

Seven Personal Leadership Skills That EVERYONE Should Develop

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INTRODUCTION

Thanks for downloading my complimentary e-book. There are SO many free info-products on the internet that I genuinely appreciate that you've selected one of mine.

I've been privileged and fortunate to work over the years with a large number of people who are either in positions of leadership, who aspire to leadership, or who have had leadership 'thrust upon them' and want to develop their skills.

Through observing and working with them, I've recognised that there are certain leadership skills that the good ones simply can't do without. These aren't the obvious things like knowing how to motivate people, being a great communicator and so on: those things are obviously important, and I'm choosing to focus here on personal skills and attributes that leaders, we believe, can and should develop.

To your success!

Annabelle Beckwith

LEADERSHIP SKILL #1: LISTENING

At the risk of stating the obvious, listening is a crucial skill for leaders to develop. Why? Well, first of all, no-one has all the answers without some sort of input from others.

More to the point, listening to people does two important things: it makes the speaker(s) feel valued and understood, both of which contribute to motivation, and indeed to further contribution from that individual or group. Nothing shuts down ideas, input and motivation quicker than people feeling ignored.

Listening also provides you with an insight and perspective that you wouldn't otherwise have...and for leaders, I can't overstate how vital this is.

Good leaders listen, and listen to the right people. Learning to do it and learning to do it well is a valuable skill which shouldn't be neglected.

Listening strategically



By listening strategically, I mean considering carefully to whom or what leaders are listening. Listening in the right direction can potentially have a profound impact on decision making and organisational direction.

There will of course be the usual things that leaders listen to: market factors, shareholders, regulators customers etc etc. However, there are a few other directions in which leaders should turn in order to listen strategically – and some issue of which they must beware.

Beware of 'Groupthink': listening to the same circle of opinions and the same peer group is limiting.

If everyone's in a similar position or has a similar mindset, is listening to each other, where is the challenge coming from exactly? Where's the raw, external perspective? The diversity of opinion? Where's the often needed boot up the backside?

If you tend to listen to the same voices most of the time, it's worth getting out more, and listening in different directions. Fresh perspective is vital for innovation and growth.

Beware forgetting where you came from: I love those fly-on-the-wall documentaries where the Chief Executive goes back to the factory floor, the call centre, the supermarket checkout or wherever.

They invariably learn a massive amount about their people by observing what they do, listening to them, and living their day to day experiences. Perhaps more to the point in terms of strategic listening, they gather ideas and customer insight that frequently translates into policy and/or new business.

Don't just listen up and listen out....listen down as well.

Beware the ticking clock: the world is probably moving faster than many companies can keep up with it. Fads can become trends which become major market forces with frightening speed.

Times are changing so fast, it's an absolute necessity to keep an ear to the ground, and I'd venture to suggest that using both formal and informal channels is the only way to maintain a true grasp of what's going on.

Market research yes. Internal reports, yes. But don't underestimate the value of taking a few minutes to listen and observe what customers are saying to your front line staff. Listen to what's going on in other areas of your customers lives. Listen out for apparently random connections in other sectors that could give you a commercial edge.

If you 'don't have time for that sort of thing', either make time or delegate it to someone else, and then honestly evaluate the return on investment of that time spent vs the information it yielded.

The mistake of thinking you don't have to listen

For whatever reason, many leaders often appear to feel that they don't have to listen.

Some undoubtedly feel the pressure of senior management to provide the answers. And some, frankly, seem to think that they have it figured out, have made it, and don't have to listen any more.

If you've ever heard yourself say:

'People expect us to give them the answers because we're their leaders'.

'I'm better informed than most'

'I don't have time to gather everyone's opinions – it would just muddy the waters'

'I know what I need to do: listening to other people could just derail me'

'We asked them last year – there's no point going back to them now...'

'I'm the leader, it's my prerogative' ...then watch out.

One of the quickest ways to destroy innovation and ideas, de-motivate people, create cynicism amongst staff and customers alike and undermine corporate and brand values is by either not listening to people (both internally and externally)...or by pretending to listen to them and then ignoring what they've said.

The bottom line is that genuinely listening – and in several directions – will motivate your people increase customer understanding, and can lead to profitable ideas and innovations being recognised, captured and implemented.

Establishing forums for listening

There's no point paying lip service to this sort of 'strategic listening': you have to actually do something to make it happen.

At a broad brush level, it's about creating a culture where listening is part of leadership, and where staff feel like active contributors whose ideas and opinions are valued. This has to be role modelled from the very top, otherwise it's just not going to happen.

It's also about creating and encouraging opportunities to listen in different directions, gathering best practice and ideas from other sectors and areas, genuinely listening to customers, and trying something different...as opposed to just analysing statistics.

Mix it up. Get a fresh perspective. Do something different. Learn from it. Develop yourself. And grow your organisation.

LEADERSHIP SKILL #2: SELF AWARENESS

To see ourselves as others see us – wouldn't that be something? Genuine self awareness, and an ability to understand how others see us and the impact that our actions and behaviours have on others, is an important skill for the leader.

As with so many things, though, balance is the key: understanding how we are perceived by others needs to be balanced by our own confidence and sense of self.

Misalignment of that balance – in either direction – can spell trouble for the leader: whilst as individuals we'll always judge ourselves on the basis of our intentions, we need to remember that others will be judging us on our behaviours.

Why is self awareness so important? Because it's the beginning of Emotional Intelligence, and as author Daniel Goleman puts it in his bestseller, this "can matter more than IQ".

In terms of Emotional Intelligence, self awareness is closely followed by four other factors:

- Managing your emotions
- Self motivation
- Understanding the feelings of others
- Managing relationships

So how, as a leader, can you become more self aware? Here are 5 top tips:

1) Try to objectively assess your impact

Being objective about our own behaviour is exceptionally difficult, because we'll rationalise and make excuses for ourselves where things are going wrong.



If your intention has been one thing, but the results are something different, take a close and objective look at yourself and your behaviours to try to understand how you might be coming across – not easy, I know.

I came across a stark example of this quite recently. A very senior executive in a global organisation had said his door was 'always open', but wondered how it was that few people ever seemed to cross the threshold, unless they were members of the senior management team.

A short while after this conversation, I relayed to him a concern that had come up in the workshop, from a couple of participants who shared the same office. His response was to cut me off mid sentence with the response "what do these people want? They need to be empowered and learn to deal with these things!"

Hmm ... let's see, now. Might there be a possibility that staff are thinking, "He SAYS his door is open, but if you go in he's likely to bite your head off"?

His intention might have been to encourage people to find their own solutions: his behaviour was very easy to interpret as that of someone whose door might be open, but his mind isn't. The impact was that people do not come through his door – it might as well be closed.

2) Be aware of the little things

Self awareness isn't just about the impact of overt or obvious behaviours – it's about the little things too.

Imagine a Chief Executive who gives a stunning performance on the platform at the AGM about his optimistic outlook in the coming year. A couple of days later, he steps into a lift and a junior colleague is already there. The junior colleague asks him how things are going. He shakes his head and says "times are tough". (Yes, this actually happened)

What's the understandable interpretation of this, in terms of the truth of the message and the character and integrity of the speaker? Which message do you think is going to be discussed in the canteen and around the water coolers of Head Office for the next month?

Non verbal communications and behaviours that take place on an ongoing daily basis need to be considered in the light of self awareness. And actively managed.

3) Having the humility to listen to feedback

For some leaders, this can be a bit of a stumbling block –particularly if they work in (and perhaps perpetuate and enjoy) a culture where hierarchy is important, and where leaders aren't challenged.

Sometimes, it's necessary to have the humility to just accept feedback, even if you weren't expecting it. During a recent workshop, I offered some impromptu feedback on delegate presentations. One or two commented during the break that they'd not been expecting individual feedback. Will you ignore it, then – because it wasn't asked for?

Norman Vincent Peale said that “Most of us would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism”. Given that feedback helps to build self awareness, it's necessary to be open to it.

360 degree reports are another case in point: I've done a lot of coaching around 360 degree reports (feedback reports gathered from peers and direct reports as well as managers). Occasionally I'll come across someone who rates their own abilities far higher than anyone else does – more often it's the other way round.

If your colleagues are saying one thing and you're saying another, it's worth considering the possibility that they can't ALL be wrong.

4) What if you're right and they're wrong?

I was coaching someone who told me that “I've really tried to understand my impact with this person, but the problem's not with me, it's with them”.

If you've been objective about really considering what's going on, this is fair enough. As I say, there's a balance to be struck between your own sense of self, and the other person's perception. You could well be right and them wrong. They might even have another agenda and are deliberately misunderstanding you or the situation.

If this is the case, what next?

This is where we have to move on, in terms of Emotional Intelligence, because you still have to manage your relationship with that person – influence them or whatever – in as productive a way as possible. And this will mean remaining self aware and confident.

No one should stop being self aware because they think they're the one in the right and the other person is wrong.

5) Beware 'impostor syndrome'

I've already said that balance is the key here, and this is just as valid for leaders who LACK confidence on certain issues.

I worked with a senior leader recently who, whilst acknowledging that her colleagues respected her, felt deeply self conscious about her humble 'working class' roots. The fact that she had a strong accent, she felt, was betraying to everyone that she was a local girl made good. She saw this as a weak point, as she worked with a number of people at this senior level who had had better educational opportunities than she'd had, and who spoke with what she perceived to be a more refined accent.

The issue about her accent had taken on far more significance than it deserved. She was starting to feel uncomfortable in her role and to doubt her abilities – feeling like an imposter.

It took a considerable amount of coaching for her to arrive at the conclusion that her accent and background might actually be a source of inspiration for those further down the corporate ladder, who'd had a similar start to her own. In this case, what she saw as a weakness could actually be turned into a considerable strength.

Self awareness is not about denting our confidence and bringing us down to the level of other people's negative perceptions. It's about genuinely evaluating our behaviours, how we come across, and the impact that we have on others, and building on this to develop our own abilities, and our relationships with others.

The leader who is not self aware is sticking their head in the sand ... leaving their backside dangerously exposed.

LEADERSHIP SKILL # 3: PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Easier though it might be to blame your staff, your boss, your company culture, the system, the government, the environment, your spouse, your dog ... sometimes, we all have to face the facts and admit “it’s me”.

Several years ago, I went through the corporate equivalent of a ‘messy divorce’, leaving an organisation with what I perceived as a bullying culture, and making a huge fuss as I did so. Whilst I don’t believe that the debacle was entirely my fault, it took me a long time (at least two years) to realise ... and accept ... that I had contributed to my own sorry situation. “Mea culpa”. At least in part.



Happily, leaving there was the best career move I ever made. But before looking at some of the factors that contribute to personal accountability, here’s a cautionary tale that illustrates what some leaders will do to avoid it ...

A few years ago, the UK’s members of parliament opened our government up to ridicule and condemnation by falsely claiming hundreds of thousands of pounds in expenses. In what can only be described as a national disgrace, our own elected politicians were, in effect, stealing from the public purse.

When the scandal was exposed, did they take personal accountability for their wrong-doing and offer to pay the money back? For the most part, they did these things instead:

Their first instinct was to try to ban investigations into the extent of the false expense claims. **They tried to hide the facts.**

When this failed, some claimed that the process for claiming expenses was faulty – it allowed too much scope for fraud. **They blamed the system.**

Some decided to show no remorse for their theft, and carry on as though it was ‘business as usual’. **They tried to pretend it didn’t matter.**

Some tried to say that their administrative staff had made mistakes. **They tried to blame other people.**

Others said that they didn't fully understand the process, it was very complicated and easy to get wrong. **They tried to claim ignorance as defence.**

Others said that they were only doing what they saw other people doing. **They blamed the culture of the organisation.**

Some said that the demands of their job meant that they hadn't been able to keep on top of all their receipts. **They claimed that they had had no time.**

At the end of the day, this wasn't down to the system, the culture, other people's mistakes or anything else: it was down to a group of people with no sense of personal accountability choosing to do the wrong thing – cheat the system and steal from the taxpayer.

The system has changed, and the worst culprits went from government office to prison. The damage done to the reputation of the British Government, however, and to the public's perception of Members of Parliament, was immense.

Personal accountability takes courage, humility and integrity:

Courage to accept the consequences, whether good, bad or indifferent, and to be prepared to make a stand when and where it counts.

Humility to admit that leaders aren't infallible, and to ask the question "how might I be contributing / have contributed to the problem?"

Integrity to remain true to your own values, and not lose sight – not just of who you are, but of the leader that you aspire to become.

It's not an optional extra for the leader. It's an essential pre-requisite.

LEADERSHIP SKILL # 4: ENCOURAGE LEARNING



If you ever get to a stage in your career when you think “I’ve arrived”, you stop learning ... and it’s obviously important that leaders at all levels don’t do this. Perhaps more to the point, it’s crucial that leaders act as role models for learning and development, in order to embed it throughout the organisation.

Cynics amongst you might think “Well she would say that –she’s in consultancy!” and I guess there’s an element of truth in that: but I wouldn’t be doing this if I didn’t believe passionately that it’s important, both to individuals and to businesses.

Here are three things to do with learning that will help leaders in any size of business.

1) Elevate the status of learning

I’ve written before about whether people approach training to build a person and their skills (i.e. in a positive and proactive sense) or whether they use it to fix problems (i.e. in a remedial, reactive sense).

If learning and development are seen as remedial measures, people are less likely to be motivated to learn – either on training courses or, more importantly, in their own time and in terms of their own personal development. And almost across the board, that whole personal development area is a huge learning opportunity that companies haven’t quite harnessed.

As a leader, making it obvious that you yourself are on a learning journey, passing on some of the things you’ve learned and referencing books, courses, online resources and so on will help raise the importance of ongoing learning within the company.

2) Condone the enjoyment of learning

Learning is serious business ... but it doesn’t have to be a mirthless drudge of lectures, powerpoint presentations and manuals the size of building blocks.

Years of research in both the training and development and education sectors point to the fact that the brain absorbs information (i.e. learns) through the five senses, amongst other factors, and that by far the most people learn best through auditory, visual and haptic means.

I was working for an organisation a few years back which approved a very interactive, innovative series of workshops for junior staff, but insisted that senior managers at the same organisation needed a more 'serious' approach.

They seemed to somehow be suggesting that once you get a 'senior manager' plaque on the door, you suddenly lose your sense of humour and personality and more to the point, lose your ability to learn by any other means than didactic instruction. This of course, contradicts both academic and medical research ... to say nothing of common sense. Do senior managers enjoy boring training courses any more than the rest of us? I doubt it!

Of course, content needs to be tailored to the level of the participant group. Delivery methods, though, need to be as engaging as possible in order to be interesting and relevant to learners.

It should be remembered that people learn more when they are relaxed and enjoying themselves. There's no age or management limit to that.

3) Support the implementation of learning

So! Someone comes back from a training course, full of ideas, keen to test out some of their new found skills! What happens next:

a) Hurray! The company already has a learning system in place, and with the full support of their managers and colleagues they successfully build confidence in implementing their new skills until they become habit, modelling positive behaviours and practices in the process.

b) They have a stab at some of the techniques from the course that they're more comfortable with, stash the course manual in a drawer somewhere, and remember to tick that training course off on their performance management checklist.

c) They try one of their new techniques and their manager /colleague jibes "Oh, well we can see that YOU'VE been on the training course!" leaving them somewhat crestfallen and reluctant to try to implement anything else they've learned.

Clearly individual leaders at all levels of the business can have an impact on the level and extent to which they provide an environment where learning and trying new skills is the norm, and where practice is monitored and encouraged, and many already do this.

It can be easier, though to assume that people will come back from a training course or other learning intervention and just 'get on with it', without recognising how the environment can affect the extent to which this is done.

Leaders who continue to learn inspire others in the organisation to do the same. Leaders who recognise when other people are learning and coach and encourage them to persevere in implementing their new skills are taking huge steps to develop a learning culture.

And why bother? In the words of the Chinese proverb "Learning is like rowing upstream: not to advance is to drop back".

And who wants their own career, their department or their company to do that?

LEADERSHIP SKILL # 5 – MANAGE STRESS AND

MAINTAIN WELLBEING



Inevitably, leaders shoulder a lot of responsibility for the departments, businesses and organisations that they oversee. This does not mean, though, that neglecting your own health wellbeing and soldiering on regardless is a viable option: you're no use to anyone as a stressed out, burnt out wreck who's running on empty.

So here are 5 things to consider as you manage your own state of mind and wellbeing:

1) Recognise the signs

Working under pressure is a little bit like the old 'boiling frog' metaphor: you gradually become more and more pressured until suddenly you develop a stress related illness.

It's important to be able to distinguish between what, for you, is an appropriate and productive level of pressure....and what becomes panic or extreme stress where you might be appearing to function, but you know yourself you're not making quality decisions, and are becoming irritable or obsessive.

Think carefully: when you start to feel stressed – where physically do you feel stressed? Prickly scalp? Knotted stomach? Tense shoulders? Where?

Begin to recognise your own physical symptoms and consciously name them. Recognising and acknowledging these early signs is a key stage in being able to address them.

If you've been feeling very pressured and are feeling the strain, seek the advice of a medical professional before it's too late.

Recognise also whether you're going through a period of short term stress which you can manage and where's there's light at the end of the tunnel....or whether the pressures are long term with no end in sight. The latter really does require urgent action.

2) Re-evaluate what's important

Find a pen and paper and make a list of the ten things that are most important to you. 'Family' can count as 1, rather than naming them individually, and the list can be in any order you like.

Be very honest with yourself here: there's no right or wrong. Some of these things might be factors like 'the need for recognition' or 'the need to be wealthier than my peers' and so on – things that you might not want others to know.

Look at your list, and cross off 3 things which aren't quite so important as the rest.

Of the remaining things on the list, cross off a further 2 that don't mean as much to you as the others.

Of the 4 items you have left, pick your top 3.

How well do these 3 life priorities reflect the amount of time you give to them? For example, if your family comes out near the top but your job requires you to be flying all over the world all the time....where's the balance?

If you look back at your life, it's unlikely that you're going to regret not having spent more time at the office. Consider carefully what the important things in your life actually are, and begin to set yourself some goals around work-life balance.

Define what, to you, a more balanced life with less stress might look and feel like, so that you have a positive situation to work towards and don't get stuck on a relentless treadmill of pressure, feeling powerless as it grinds you down.

If you're trapped in a mindset that says 'I can't get off the treadmill – I have a family to support, bills to pay' then think very carefully indeed. Do your family want you to be a burnt out wreck? Do your creditors want you to become ill and be unable to pay your debts? Almost certainly not. You owe it to everyone – including yourself - to take the matter in hand.

3) Retain perspective

Years ago I worked for a short while on a live, daily TV show. On one occasion, I was working with a TV chef who was assembling a pudding of some sort. Somehow, between the rehearsal and live transmission of the piece, a jug of custard had been moved from one side of the table to another, partially obscuring one of the camera shots.

During the debrief afterwards, some of the directors team were furious about the move of the custard, and went on a considerable length about the problems it had caused. The fact that no-one watching the show at home would have noticed – or even cared – didn't seem to be a consideration. Eventually, one senior member of the team brought the argument to a close by saying. "So a jug of custard got moved. Nobody died".

Refresh your perspective from time to time. Take a step back. In the grand scheme of world events, where does it stand?

4) Don't be a martyr

Pretending you're fine and ploughing is almost never the best option. You might feel for some reason that this is the noble thing to do, but if it's a habit, it absolutely isn't.

If you're stressed, it's highly likely that you're irritable or moody and aren't making quality decisions...which is going to impact on those around you and on your business or career.

Some leaders find themselves taking on too much because they don't want their staff to feel pressured, working unreasonably long hours themselves whilst ensuring that their team clocks off at 5 pm.

Learn to delegate, learn to trust the ability of others, and accept that you're not earning any brownie points by being a martyr and are potentially establishing an unhealthy work ethic.

I used to work with one boss (I was very junior at the time) who pushed himself to unreasonable levels. The company was working on an important project that would impact the entire industry, and the stakes were high. However, he decided to model himself on Gordon Gekko, proclaiming that 'lunch was for wimps' and working long hours without a break.

I left before the project was completed, but I did hear that some time afterwards, that the man had a breakdown. Was the project worth it? I'm guessing not.

5) Do something different

Make sure you have some out-of-work activities that are absolutely not work related. Golf. Needlepoint. Sky diving. Anything where your brain can have a chance to switch from pressing matters and focus elsewhere.

Simply trying to relax by doing nothing sometimes isn't enough...the mind just wonders back to the stressful issue. In these cases doing SOMETHING - mentally taking yourself somewhere else by

reading, carrying out an activity, or going somewhere new – is the best approach to take in order to refresh and rebuild your strength.

Make sure that pressure doesn't turn to stress. Don't ignore it if it does.

If you look after yourself, you'll be better able to take care of – and lead – others.

LEADERSHIP SKILL # 6: LEVERAGE THE TALENTS OF OTHERS

One of the marks of a strong leader is his or her ability to leverage the talents of others in order to reach organisational (and individual) goals. Leadership isn't about knowing or doing it all yourself, it's about enabling others to learn, grow, contribute and achieve excellence.

1) Know your people

I hardly need to say that unless you know your people, you're not going to know where their talents lie and therefore you're not going to be able to leverage them.

How well do you know your team, what motivates them at work, their out-of-work interests and so on?

A participant on a course I was delivering recently told me about a team member of his who was terrified of public speaking. Common enough, you might think. However, the course participant knew that this individual sang in a band in his spare time and regularly performed in local venues at the weekend.

Using the rationale that if you can SING in front of a crowd of people you can probably speak in front of them too, he coached and encouraged the singer to transfer his skills to the public speaking arena ... with conspicuous success.

Had he not made the effort to get to know his team, this vital talent – and its link to the workplace – might have been missed.

2) Look beyond the obvious

It's all too easy to focus on the obvious, to pigeonhole people according to their job title and to assume that, because of the work they do, they're going to be good ... or conversely not going to be good ... at certain things. Look beyond the obvious, though, for hidden and unexpected talents.

I used to work in an organisation where, in the marketing department, we were frequently required to come up with catchy titles for performances, projects and publications.

Whilst it was well outside his remit, someone who we'd often ask for input was the Finance Officer. Why? Because he had a knack for coming up with great titles and captions and had a way with words.



If we'd pigeonholed him as the number cruncher who held the purse strings we'd have missed out on some great headlines. I'd like to think too that he enjoyed being asked to contribute to something that wasn't directly linked to his job role, but was still of benefit to the organisation as a whole.

3) Don't value your skills above everyone else's

This is a bit of a lesson in self-awareness and humility, both of which have a role to play in leadership. Many people, whether they realise it or not, will place their own skills at a higher value than those of others.

To the creative person who loves coming up with new ideas, the logical pragmatist is "boring and conventional". To the strategic realist, someone with strong people skills is "touchy feely". To the 'blue sky' thinker, the person who needs to establish a context is "stuck in the past".

If you are to leverage the skills of others successfully, you must recognise them for the values that they bring, and not undervalue them because those values might be different to yours.

At the end of the day, leadership and leveraging the abilities of others isn't actually about you ... it's about them, and about the business as a whole.

Recognising, valuing and leveraging the skills of others is something that requires us all to leave our egos at the door and give ourselves the challenge of looking for people who aren't just 'like us' and able to 'fit in', but who are better than us at a given thing, and who will provide the necessary challenge to move everyone up a notch. And that's not always as easy as it sounds.

LEADERSHIP SKILL # 7: DEVELOP THE LEADERS AROUND YOU

There are many indicators that show how good a leader you are, and your ability to develop leadership skills in others is an important one. It's easy to be so involved in the business of leading (or leading the business) that it's easy to lose track of who's climbing the ladder behind you, or to just assume that other leaders are stepping up to the plate behind you of their own accord.

Here are some thoughts on developing others ...

1) Identify and encourage those with leadership potential.

Keep your eyes open for people who demonstrate integrity and leadership capability, not just in terms of their output, but also in terms of their behaviours.

Bear in mind that this capability can manifest itself in many different ways, and some of them might be easier for you to spot than others. By that, I mean it might be easier for you to spot people with similar leadership skills to your own, but possibly less easy to identify people with a different set of leadership skills to yours (this links back to the point I made in my last post about not necessarily valuing your own skills set above others).

I'd strongly suggest that you observe HOW potential future leaders operate, and don't just look at their achievements on paper. In the short term, you might find it acceptable to advance someone who, let's imagine, exceeds their sales target consistently, but takes short cuts and is a little underhand in how they achieve this.

In the longer term though, negative behaviours - acting without respect or integrity – are likely to result in resentment and stress amongst colleagues, leading to lowered motivation and lower productivity. And sometimes, as we've seen in recent corporate and political history, the consequences can be far worse.

Remember, too, that not everyone sees their own potential, particularly if they are at an early stage in their career. It might be up to you to identify and nurture the leaders of the future.



2) Coach, don't always instruct.

Coaching in its truest form involves asking the coachee questions that help them to clarify their thoughts, find their own way forward, and take action. It doesn't involve giving training, advice or instructions for them to follow.

Obviously enough, as a leader, you're going to need to direct people some of the time. But consider how empowering it would be if, rather than trying to provide all the answers to a potential leader, you let them define themselves and, with your coaching, make their own way forward.

It's the difference, in simple terms, between saying "I think you ought to do xyz to improve this situation" and saying "what do YOU think you can do to improve the situation?". Yes, it takes longer to coach someone than to give them the answers ... but the impact and the buy-in and the long term result in terms of building the confidence of future leaders are all much more powerful.

In developing a culture of independence where people are solution focussed rather than coming to you with their problems and expecting you to have the answer, it's also a strong approach.

3) Become a mentor.

If you've reached a level of leadership to which you know others might aspire, you could think about offering to be a mentor. Mentoring differs from coaching, as here you'll be offering pointers and advice to the person you are mentoring. In effect, you have already travelled some way down the path that they wish to follow.

There are plenty of opportunities for you to become a mentor, within larger companies, within enterprise agencies and indeed within the voluntary sector, so seek out opportunities.

A strong mentor can have a profound impact on the leaders of the future, so it's a great way to 'put something back'.

4) Provide opportunities for leadership.

It's worth taking a step back sometimes and allowing someone else to take the leadership reins for a while, perhaps on a specific project or task. You might well remain ultimately accountable, but that shouldn't stop you from allowing others to step forward and test their potential from time to time.

Conversely, it's worth giving some thought as to whether you might unwittingly be blocking leadership potential in others, perhaps by assuming control too much, or taking too much of a directing approach.

5) Be a role model

This, I'd suggest, is the most important factor of all. At some level, you ARE a role model for others, whether you're aware of it or not. And I'm sure we've all come across people in our lives who are dreadful role models and who provide an exemplar of what NOT to do and how NOT to treat people. I know I certainly have!

In short, aim to be the leader that you would want to follow. And remember that, while you're developing leaders of the future, you're also developing your own abilities to coach, mentor, and lead, and make a genuine difference.

So there we have it - 7 leadership skills that everyone should develop. Of course, there are many more – the ability to motivate people, the ability to think strategically, the ability to prioritise, to make decisions, to communicate effectively and so on.

I wanted to scratch beneath the surface at some of the less obvious, more personal ones and I hope it's given you some food for thought as you develop your own leadership style and imprint.

If you'd like to develop our own leadership skills or those of your team, do get in touch about our coaching and bespoke training programmes:

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