

# The Leader's Pocket Guide for Leading Yourself, Others & the Organization



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# 01

## Introduction: The Importance of Strong Leadership



An organization is only as strong as its leaders. They are responsible for dictating the culture and values of an organization through their actions and behaviors. Ultimately, what happens at the top trickles down to the bottom. Employees look to their leaders for behavioral cues on how they should act and behave.

In fact, the leadership skills (or lack thereof) of an organization's managers and top brass have a huge effect on the well-being and job satisfaction of employees. A 2015 Gallup study<sup>1</sup> found that 50 percent of employees quit because of their direct managers. So much hinges on the leader-employee relationship, from turnover rates to successfully transitioning through a merger. Leaders need to be at the top of their game to ensure the success of themselves, their employees, and the organization. To get there—and stay there—leaders must continuously invest in learning and development. In this guide, you'll learn the key areas leaders must develop on a personal, interpersonal, and organizational level to support the success of the organization.



02

# Leading Yourself



In order to lead others, you must first be able to lead yourself. Focus on improving your personal leadership skills to increase your focus, efficiency, and ability to deliver on your accountabilities.

## Have a Vision for Yourself

Just as a project is more likely to be successful when a specific objective is defined, you're more likely to become a better leader when you map out your specific vision for yourself. Why? Because vision drives action.

Think of the vision for yourself as the “point of direction” for your goals. By visualizing what this looks like you'll be better able to create concrete, actionable goals that will get you there. When you imagine your future as a leader, this vision will significantly impact your actions to get there.





## Developing Personal Leadership Skills

True leaders know they're on a lifelong journey of learning and development. There's never an "end" to the journey of leadership—leaders must be continuously sharpen and apply their skills to stay at the top of their game. After all, the skills that put you in a position of leadership—often known as functional or technical skills—are usually not the skills that will make you a great leader. For that, you need people skills, and the people skills needed to become a world-class leader can be *learned*.

As a leader, a big part of your job is managing your own improvement. To do so, it's helpful to perform a periodic self-assessment of your priorities. Try following these self-assessment steps first posited by lifelong learner, Benjamin Franklin:

- 1 Identify your areas of improvement.** Then identify *what* you want that improvement to be.
- 2 Rank relative importance.** Put your areas of improvement into a list, from most important to least important. Consider whether your need to improve in a certain area is immediate or whether it's a skill that will be mastered later in your career.
- 3 Chart the result.** Plot your areas of improvement and their relative importance on a chart—your x-axis should be labeled “short to long term” and your y-axis labeled “low to high,” referring to relative importance. This chart will reveal what skills are most important to master right now, and when you should start focusing on skills for the future.

- 4 Assess and take action.** With this data, you'll be able to determine whether your current priorities are in alignment with the skills you should be concentrating on. You'll also be able to create a plan for how to tackle skills that will increase in importance down the line.

While the skills that must be mastered will vary from leader to leader, there's a core list of people skills every good leader needs to develop. Consider focusing on the following skills in the course of your personal leadership development:



## Relationships

Strong relationships are built on mutual trust, with trust meaning that you can be relied on. Only when trust has been established can a relationship focus on issues of much deeper significance. This is a skill that can't be mastered overnight—and that's by design. Trust is strengthened through each interaction as each party evaluates the other.



## Time Management

Good leaders have good habits—and one of the best habits you can adopt is making a daily to-do list. Getting it all down on paper allows you to focus on accomplishment, rather than remembering things. As a leader, managing your time also means looking at the big picture. Building in time to look at things from this point of view allows you to manage your employees, capacity, and projects in order to optimize productivity.



## Communication

Effective interpersonal communication should always employ three elements: style, passion, and fact. Style refers to interpersonal skills like body language and tact, passion refers to one's inner commitment and enthusiasm, and fact refers to logic like persuasive arguments, replicable information, knowledge, and evidence.

To achieve a positive face-to-face interaction, you must strike the right balance of style, passion, and fact with the right person, at the right time. The audience and circumstances determine the appropriate proportion of these three elements—but know that every element is crucial for strong communication.





## Goals and Vision

Leaders unify teams by creating visions that empower and goals that provide direction. The vision is the final destination, while the goals, also known as objectives, are the steps taken to achieve it. In order for this to take life, commitment from the whole team is needed.



## Conflict Resolution

For healthy *and* effective conflict resolution, focus on cultivating teachability and integrity in your team members. Teachability refers to the willingness to learn and apply what's been learned—in this way teachability goes way beyond being a “good listener.” Integrity, meanwhile, is displayed through consistently doing what you said you were going to do. Fostering teachability and integrity in your teams won't eliminate conflict, but it does allow your team to move forward, instead of backward, after conflicts and not repeat mistakes or get into the same conflicts over again.



## Stress Management

Making major decisions, managing people, navigating change—all of these responsibilities (and more!) leave leaders pretty stressed. Unfortunately, stressed-out leaders are leaders who can't think clearly—and that leads to poor decision making. To manage stress, you must hone your emotional agility. Emotional agility refers to approaching one's inner experiences mindfully and productively. Due to stereotypes associated with being a leader (e.g., strong leaders don't show emotion and must always be in control), leaders often feel pressure to bottle up the negative feelings brought on by stress. Not only is that personally harmful, it halts your productivity. Instead, allow yourself the opportunity to feel the full range of your stressful emotions—then take action based on your values, *not* your emotions.

Bottling them up doesn't make your stressed-out feelings disappear, it just gives them room to surface in toxic ways.





# 03

## Leading Others



When leading others you are responsible for those in your charge. Their productivity, their achievements, and their improvements are heavily influenced by the talent and insights of their leader. By honing the right set of skills, leaders will be fully capable of unleashing employee potential, which in turn supports the success of the overall organization.



## Leading by Example

Employees take behavioral cues from leaders. Therefore, “Do as I say, not as I do” is not the optimal attitude—you must lead your team using both words and actions. Keep in mind that employees are able to tell if your heart’s not really in it. Your words and actions must be genuine; otherwise, your employees will see right through you and many other things will suffer as such.

## Accountability

Leading others means being held accountable for others' actions and results. Leaders must take full accountability for team outcomes the good and the bad. Accountability as a leader also means always looking for ways to improve your team's results and making them a reality for next time. Get into the habit of conducting a "post-mortem" at the completion of a team project by asking: *What could we have done better as a team and as an individual?* A post-mortem bridges the gap between accountability and action by providing the team with the information they need to achieve a different or improved outcome the next time.



## Coaching

Coachable moments will present themselves during day-to-day activities, and a coaching-minded leader will be able to seize the moment and turn it into a valuable learning experience. As a leader, coaching is one of the best methods to employ in order to strengthen others and unleash their full potential. Essentially, as a coach you have two priorities:



Close gaps by developing the required skills in your team members.

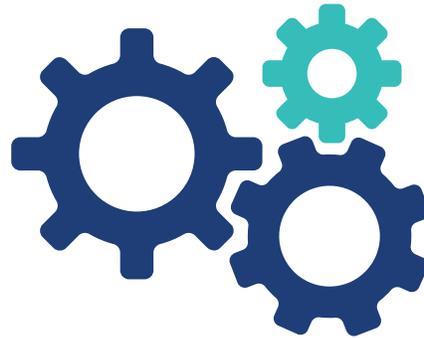


Build abilities that are *even* greater than what is immediately required—thereby building for the future.

How do you make these happen? By following these six steps:

- 1 Secure a commitment from both parties (leader and individual) to close gaps and build abilities.
- 2 Identify what needs to be strengthened.
- 3 Identify how the leader can support this.
- 4 Establish frequent and ongoing communication throughout the process.
- 5 Recognize and appreciate that different people will learn at a different pace and in different ways.
- 6 Tie why strengthening abilities is important to the larger-scale goals of the individual, leader, and organization.

Coaching doesn't always require one-on-one meetings or training with individuals, but it does require that leaders always have coaching—and these six steps—top of mind.



## Productivity

The good is the enemy of the best. It's a well-worn mantra, but it's certainly true for leaders who strive for greatness—from themselves and from their teams. And it should be your mantra when it comes to productivity as well. To get as much done as possible concentrate your efforts where they will make the greatest impact in the time allotted. To determine what's best to focus your efforts on, focus on the value of a task or project, not the amount of work required.

## Empowerment

Empowerment is not only key to the employee experience, but it dramatically influences the organization as doing so successfully can improve the quality and value of the results of the organization.

To do so leaders must be equipped with the tools and mindset to drive vision and set direction, while allowing employees to take control of how it will get done.

Here are six things you need to be able to do effectively to manage empowered employees:

- 1 Initiate frequent, honest, and open communication.
- 2 Initiate discussion to identify problems, ideas, and progress.
- 3 Provide and reinforce a clear, focused vision and direction.
- 4 Ensure relevant training is provided.
- 5 Clearly define boundaries, and then allow freedom of action within those boundaries.
- 6 Have fun!

Following these points will ensure your team knows what to do, but has the freedom to decide how best to execute—and that's what leads to empowered and inspired action.

## Providing Feedback

For feedback to stick and be of value, keep communication simple. Teach less so your listener will learn more by choosing the crucial pieces of information to communicate. Then, give the listener time to understand it. Focus on giving constructive feedback to course-correct as needed, and find opportunities to celebrate wins.





# 04

## Leading the Organization



Ultimately, leaders at this level are responsible for driving organizational results by successfully leading their organization with a strong personal conviction for the charted course of action. Couple a strong personal conviction with the following skill set, and you will be prepared to effectively lead at an organizational level.

## Mastering Organizational Communication

What should communication look like on an organizational scale? One word: repetition. Don't underestimate your employees' need to hear the message or focus again and again (and *again*) for it to sink in. Employees need to internalize messages, not just hear them. To achieve this, your messages should be repeated several times in different formats (which will help your message sink in for those with different learning styles).



## Leading an Engaged Workforce

One of a leader's most difficult responsibilities is to obtain a shared commitment to outcomes from every individual in the organization. Doing so builds the necessary conviction for employees to participate. Foster a shared sense of commitment by developing and living your company's mission every day and in every situation. For projects and major initiatives, paint a vivid mental picture of the final outcome, which gives your workforce something concrete to work toward.

Your drive to build an empowered and engaged workforce may be hindered if your company is full of knowledge vacuums (i.e., a lack of understanding in key areas). Knowledge vacuums create uncertainty and tentativeness in those you lead. So—fill them. For example, if you often hear the refrain “I don’t know why we’re doing this,” be sure you’re providing the full rationale for the initiative. If you know that your employees are wondering “What’s in it for me?” then you need to anticipate and explain foreseen consequences for individuals. Filling knowledge vacuums gives your workforce the clarity and confidence to fully commit their energy to the organization.

## Accelerating Organizational Performance

Individuals are only able to operate to the limit of their knowledge and skills. So, if you want to accelerate organizational performance, you must invest in ways to push that limit. Two main ways leaders can do this are education and delineation. Empowered employees will want to learn more so they can contribute more, which means it’s up to leaders to support that want with relevant training.

With more education under their belts, employees will be able to contribute more without putting the company at risk—if leaders manage their boundaries well. Boundaries that are too restrictive will confine employees, limiting their performance. While boundaries that allow too much leeway will fail to support employees, leading to feelings on being lost. Strike the right balance and watch your organization flourish.

## Create a Continuous Learning Culture

An organization that wants to grow has a workforce who has a hunger to learn and continually develop, in order to be the best. As we mentioned above, continued education is important for individuals so they can feel personally empowered to perform to their potential. That's what learning can do on a micro level.

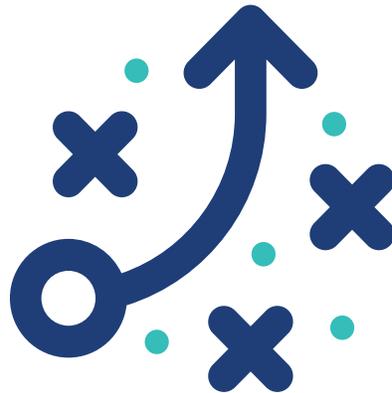
On a macro level, fostering a continuous learning culture leads to innovation which improves the organization's standing in a competitive marketplace.



That means investing in skills and leadership training at all levels—from the C-Suite to the frontline, and everyone in between. This should always include an investment in retention strategies, so the learning lasts long after the training session ends.

## Strategic Planning and Execution

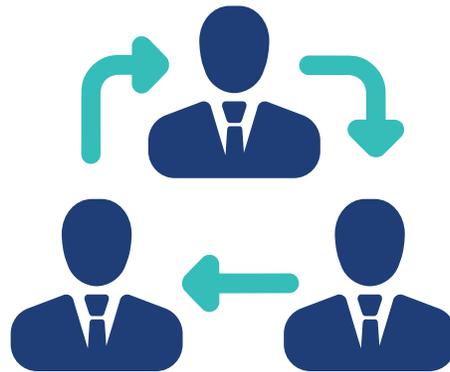
A strategy is only as good as its execution, and execution is only as effective as the thinking behind it. A leader's ability to think and operate strategically, and their ability to execute at the practical level is critical. Strategic skills are those which are crucial to formulate policy, establish direction, and determine how resources should be allocated in order to achieve the larger vision. Tactical skills, on the other hand, are those skills which "put feet to the plan." The importance of clear vision and thinking cannot be underestimated (the strategic skills), but without good tactical skills the benefits of thinking will never be realized, and will slowly dissipate.



Clearly if an individual is strong in both areas, then there is a huge benefit: the strategic thinking takes into consideration the tactical realities; and the tactical realities are driven by the importance of the strategic plan. This is what a maximally effective leader is truly capable of for their organization.

## Leading Organizational Change

Whether you're faced with a merger or introducing a new company direction, shepherding your organization successfully through change is a major test of leadership. To pass the test, you must know where you're going, and where you're taking others.



Leading through change starts with clearly defining your current place, in terms your team understands. Be sure to validate this—where you think you are may not be where your employees or customers think you are. Get all your information aligned and all parties on the same page about your current reality.

Then, use similar terms to describe your vision for what will be. Describe both how it will look and how it will feel to be there, so you meet your employees' intellectual and emotional needs. Doing so will create a shared vision. Furthermore, you can direct and motivate action by drawing on both intellect and passion to influence outcomes. Drawing on enthusiastic passion will get your employees to commit to the outcome, while drawing on intellect provides the clarity and direction needed to capitalize on that passion effectively.

## Succession Planning

A strong organization is one that can thrive long after you leave as a leader. Start leadership training for individual contributors early and continue through all levels to prime the leadership pipeline; consider every employee as a potential candidate for advancement to ensure future success.

In addition to investing in leadership training at all levels, it's crucial that you take the time to identify and focus on linchpin positions in your organization; those roles that are absolutely essential to your organization's long-term health. These are not always executive level positions, but they may include your essential middle managers or those between middle management and the C-Suite. Prime the leadership pipeline with these positions in mind to ensure your organization will succeed long-term.



# 05

## Conclusion: Bringing It All Together



Throughout your journey of leadership one thing will always be needed—continuous learning and development. Successful leaders are humble leaders, those who recognize that there’s never a point at which they’ll “know it all.” They embrace, and in fact relish in the challenge of the lifelong leadership journey.

Leaders who want to improve in turn inspire employees to want to improve—and they provide opportunities to do so with leadership and skills training. Training at all levels supports employees’ personal development as well as organizational goals. The kinds of leaders who will steer their organizations to long-term success are undoubtedly the ones who recognize that being at the top of their game improves the organization, the customer, and their employees.



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