

BE A LEARNING LEADER

Introduction

Leadership Lessons is the title of a combined training, coaching, and series of self-study tools on the topic of leadership. This tool, *Be a Learning Leader*, serves as a handout to accompany the Learning Leader training module, but it also works well as a stand-alone study guide. The objectives of this tool and the module are to offer a simple definition of the complex topic of leadership, outline what we think it takes to lead well, describe the progression of development, increase your commitment to learning, and offer tips that will help you accelerate learning.

What is Leadership?

Our simple definition of leadership is “Bringing out the best in others to achieve meaningful goals that are in the best interest of the organization, it’s customers, and it’s employees”. Leadership isn’t position or power, it’s the ability to influence with or without authority.

What Does It Take to Lead?

Leadership takes a lot. It takes many areas of personal and technical competency, strong character, and admirable behavior. To lead with and without authority you need to earn the respect of others with capability and credibility. *Capability + Credibility = Leadership*

Let’s start with capability. You’ve heard the saying “natural born leader” to describe individuals who seem to transition easily into leadership roles. It’s true that some of the best leaders often have natural attributes that lend themselves to the role, but those attributes are combined with knowledge and skills gained through training and experience. Leadership behavior requires a combination of *attributes, knowledge, and skills*.

- Leadership attributes include trustworthiness, fairness, likeability, confidence, humility, creativity, and many other qualities of strong character.
- Knowledge required in business includes subjects such as marketing, accounting, and science. Staying current on the environment that affects your industry is also a knowledge requirement.
- Skills such as writing, influencing, and delegating are examples of skills that we demonstrate in applying our talents and know-how.

Attributes + Knowledge + Skills = Capability

Leading without authority is real leadership. The authority of a title, a job level, or having people actually reporting to you may sometimes make it easier to get things done, but it’s no guarantee that others will deliver. No matter what level you are in an organization there are many times you need to lead without authority.

How you show up, what you say, and what you do must consistently earn leadership credibility. Your confidence and your willingness to take risks, your collaboration with others, and your refusal to throw anyone under the bus earn leadership credibility.

$$\text{Integrity} + \text{Admirable Behavior} = \text{Credibility}$$

Notes (Include your definition of leadership):

How Do You Get What it Takes to Lead?

When it comes to leadership development, one size does not fit all. Every individual has unique strengths and evolving interests and development needs. We intentionally begin our work with the topic of learning because learning is where leadership begins and ends. Learning to lead is a life-long process and even the best and most seasoned leaders will say that they haven't yet mastered the role.

There seems to be a path of development. It may not always be linear but each set of competencies can build a foundation for the next level.



"It's what you learn after you know it all that counts." –Harry S Truman

Sometimes on the path of development we might take a step forward and two steps back to do some fine-tuning and practice to strengthen the basics. For example, you might be working on being a better communicator while at the same time you are improving a leadership skill of providing accountability for results; but one thing is very clear – you must excel at managing you before you can lead anyone else.

Manage you. We're only human so sometimes we make mistakes, let standards slip, and let things get in our way. Everyone has a few areas of self-management to improve on. You may have a bad habit to stop or a need to be more organized. Maybe you've gotten so busy that you aren't exercising or getting enough sleep. Maybe your house needs some repairs or your wardrobe is out of date. Manage you by noticing when you are getting off track and take action to get back on track. Manage you to be your best self.

Think strategically. This is a basic requirement for leadership (and life). When we don't make time to think and plan, we know it and others know it. When senior executives are asked to choose the #1 success factor that contributes to their success, most would probably say it's preparation. Preparation is strategic thinking. It takes stepping away from the rush of daily activities for reading, study, asking insightful questions, analyzing and evaluating, and writing.

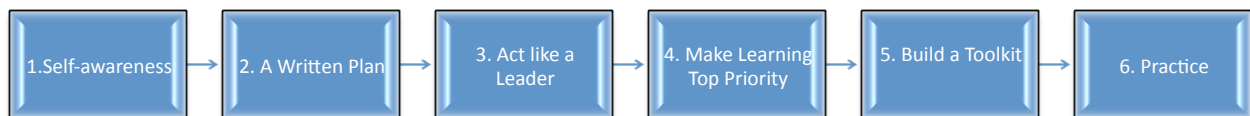
Communicate effectively. Not being able to communicate effectively is a deal breaker when it comes to leadership. What you say, how you say it, and whether or not it is understood and accepted determine whether or not you will have any followers. You need to write well, easily engage in conversations, speak well, and deliver clear and focused messages that get quickly to the bottom line.

Build relationships. Leaders who make it to the top and stay there are, of course, smart but they are also collaborative and enjoyable to be around. People tend to want to be around, talk to, work with, and buy from people they like. Being able to make a good first impression and being skilled at establishing and nurturing relationships are way more important than proving how smart you are. Put people before results, learn how to adapt to different personalities, and give up the need to win at all costs.

Bring out the best in others. This is a pseudonym for leadership. Leadership requires followers who perform at their best and deliver the right results. They'll follow you if you treat them with respect, inspire, coach, provide feedback, and hold them accountable. Leaders need to let go of some things in order to lead well. The activities that brought them success in the past as individual contributors can sometimes detract from their ability to lead. Leaders need to empower others to do things their own way, enable collaboration, and facilitate alignment across the organization.

Notes (include insights you have about what attributes, knowledge, and skills you'd like to strengthen):

A Roadmap to Leadership Learning



1. Your learning journey begins with **self-awareness**. Pay attention to your thoughts and behaviors and seek feedback from others. Put support systems in place to help you show up at your best.
2. Have a **written plan**. With your self-awareness high, you are ready to set your development goals and write them down. Include strategies and tactics as well as measures of success in your plan.
3. **Act like a leader**. You belong in your role and you have a responsibility to step up. Act like a leader in the way you talk, dress, and behave – and in the way you talk to yourself.
4. **Make learning your top priority**. Learning is not an extra task, it's part of the job. Stay current and constantly grow your skills to stay in the game. Since there is never enough time, take the time from something else. Action usually comes before motivation, so if you are not passionate about learning, force yourself to take repetitive actions needed to develop the habit that will lead to the passion. Commit to act on at least one new idea or skill a week.
5. **Build a Toolkit**. A tool can be anything from a reference book to a brief handwritten note. Create a paper or electronic file and name it "Leadership Lessons," or Learning Toolkit. In it, save useful tips, exercises, and ideas that will reinforce your learning. Organize it by topic. Keep track of what you learn – build a toolkit you can refer to. Keep notes from training, ideas you pick up from mentors, highlights of books you read, and various tips, articles and reference guides to reinforce your learning.
6. **Practice**. Practice makes perfect. Put some structure in place to support your learning; e.g. an accountability partner, a book in your briefcase, time on your calendar, magazine subscriptions, etc. Brainstorm with your colleagues to come up with ways to make sure the action happens. Commit to teaching leadership lessons to others. Teaching others is practice and it's one of the best ways to learn.

Notes (include your insights about the roadmap and the actions you'll take to accelerate your development):

Learning Styles

There's been a lot of work done on learning styles and the results show that we have a preference for the way we learn. Here are descriptions of the three predominant styles of learning.

"Analyzers" need to study, scrutinize, and think about new information before acting. Analyzers want to read the instruction manual. They worry about mistakes more than the other two styles.

"Observers" need to watch a process from beginning to end. Don't start in the middle or try to show them just one part of a task. They like models and demonstrations and will typically say: "Show me." They like instructional videos and shadowing others to learn a job.

"Doers" jump right in and learn through trial and error. They are impatient with instruction manuals and demonstrations and will typically say: "Just let me do it."

You may have a combination of these styles, but one will be dominant. And we can all reinforce our learning by taking notes, taking action on new learning right away, and teaching others.

Notes:

1. Which style are you?
2. How do you know that?
3. What will you start doing to make sure your learning sticks?

Summary

Here's a quick recap of what we've covered:

- Leading without authority is real leadership.
- Leadership behavior reflects a combination of capability and credibility.
- Capability is recognized when you demonstrate your attributes, knowledge, and skills.
- Credibility is earned with your integrity and admirable behavior.
- Growth seems to follow a path that begins with self-management. You need to manage you well before you can lead others.
- You can accelerate your development with high self-awareness, a written plan, your commitment to learning, resources and tools, and practice. Part of self-awareness is knowing how you learn best and putting yourself in situations where you can learn that way.

Many people write pretty good development goals but only a few people actually take the repeated actions they need to execute strategies and tactics to learn and practice new learning and behaviors.

Are you one of the many or one of the few?