



*The* **MANAGER'S**  
*Communication*  
**TOOLKIT**

**LEADERSHIP GUIDE**

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# LEADERSHIP

What makes you want to follow or work for one person and not another?

Whom do you remember as the best leader you ever followed?

What was (or is) the nature of that leader's character?

What made this leader so special?

**Great leaders get ordinary people and teams to do extraordinary things.**

Let's take advantage of some of the wisdom available from great leaders and students of leadership.

Throughout this guide, you'll see quotes and advice from those who have devoted years of study to the question of what makes leaders effective. I hope you'll take advantage of these as points of reflection and inspiration for further study and improvement of your own leadership "toolbox."

Successful leaders exhibit the following five traits:

1. They know themselves;
2. They establish vision and direction;
3. They empower their teams;
4. They align people in positions to maximize each individual's strengths;
5. They consistently motivate and inspire. Let's take a closer look at each of these attributes, especially as they apply to successfully communicating with stakeholders as a team leader.

## KNOWING YOURSELF

### Know Your Personal Ego Needs

Leaders are more effective if they make decisions without the influence of their egos and judgments about people or situations. Individual ego needs produce blind spots and cloud judgment. The more you know yourself and the part you play in relationship issues, the easier it is to be nonjudgmental, objective, and fair.

A leader's ego can also present itself as fear. This fear—of failure, loss of status, lack of recognition, or other factors—translates into destructive actions such as always needing to be right, verbally attacking others, indecision, failure to delegate, withdrawing, risk aversion, or taking inappropriate risks. To start learning about yourself, pay attention to how you react throughout your day. Ask yourself these questions:

- Why do certain people trigger reactions in me?
- When do I feel angry?
- What part of me feels threatened, and why?

### Continue to Grow as a Leader

In order to remain effective, leaders must continue to grow. Every situation you encounter as a leader or a team member presents you with a growth opportunity. This includes occasions when something doesn't work out the way you planned. History demonstrates clearly that everyone fails from time to time. The distinguishing feature of great leaders is that following failure, they know how to get up, keep going, and learn from their mistakes.

As the people with whom you associate most closely day in and day out, your team will not fail to see your process in action as you work on yourself and make needed changes. Don't be afraid to be appropriately vulnerable to your team; let them see that you recognize your flaws and that you are willing to change. A leader who can admit shortcomings without becoming paralyzed by self-doubts will serve as a powerful example for any team.

Your personal growth plan can start with a simple three-step strategy:

1. Request and receive regular feedback from a trusted mentor.
2. Do a "personal lessons learned" introspection every week that includes these questions:
  - a. What went well?
  - b. What could I have done better?
  - c. When did my ego cause me to not listen or to handle a situation badly?
3. Meet monthly with the leadership on your team and do a group evaluation of the past thirty days.

## **ESTABLISHING VISION AND DIRECTION**

### **Develop a Vision for the Future and Strategies for Producing Changes**

Change is continuous, but sometimes it can be difficult. Even positive change can present complications, requiring shifts in thought and process. A manager must provide a clear vision in order to ensure successful change. You must maintain a clear sense of the final destination that will endure despite temporary shifts in course.

The leader's vision is the team's road map to success. What defines success for your team: Having happy users of your product? Meeting financial goals? Hiring twenty people? Meeting cost and schedule goals? Swift response to changing customer requirements? Whatever spells success in your organization, it is up to you as leader to articulate that and to keep it constantly in the forefront of everyone's efforts. Without a vision, how can any enterprise or team know where it is headed? How can people make correct decisions without knowing the end goal?

### **Communicate the Vision by Words and Deeds**

A leader needs to communicate the vision in both written and verbal media. A good leader embraces the vision, lives the vision, and becomes a champion of the vision. Every decision and discussion should be put in context of the vision for the organization and its success criteria. As you look at priorities and assign activities, ask yourself, "How do these activities line up with our success criteria?" Activities that do not line up should be avoided or redesigned.

### **Facilitate Completion**

A good leader understands how to bring a task to completion, first of all by defining what it means for an activity, document, or product to be complete. People need to know they have successfully completed a task in order to become fully involved with the next one. Even in a chaotic environment, when requirements and priorities are constantly changing, it is important to have a structure that allows teams to feel a sense of accomplishment. There are many ways to define completion; sometimes, for example, completion is defined as simply meeting the requirements within cost and schedule objectives. However, sometimes the concept of completion must take into account more complex factors such as customer satisfaction.

## **Develop a Plan Consistent with Your Goals and Requirements**

While this sounds obvious, it is amazing how many management approaches and associated plans are designed counter to the vision and goals of the organization or company. Know and understand the goals and requirements of your organization and stakeholders. Goals can be things like: maximizing profits; creating the best product to gain market share; diversifying the business customer base; having superior user satisfaction. As a leader, you need to know exactly what the goals are. Where you put your resources and energy will shift, depending on your goals.

It is imperative that a leader communicates to the team, to the organization, and to management the priorities and the vision of the organization. When focused on priorities and clear on the vision, each person on the team will be able to make decisions to maximize the goals of the organization.

## **EMPOWERING YOUR TEAM**

### **Push Down Responsibility and Authority to Empower the Team to Make Decisions**

One of the worst things that can happen is for decisions not to be made, or for all the decisions to be made by the manager. How discouraging! Such an organization typically grinds to a halt when the leader is out; teams become disgruntled; and personnel with innovative ideas and self-motivation leave the organization.

There is a significant difference, however, between micromanaging and leveraging control. Micromanagement is telling the team how to do the job; Leveraging control tells the team what they need to do. The difference between telling the team how to do the task and what to do is huge. There is a time and place for micromanagement, but it should only happen for specific reasons and short bursts of time.

How can you create an environment that will allow and accommodate the appropriate sharing of decision-making responsibility? First, your team must operate in an atmosphere of trust. Provide an

### **Environment of Trust**

What does an environment of trust gain you? Trust encourages teams to work together to solve problems. When a team has a culture of trust, both from management toward the team and vice versa, there will be more disclosure of information, more acceptance of others' ideas, and a more comfortable, relaxed, and creative atmosphere.

In an environment of trust, ideas are encouraged and fostered. Work becomes exciting because people feel like they are part of the solution. Trust is an amazing teambuilding tool. An environment of trust starts with the manager. If the team, customer, or upper management senses hidden agendas, withholding of information, or lies, they will hold back in turn. Trust is a self-reinforcing process.

How do you create a trusting environment? Share information so that people are not forced to make assumptions, and be honest in your communication. It's that simple.

The only way to create a trusting environment is to communicate frequently, openly, and honestly.

## **MAXIMIZING INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS**

### **Know Your Team and Their Talents**

Analyze your team members and find out their natural talents and skills. Take the time to learn who on your team is good at seeing the big picture; who is good at completion; and who is good at understanding details. Realign your staff to take advantage of these different skills.

Aligning people based on their talents requires flexibility, initiative, and energy. The alternative, however, is a team that doesn't trust its leadership.

### **Define Clear Authority and Accountability**

How do you feel when you don't know who has the authority to make a decision? When no one is accountable, what happens to the goals? As a leader, you need to provide clear roles and responsibilities. Be very clear when you state who has the authority and the responsibility for major activities. One of the worst situations to be put in is to have the responsibility for a task but no real authority. Putting team members in such a bind can be frustrating and destructive.

## **MOTIVATING AND INSPIRING**

### **Show Passion and Excitement**

A passionate leader will promote passion and excitement throughout the team. Take a moment to think about whom you would rather work for: a manager who is excited and happy about coming to work each day, or a manager who is indifferent and distracted.

It has been observed that a team with great passion and commitment, but inferior resources and equipment, will almost always outperform a team with a ho-hum attitude, even if the latter team has state-of-the-art equipment and resources. As a leader, it's up to you to exhibit a sense of excitement and anticipation about what you are doing. This attitude is contagious—and that's a good thing.

### **Help People Energize Themselves to Overcome Barriers to Change**

Change happens effectively when people get excited about it and its benefits. However, any change, no matter how small, requires a transition.

One of the most effective ways to facilitate a transition is through frequent communication. A lack of clear information can create a lot of disinformation, which is disruptive and destructive. On occasion, there will be people on the team who, despite your best efforts at communicating through the transition, will continue to be disruptive, resist change, and discount new ideas. They become the center of negative energy flowing through the organization. They constantly complain and undermine the leader's authority. Unless you can get these individuals functioning from a better place, they can poison the health of your organization. The maxim, "One bad apple ruins the batch" applies to organizations as well as produce. In such cases, there are two primary options open to a manager:

1. Work to move the individual(s) out of fear. This is always the best option in the beginning. However, if the benefit you receive from having the person in the organization does not outweigh the amount of time you spend dealing with the backlash of this person's behavior, it is time to take a more drastic move.
2. Move them out of the organization. This is the easiest and quickest way to "fix" a disruptive personnel problem. However, sometimes it can cause unintended change by either starting a wave of people leaving the organization or creating a knowledge gap. Always weigh carefully the costs and benefits of removing or replacing a team member.

It is imperative that the manager communicate frequently with disruptive individuals. In this way, even if the decision is to move them off the team, it can be done in a way that benefits both the individual and the team.

## **Be a Role Model for Ethical Behavior**

The manager sets the culture and tone of the organization and team. If the leader sets a high ethical standard, the culture becomes one of similarly high standards. But why is it important to have an organization with high ethical standards? What does it mean to be involved in an ethical organization or team? How do you set and maintain a high ethical standard?

Ethics is the process of determining right and wrong. Organizations with high ethical standards are characterized by honesty, clarity, and openness. Risks of all types are reduced, because collaboration and honest discussion typify the team, from top to bottom.

As a manager, you need to show the team, by your words and actions, what is right or wrong. If the team sees you lying to your manager or customer or cutting corners, they will assume that type of behavior is acceptable. If team members see you take home office supplies, waste time with non-company-related online pursuits, or do personal activities on company time, they will assume these behaviors are acceptable for them as well. This can cost any team valuable time and money.

Of course, it is easiest to behave ethically when things are going well. Good people who believe they are ethical will sometimes behave unethically when an organization, company, or project gets in trouble. The most common example of this is lying about the status of a task. However, people have to know about issues in order to help fix them. A team who hides or lies about status is in big trouble—not to mention ineffective. To resolve this:

- Keep communication open.
- Keep listening.
- Actively manage risks.

Open discussion and management of risks promote honesty and clarity.

## **Positive Energy Creates More Positive Energy**

Think about whom you want to work for: A boss who is energetic, believes in the organization, and is optimistic about the future? Or a boss who is pessimistic and complains? Positive—and, unfortunately, negative—energy from a leader permeates throughout the organization. A wave of positive energy pulls people together, makes them believe in their mission, increases productivity, and saves money and time. Negative energy from a leader creates more negative energy. The team spends time complaining, whining, and not focusing on the success. Such teams typically end up over budget and past deadlines.

## **Care about Your Team**

Have you ever had a boss you believed really cared about you? How did it make you feel? Didn't you work harder for that person? This may not mean your boss wasn't tough or demanding—just that he or she truly cared. How can you show you care as a manager?

## **Listen to Your Team Members**

You can learn so much by listening more and talking less. Keep your ego in check, and don't assume that everyone wants to listen to you talk.

## SUMMARY

Great leaders project a sense of caring to each team member. They genuinely concern themselves with the welfare of those they lead, realizing that people are the most important part of any organization.

In an atmosphere of caring and mutual trust, great leaders operate with transparency, honesty, and the highest ethics. Great leaders know themselves; they establish a vision and direction; they empower their team; they align team members according to individual strengths; and they motivate and inspire.

**Become a great leader people will remember!**