the communication they want and that works for them and don't worry about how you communicate, it just doesn't matter that much.

5. Adapt

The last section I have about leadership from the people perspective is about a leader's ability to adapt. Not only are circumstances always changing that you need to adapt to, but so are the people you are leading. They will grow themselves, challenge you as a leader both positively and negatively and continually change. You must be able to adapt to these people changes as well. All the above pieces can assist in adapting and they will continue to need changes as long as you hope to lead. Leadership really is all about change so if you cannot adapt to the people you want to lead, you will never successfully lead them.

Expect people to change that you lead. Some people will come, some will go, others will follow you for ages, and some will hope to or even pass you in leadership skills in a short time. You must enable this, encourage it, allow it, and welcome it as a leader. Know the changes will occur, don't get discouraged by them and certainly don't hold back anyone else to quickly adapt, even if it's faster than you can as the leader. There are ways to adapt yourself, demonstrate this and then use it to lead others as well by showing the results of it. Look to teach others to adapt and adapt

them into your own leadership to take the journey with you. If you can adapt with the people you lead, instead of only adapting yourself, you can enable a large following to not only deeply believe in you and have trust and respect for you as a leader, but you will develop more leaders and yourself along the way. Now, that is leadership with people my friends!

Examples of Leading When It's About People

I have a few points listed here to help illustrate examples of some of these ideas and what it might look like to lead with people more than simply leading them. I'd love to read your stories and examples of leadership, so please comment them below...

- Integrity - hold your values strong and don't sell out for anything
- Always give (or at least include) your followers the credit for your successes
- Take the responsibility and blame for your follower's mistakes
- Do not self-promote, learn to be a [humble leader](#)
- Give decisions to your followers or at least include them
- Regularly ask for others' views and never judge them
- [Share your vulnerabilities](#)
- Help your followers anytime they need it
- Be fair and treat everyone equally
- Do what you say and hold others accountable for the same
- Encouraging your people to grow, to learn and to take on as much as they want to, at a pace they can handle
- Show compassion for others and what they share with you
- Be confident and positive in all your actions
- Read good books in your field and always encourage learning
- Be a storyteller
- Smile, have fun and be passionate about your goals!



Leadership always requires some level of risk taking. Risks are necessary to make changes happen and there will always be both personal risk, risk to followers as well as to the organization or group involved. The areas where risks are the most important to a leader are what I'll outline below.

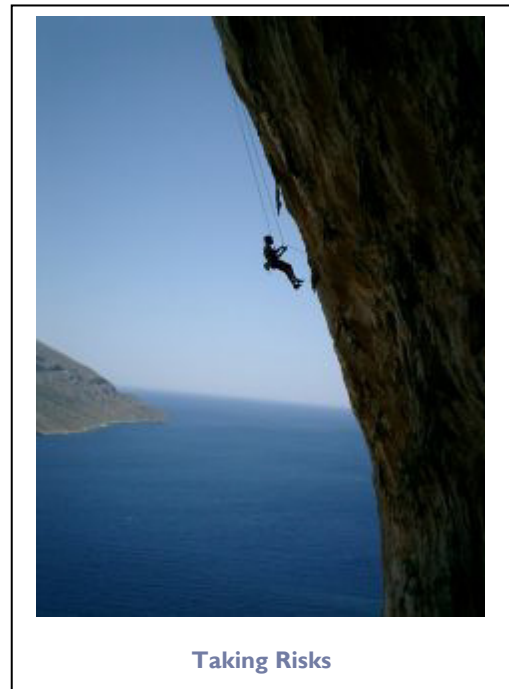
Comfort Zones

Comfort zones are really the perfect opposite of risks. They are the decisions and ways of doing things that have the least risks, the least unknowns and are easy for you to do. They do NOT have any risk. These are bad for leaders and a leader should never let these comfort zones dominate them. Having a willingness to take on risks means also to have a willingness to [step outside your comfort zone](#). Anyone who is too afraid to step outside their comfort zone is also too afraid to take the risks that are often needed as a leader. This is an important point as at least in this aspect, leadership is something to easily test for and I think this is often missed when employers or groups look for leaders. If an individual is give up comforts and ease to move towards and tackle the next challenge, they surely show great signs of leadership.

Comfort zones are everything from an individual's daily routine, to their lifestyle, to their work environment and habits or roles in their life and job. All of these things that are repetitive and lasting become comfortable and only the new things in life really make things change over time.

Challenge

Challenge is the next component when examining how to take risks. Challenge is really the part of any risk that keeps us from it. It is what makes it difficult and what steers most people away from it. However, challenge is the whole point of taking risks. It's the challenge itself that you learn from, develop skills from and improve not only yourself as a leader but all the people you lead through the challenge as well. There isn't any point to making things a challenge for no good reason so it's about taking on the right challenges and calculating risks to a point that justifies them when compared to the challenge that is faced to accomplish them. If there are ways to reduce the risk, avoid the risk or make the challenge less with the same outcome, then that is absolutely the path to lead people down. However, sometimes the willingness to take a risk even when the challenge is great, is exactly what a leader needs to do to show courage and ability to get through a difficult situation.



Taking Risks

These decisions by a leader as to when to take a challenge on or not and accept the risks is a cue that followers will carefully assess themselves. The emotions of the decision maker, the reasoning behind it and the considerations they take involving others are what followers are learning from when facing any challenge. A great leader makes these decisions transparent and does it with a moral basis, emotional attachment and passion to drive past the problem.

Innovation

Taking risks is done with some purpose in mind as well. There isn't any point in taking risks that don't pay off. There are however, hundreds of things that require risks in order to make them happen. Innovation is a big one of those. Innovation is when you look for new ways of doing things, building things or perhaps new ideas being realized as a product. This requires breaking new ground that no one has done before and so there are always risks involved. People and companies who are unwilling to take risks will become stagnant with no ability to innovate or change. In the forever changing world we live in today, innovation is required to lead people well. It enables change and opens opportunities that were impossible to see before the change occurred.

Innovation is not the job only of the leader. For innovation to happen at all levels and from followers as well, a leader must look to steer what is needed for a change or direction, but should never limit how to come about doing that. The adversity that exists in a team is far greater than any leader will ever have and so the possibilities and ideas generated from the whole group are always more than the leader could generate on their own. For this reason, it is especially important for a leader to not only allow innovation at all levels, but encourage and promote it as well. This will bring forth more ideas, more possibilities and enable more people amongst the followers to start having practice and interest in the decisions, risks and change as well. That personal interest that a leader generates among any followers is key to enabling a lasting improvement system or continuous change system.

Confidence

Confidence is huge for a leader to not only have but also to demonstrate. Building up confidence to make difficult decisions requires some history or track record of decision making as well. A great leader looks at all the decisions they have made and either learns from the ones that were mistakes or reinforces the factors that contributed to the good ones. This gives them confidence that they are making the best decision they can at the time. This fact alone that it is about the best decision possible at that time is what enables that confidence to be utilized. It is not that the decision has to turn out to be the best in the end. Often, more information or progress through a challenge, will reveal a different decision to be best and it's not until this point that that can really be evaluated.

Many people fear making that initial decision with the fear that it may be wrong so they need to evaluate and attempt to consider all possible options without ever making a decision. There is always more information available and it is easy to get stuck in information paralysis where you do nothing and just continually analyze the possibilities. A leader needs to have confidence that an early decision can progress things faster, even if that decision is wrong or needs to be changed later on. The risks can still be minimized by having option, alternate paths and a reasonable level of consideration, but the decision does need to be made and a leader must be confident in it to lead others toward that path as well. Others will likely have their own doubts about an early decision and many would prefer to spend more time before deciding on a route to follow. A leader must show their confidence in an obvious way to convince these people who are still

waffling about the decision that it is OK to proceed with it now. This is the kind of confidence necessary.

Confidence has its drawbacks as well so needs to be shown carefully. A leader definitely should not show confidence that comes across as arrogance. Be confident in the ability to get through problems, to make the change happen and in your ability to lead. Do not show the confidence that you are right about the decisions or that you will not fail. Failure is just a quick way to learn and so a leader should be quick to change when a decision is wrong, be open about it and admit the mistake and then turn around and again be confident that you can immediately use that mistake to move forward in a better direction and that you will in fact still achieve the results desired. Great confidence in the process, your followers and your ability to change quickly are what will enable you to take on risks willingly and be a strong leader.



Learn From Your Mistakes

Mistakes are unavoidable in life and leaders certainly make their share of them. Any time you look to break new ground or technologies or whatever it is you are leading, you open up many new avenues for mistakes and they are inevitable with change. You can't have one without the other and so learning to use mistakes well is an important leadership trait. The first point about mistakes is that a great leader learns from their own mistakes. They know when they make it and will quickly look at what can be salvaged or gained from the mistake as to avoid it in the future or to streamline some action or process to improve it next time. This makes no difference if the mistake is big or small, there is always something to be learned from it and mistakes offer an immediate piece of feedback to anyone who is wise enough to learn from it.



Mistakes are the usual bridge between inexperience and wisdom. (Phyllis Therous)

Another point of learning from mistakes is to also be a leader in this area and actually admit your own mistakes. Admit when you were wrong, and emphasize what you have learned from it and what your next steps are work around that mishap. If you encourage and set the example of owning up to mistakes quickly and working past them, you can quickly inspire your followers to do the same and look at the value of the mistakes instead of hiding from them.

Leave Room for Mistakes to Happen

If you have done the first part and owned up and admitted your own mistakes you have done a great service to those following you. You have proven that you are OK with mistakes happening as long as they are learned from. You must do the same for others. That is, give them room to make mistakes, make sure they know that and don't reprimand mistakes, instead simply follow up on what they have learned and that they have put in place things to ensure it doesn't repeat itself. If you make sure people know that they have some room to try new things, innovate, be creative and take some risks, then the fear of making mistakes is greatly reduced. Of course you don't want to encourage mistakes to happen when they are avoidable, but if you give people some extra time, room and allowance to do their own steps and learn in the process, they will be much more likely to learn from them as well. A previous article I wrote here called [The Power of Making Mistakes](#) should add some details if you are interested.

Sometime as a leader there is value is leaving a decision or process up to someone else for them to learn from it. Even if you know the best method or the result of some idea, there is great value in promoting others' ideas and seeing it though, even if there is a mistake bound to happen because of it. Adopting the ideas of others and letting the mistakes guide things beyond it will quickly grow all those involved and gain a lot of trust and respect of the leader when the mistakes are OK and not constantly punished. This fear of making mistakes is a huge contributor why people fear change, fear risk and don't step up to their full potential, so eliminating that fear of mistakes, eliminates much of that other baggage as well.

Show me a person who has never made a mistake and I'll show you somebody who has never achieved much. (Joan Collins)

Don't Dwell on Mistakes, Look Beyond and Move Forward

Learning from mistakes clearly needs some analysis of the mistake itself to gain value from it. This is certainly true and there are a few steps to use to analyze a mistake quickly and efficiently:

1. Accept that it happened and can't be changed.
2. Know there is always something to learn from it.
3. Look to understand it and the factors that caused it.
4. How could you have recognized the mistake earlier?
5. How can you avoid the mistake next time?
6. Are there similar things that might have a related mistake to avoid?
7. What has changed now to ensure that mistake doesn't reoccur?
8. Who else should know about this and learn from it?

So, once you have done this initial analysis of the mistake, it's time to move on. No matter how big the mistake was, just let it go and move on. Make the changes needed to avoid it next time and make sure that everything you spend time on now in accepting the mistake is with the future in mind, not the past. Put your focus on what you can do for next time, not what you should have done. Ask what individuals are doing now or in the future to ensure it won't repeat itself and remind people to think of ways to avoid the similar event. All these actions will move you forward and enable you to quickly adapt and deal with similar situations in the future even better and hopefully you will never make the same mistake again!

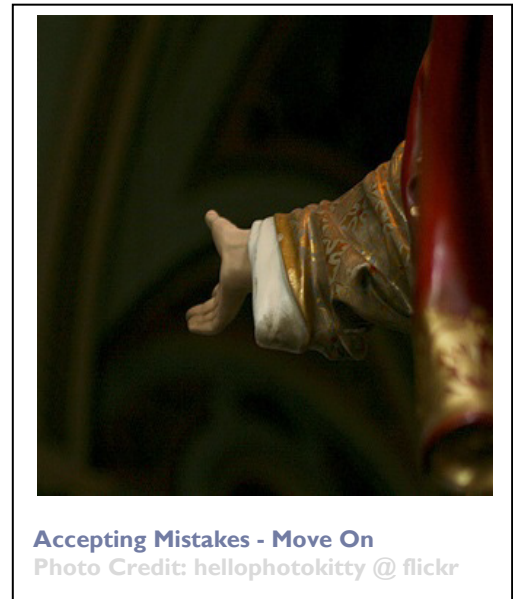
When you focus on the improvements and lessons learned from a mistake you reinforce the ability to make mistakes part of the process and something that is accepted as long as it improves things. There is no value in worrying about the mistake or dwelling on it after it is done. So, move on!

The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one. (Elbert Hubbard)

Mistakes to Avoid as a Leader

So, while all this encouraging of mistakes and learning from them are important as a leader to make some room for, they obviously need to be balanced and still minimized whenever possible ahead of time, especially when the risks are high. There are also some mistakes that will immediately set you back as a leader if you make them so knowing these and avoiding them is a big help in leadership. Here are my top 10 mistakes you can make as a leader so definitely areas to!

1. Pull the power or authority card
2. Do the work yourself because you are faster or better
3. Point the blame finger
4. Focus on tasks instead of results
5. Avoid change
6. Don't listen to or accept others' ideas
7. Complain or be negative
8. Hoard everything for job security
9. Claim or take any credit
10. Not showing appreciation





To me, leadership is often thought or even taught that it requires a person to be very pushy, aggressive and must stand out amongst any possible competition. I've focused this series on looking at how leadership fits an individual, not how an individual has to fit leadership. This is contrary since many still believe leadership needs that commanding, loud, direct personality with the best track record, skills and talents to make things happen. Well I say, "Bah!!!" That isn't what leadership is at all! A leader is not necessarily any better, smarter, or more skilled than others. A leader does however, have influence and impact with others. This unique capability doesn't have to be a trade off for a compassionate personality or a label of someone with an "ego". Leadership can be done with great humility and I believe it requires humility to truly be a great leader. You don't have to give up any bit of your personality to be leader, you can be a leader in your own way. The problem is, it's easy to lose your humility in achievement so this final topic on leadership is about staying humble with leadership.

"What should it profit a man if he would gain the whole world yet lose his soul." (Mark 8:36)

Humble Leadership

I've written several times about humble leadership both looking at what humility is and what I think it means to truly lead. You might want to check out these previous articles for more on that. [Being Humble: Leadership and Why Bothering to Be Humble?](#) (or as [Being Humble Series PDF download](#) from the free resources page).

Even if you've read those before I'll explore a little more what this humility means from the leadership perspective.

There are many leaders that think being a leader is about taking charge, having authority or a position to tell others what to do or to win influence over others because of self accomplishment. That isn't leadership, it's power and they are two very different things. If you want to be seen as a leader, stand out or emerge as a leader in your work or life, then likely that stems more from the desire of power than it does from leadership. Leadership is nothing about you, it's about others.

Humility is when you can remove the status and personal gains from what you do as a leader and begin to look only at what you accomplish in the lives of those who follow you. You know that any accomplishment or changes come about through those you lead and without them, you are

nothing. It's about recognizing others before yourself and taking a far step away from any ego and closer to a compassionate and genuine concern to make others around you better and able to do more. That is humble leadership my friends.

Blending Willpower and Humility

Willpower is a massive part of being a leader and having a strong will to improve things and change is what shapes the role of many leaders. They can use that will through difficult times, to get through impossible situations and to inspire others like no one could ever hope to accomplish without the same willpower. Blending that together with humility that a leader should have from knowing he needs others to accomplish anything will enable them as a much stronger leader. Putting willpower at work towards the people being led progresses things even faster creating a much more loyal group of followers. All of a leader's efforts and willpower should be spent and shared with others to ensure they experience it first hand and are empowered by it themselves. The blend of these abilities allows a leader to instil their own extreme level of will to all their followers. Having a strong will without humility can easily (without even intending it), build on a leader's ego and be a very negative influence to others.

I learned this first hand several years ago in dealing with what I considered (at the time) people who couldn't get the job done right. I had the will power to want to do it faster and push the deadlines, but doing this by either saying or demonstrating (I made the mistake of doing both) that I could in fact do it faster did nothing to help me emerge as a leader of people. It made me look strong in my skills, yes, but the people I had to work with didn't see this as helpful or as leading them in any way. Instead, it was very intimidating and quite a negative impact on them. The damage that this has done is obvious now that I have learned from that experience. I now see this in others as well and know better than to put my willpower to work for myself, because it does nothing. Instead, when I put my willpower to empowering others, encouraging them, and working to help and convince them that our plans will work, are achievable and that we will all succeed, I can take them much further without ever a mention of my own abilities. Blending humility with willpower is one of those areas that makes a difference between good leaders and great leaders.

Willpower is very useful for facing difficult situations, such as:

- to drive through low standards
- face mediocrity with a helping hand
- eliminate failure

Staying ambitious among a team and organization as a leader while remaining modest and non-boastful is what humble leadership is all about. I dare say it's the highest level of leadership, the most rewarding and it makes the biggest most lasting impact a leader can make.

Build Others

Leadership will always be about others and a great leader puts much attention towards that. Whether it is for skill development, filling a gap, enhancing areas for even better results or for succession planning, building others is done best by humble leaders. People want to learn from someone that doesn't think they know it all or are better than you. Staying humble while training and giving advice is an easy way to ensure they stay interested and lets you not only build their leadership skills, but also their confidence. That's because a humble leader will also encourage a person and credit them often. They can encourage a person to realize that they have their own talents and skills within their capabilities and that the teacher (humble leader) just helps to surface and release those skills. Compare that to a egotistic style sounding like this, "Just do what I tell you to do, I've been there and already know best how to do it!". Would you want to learn from someone like that? Would it give you much self confidence? I doubt it.

Leadership should also ensure that there is some level of succession planning. The things that the leader does on their own should be eliminated, as it is a single point of failure among a group. To get the best results from any team, there should not be a single point of failure and there should be built in through skills an inherent flexibility when it comes to resources. The leader should look to build others' with leadership skills the particular areas they do themselves so that ultimately they could be replaced. Many fear this approach as they think it can put other candidates in place for their role and put themselves as risk. It does in some ways, but from a leadership perspective, not really. First of all, the best thing that a great leader could possible accomplish is to lead a group to be self contained and able to produce the amazing results and drive for accomplishment on their own. A leader who can do this is extremely valuable, as they are a producer of leaders themselves. You can lead anywhere if you have the ability to produce more leaders in doing so. Listing that kind of value on your resume and portfolio has impact!

Servant Leadership

Finally I come to servant leadership. It's foundation is humility and means that you put others first, above yourself consistently. You'll end up doing the things you don't want to do and you'll take any consequences away from others to relieve them. These could be things like taking blame, sacrifice of work hours or giving up credit even when it is due. And this isn't done when convenient, it's consistent!

There are many ways that servant leaders lead, and it is usually obvious in their humility. Here are just a few:

- Will always take someone else's suggestion or idea over their own
- They don't ever need to get their own way
- They never argue to be right about something, they immediately close it and say, "you may be right"
- They hold their own opinion and let other's share first
- Want and query the opinion of others often
- Appreciate what they have and are given

- Never make excuses, they simply accept responsibility (even if it isn't theirs to accept)
- Will carry out any task, no matter how tedious
- Are happy to help others with anything

Servant leadership is based on love and help to others. A servant leader demonstrates this in every action they do, which is how they lead, by doing. I personally believe this is not only a noble way to lead, but a godly one. It was taught by the only perfect servant leader, Jesus Christ and is a powerful humbling way to lead. Learning this takes life experience (often the hard way by learning what NOT to do) and by studying and reflecting on other humble leaders. What makes them humble, how do you measure or judge someone's humility. How far would you take things to be humble and for who?

Learning to be more humble requires great attention and a change in your character traits to relate more closely to human relationships and lasting endeavors in life that includes others. Look to read more on servant leadership from leaders who have made great sacrifices and lead by love. They are not the typical top CEOs or the celebrity leaders that get the most publicity, they are the quiet, graceful and often missed leaders that leave the greatest impact of the hearts of many once they are gone.

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