

Leadership...Intentionally

Word Count: 990

You have arrived! You have the corner office, the bigger business card and the outward respect of all those who now realize you command the future of their paycheck. You have more money, a longer title on your business card and as you walk through the halls of your office, people begin to look busy. This is it! You've made it, finally...and that euphoric feeling will last for about... hang on... okay... and now... it's done.

The reality is that you are a leader, with or without that title and that office. The reality is that only 24% of the population of middle managers involved in current national studies is showing a well-developed set of leadership traits, yet 83% of those same managers see themselves as well developed. That means that the way you see it, isn't necessarily reality. You may have arrived and those folks that now report to you may appear to believe you are their leader, but the way they see it, REALLY, is reality and what they are seeing is different.

Leadership takes work; intentional work. Much as any relationship takes work. You don't get married and then let the relationship take care of itself, do you? Or do we as a nation think that this is the way it works. Marriage license in hand equals all the work is over. Bigger title on card in hand equals all the work is over. Hardly! The work has just begun. Employees don't trust you because you say to. Employees don't respect you because you say to. Employees don't believe you care because you say you do every once in a while anymore than they produce high quality work in the time you ask for it, merely because you ask. You have to earn these rights and that garnering of the corner office is not the sum total of the work it takes.

Okay, well, what work is involved? It isn't as difficult as it may sound and we have already established that you are already a leader. Here is the secret: no matter what anyone tells you, you ARE a leader of the voices in your head, the actions that you take and the perceptions and beliefs that you hold to be true. If you wish to lead other people, though, one piece of the work will entail honoring and understanding those very same things in all the other people you lead. It is an on purpose, intentional, decision to see the people you lead as equally valuable contributing parties to the work that you will be responsible for having completed. That is step one.

Value and honor the contributions of those you work with

Each of the people you lead have experiences, backgrounds, beliefs, perceptions, and skills that got them where they are. Ignoring those would be fatal to the team's unity. Teamwork only happens when each member of the team feels valued, special, and involved. This isn't about you telling them you value their work and then fixing it behind

their work. It is about you showing each team member that you value their judgment, efforts, and work. If it isn't exactly the product you asked for then that leads to step two.

Shift the focus of your role to the development of others

One of the greatest challenges of middle management in this country is figuring out exactly what their priority is. Some say the work they do. Some believe it to be the people they lead, but aren't sure how to show it. Some say the priorities change depending on the day, or rather the fire drill of the moment. No matter what, the priority of management may shift, but the priority of a true leader is the development of those they lead. The greatest leaders practice skills of empathy, listening, and flexibility to allow others to grow and make mistakes that let them learn. Yet, in these same national studies mentioned earlier, only 5% of the study population has well developed skills in this area. A full 95% of middle managers show a need for training in empathy, listening skills and flexibility. Does that mean that 95% of managers really do subscribe to the "my way is the highway" philosophy? This will not win you the best leader on Bosses day award, much less the respect from others and pride of ownership from the members of the team you lead. If it is your project, your way, what are they to have pride in?

Ask those you lead for help and have enough self-esteem to accept it

Those you lead may have an answer that you have been trying to figure out. Don't let an over-inflated ego over office space and position status get in your way of allowing those you lead to play an active role in the work they are producing. Ask them to help you and you bring them along. Deny their help and you clearly demonstrate a belief that they couldn't help, shouldn't help, or aren't "special enough" to help. If that is what you believe then perhaps it is you the leader who will benefit from a deeper belief that you are "special enough" to let others contribute. It shouldn't take away from your status unless you let it and in fact, the combined efforts of you and those around you should elevate the entire team and the entire project.

Leadership is an intentional practice, a conscious decision. Leadership... Intentionally is the way in which we believe all leaders practiced their leadership skills, or at least that is what employees tell us. What, you weren't born with leadership traits? Welcome to the rest of the 76% of middle management who would benefit from more training in the most common leadership traits. You were born a leader of you, but to be a leader of others requires intentional practice of new skills. When will you begin to lead...intentionally?