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THE ART OF INFLUENCE



MASTERING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

TO MOTIVATE YOUR TEAM

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a topic that will typically interest businesses, managers, and CEOs. It is certainly very true that these are people who should try to understand what makes a good leader, and who can benefit from following leadership tips and advice.

In this e-book, we will be addressing the concept of leadership primarily from this angle. Most examples will pertain to leaders within organizations – whether those are charitable organizations, or whether they are massive corporations.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEADER?

Leadership is incredibly valuable then, but unfortunately, it is not simple and easy. In fact, to demonstrate just how challenging leadership can be, keep in mind that a lot of people – including those who are in leadership roles – actually have no idea how to be a leader! We have an image of what leadership means, and we often think of it as being “in charge.” That means we need to micromanage our staff, and it means that if they do something wrong, we need to shout at them. Right?

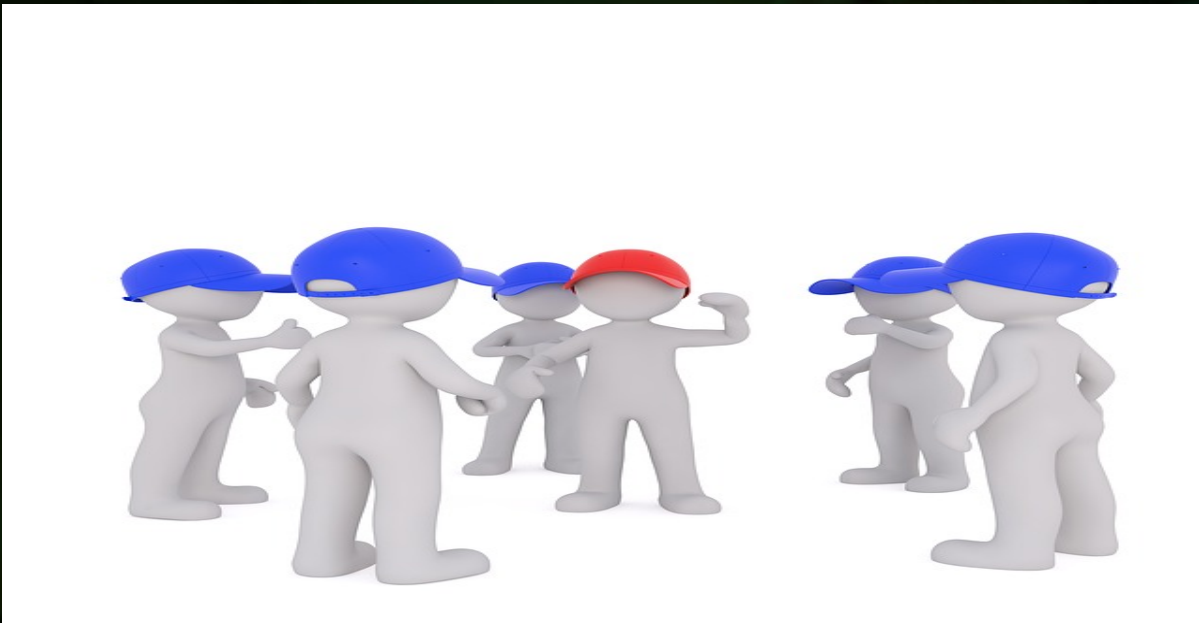
So how do you go about motivating a team that isn't working its best? We'll get to that more in future chapters, but the idea is to guide and not force. Your team were selected because they each should bring important new skills to the table. Your job is to create an environment where they feel comfortable to flex that muscle and employ those skills.

At the same time, you must inspire them to want to work, and to help place the right person on the right task so that they feel enthusiastic and excited to get to work. You need to provide clear and concise instructions, but then also step back and let your team's skills come to the forefront.

Being an influential leader is about nurturing, protecting, inspiring, guiding, and sacrificing.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS



One of the most important skills for any influential leader to cultivate, is communication. Your ability to write and speak will greatly impact on the way that people treat you, and the way that they respond to your instructions.

Consider these tips for providing clearer instructions:

- Provide all instructions right from the start. “Need to know basis” does not apply here.
- Don’t assume anything. This is related to the above point. But if you have a strict requirement, you cannot assume that your recipient will know that and plan their work around it. Don’t wait until they’ve wasted hours doing something unnecessary to point out the precise specification!
- Be clear and concise. You can write a more detailed instruction if you want, but make sure that the key specifications are written in a bulleted list that is extremely simple to follow



- Demonstrate where possible. This is a very useful tip as it will help to show exactly what it is you’re looking for.

HOW TO COMMAND RESPECT

One of the most common questions in regards to leadership is this: should you be feared or liked? Some leaders are effective because they frighten their team into submission. When you are a strict leader who has been known to reprimand the team, this can gain you a reputation for being nonsense. People therefore don't want to upset you, and thus they will do precisely what you instruct.

That's one approach anyway. The other approach is to try and be liked. The idea here is that you become someone that people enjoy spending time with, and who can actually enjoy socializing as a part of the team. You are a friend to your team, which means that they will want to please you out of respect and out of kindness. Thus, when you ask them to do something, they do it!

So which is better?

Ultimately, neither. Your aim should be neither to terrify your staff into obedience – which simply creates ill feeling. Likewise, it shouldn't be to try and be the class clown, which will undermine respect.



SPEAK SO OTHERS WILL LISTEN

You've been in your office allowing your team to talk among themselves outside, checking in every now and then to ensure everyone is okay. Now it is time to talk and to provide some strategy or direction. How do you do this so that people will listen and take what you have to say to heart? Being able to speak in a commanding manner is actually one of the most important aspects of leadership outside of the office too.

SPEAK MORE SLOWLY

Tip number one is to speak more slowly. Doing this will make you seem calmer, which in turn will make you seem more confident in what you have to say. At the same time, speaking more slowly makes your voice sound lower, and it makes you appear more intelligent. You'll also be less likely to stumble over your words this way. Think of pretty much any heroic leader from fiction, and they will normally have a measured, deep, booming voice. You can accomplish this by simply speaking more slowly.

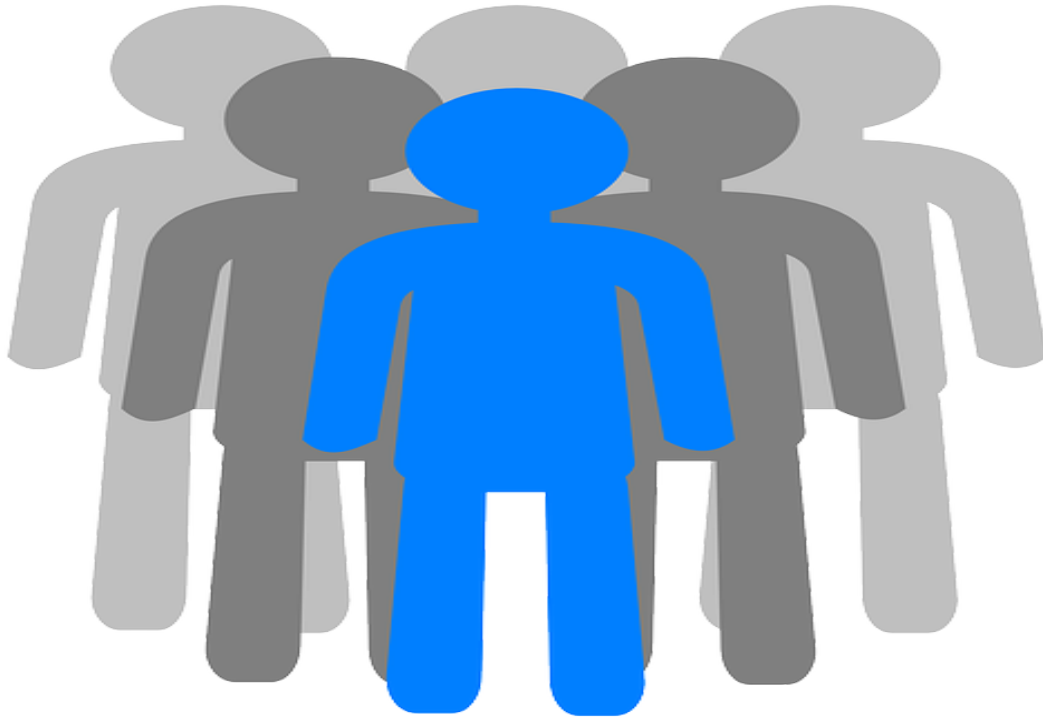
LEAVE SILENCE

Another tip is to recognize the power of silence. Don't be afraid to ask a rhetorical question and then let it hang. Don't be afraid to build some suspense for what you're about to say next!

Too many of us feel a constant urge to rush everything we have to say out at once. In fact though, it is often the silence between the individual statements that really has the most impact. It shows poise, control, patience, and confidence.

When you aren't talking and getting your point across though, learn to be entirely still. This again will help you to evoke confidence and calm, which will create a powerful aura around you that makes other people want to listen.

KNOW YOUR TEAM



As a leader, your job is to achieve some kind of goal, or reach some kind of target, all by encouraging your team to do their best work. Again, it is not your job to micromanage that team or to do the work for them. Rather, you are simply encouraging them and giving them a safe place to exercise their inherent abilities.

BE INTERESTED IN YOUR TEAM

One of the most important aspects of getting the most out of a team is to know them well. That means taking a personal interest in them as people, as well as having a solid understanding of what it is they do for your organization. One of the most fundamental aspects of this, is to recognize what the key skills of each member of your team are, and then how you can put them to the best use. If you have a member of your team and you're failing to maximize their potential, then you are simply wasting money.

PUTTING YOUR TEAM TOGETHER

Another important reason to know your team well, is so that you can know who works best with who, and then make sure that they are paired according to that information. Likewise, consider factors like "convergence and divergence." This tells us how people placed in groups will typically grow more alike over time, while also becoming more different from those around them. This process can result in a "tribe-like" attitude, which might ultimately create problems within the office.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TEAM

Finding ways to get the most out of staff is a constant struggle for business owners and managers who are constantly told different things and given different information. One minute it's a good idea to incentivise staff with potential bonuses, perks and rewards, the next that same advice is apparently wrong. How do you know what to believe and what do you do for best? And why is there so much disagreement in the first place?

MOTIVATING YOUR TEAM

Well as it happens, the question really comes down to how you define motivation. There is of course more than one type of motivation and as the needs of the organisation vary, so the best ways to get more out of staff change too.

It turns out that when you're trying to encourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking specifically, then incentives are more damaging than helpful. And to understand why this is the case we need to break things down further and examine exactly what we mean by creativity. How do you define creativity? How do you measure problem solving ability?

While opinions vary on this matter, one aspect that is generally agreed to be indicative of wider creativity and problem-solving skill is what's known as 'functional fixedness'. This term refers to the ability or inability that we have to think of objects in ways other than their intended use. So if you were to take a hammer for instance, functional fixedness would be the 'cognitive bias' that prevented you from thinking of using it to scratch your back. It's a hammer, not a back scratcher.

Conversely creativity it appears is most likely to occur when we step back and relax. This in turn helps us to allow our minds to wander and enables us to see more connections between disparate ideas. And many believe that this is what creativity really is: the ability to combine unconnected ideas and combine them in unique new ways.

PROTECTING YOUR TEAM

If stress can dampen creativity and prevent your team from producing their best work, the logical alternative is to reduce stress for your team as much as you possibly can. That in turn means you need to take the flack. And that's a huge part of what it really means to be a leader. What being a leader really means, is taking responsibility.

The bad leader will shout at their staff when things are going badly and blame them – failure to take responsibility.

But the good leader will let the team work in the way they do best, and will then take the flack from upper management when things don't go to plan.

Being a leader ultimately means taking the hit, and being willing to sacrifice your own sanity for theirs!

THE POWER OF OWNERSHIP

At this point, you have a team that is happy to work and that feels safe and protected doing so. But we still haven't honed in on precisely how you motivate them to actually get down to it.



GIVE OTHERS FREEDOM TO WORK

The answer to that little puzzle then, is to give your team ownership over the work that they do. That means to let your team make decisions about how they're going to work, what they're going to focus on, and even what it might end up looking like. You can even let them create their own projects.



DON'T FORCE SOMEONE TO WORK

Here's the stark reality: you can't really force someone to do what they don't enjoy to the best of their ability. If you force someone to work on a project they find dull, then of course they will work on that project. But they won't give it their all, and much of the work will be sub-par.

Conversely, if you get someone to work on their passion project and this project has their name on it, suddenly they become far more invested and they actually want to go to work. They'll work harder at the project because it has their name on it, and because it makes them feel alive.

This could improve their career, and it's something they can be proud of at the end of the day. When you micromanage someone and control every small decision that someone makes, they are given zero control or ownership over that thing. This in turn means that they won't be at all invested or interested in it.

Likewise, if you refuse to listen to their point of view, or if you know they have big problems with the way that the work is being approached, again you shouldn't be surprised if they lack motivation and don't do their best work.

IN A CRISIS

In a crisis this same approach applies. That's because you will likely be yelling out roles for people: asking someone to call for help, while another person stops the bleeding for example. Again, you can't be everywhere and do everything. Your job is to give the instructions to the person attempting to do the job, and then to let them make the key decisions about how to do it.



HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULTY



Sometimes being a leader means making the hard call. In fact, this is very often what it means. Remember, the job of the captain is to go down with the ship. You are trying to protect your team so that they feel confident to do their best work. And that sometimes means taking a serious hit. Here is how to deal with things when the going gets rough.

HOW TO STAY CALM AS A LEADER

What do you do when you lose your biggest client and you think that your company is going to no longer be able to afford to employ everyone? What do you do when your family is in debt and you need to tell them that you have to downsize your home? The single and most important job as a leader is to remain calm.

Remember: you are protecting your team and taking the hits so that they can do their best work in a safe environment. That extends to remaining calm in a crisis so that they don't have to panic. If your team is worrying about lay-offs, then how are they supposed to focus and do their best work? This can ultimately become a self-fulfilling prophecy if allowed to escalate. Consider that your team will look to you to set the tone.

If you seem panicked, then they will panic. If you seem calm, then they will see that you have it under control. Not only that, but you'll also be able to appear more confident in your leadership, and ultimately it is only by being confident in yourself that you can inspire confidence in others! This is not the same as hiding the truth from your team. One of the worst things you can do for a team from a communication standpoint is to lie and tell them everything is okay when it really isn't.

While this might seem as though it would further the cause of helping your team to stay focussed on their work, the truth is that it will eventually come out in the wash. This means you'll then lose the trust of your team, and that they won't know how best to prepare themselves for the coming event. Be truthful, reassuring, transparent, and calm.

HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT TEAM(S)

Another issue that you will find yourself struggling with is the occasional mutinous individuals. Whether you are the captain of a ship, or you are a team leader on the meat aisle, you will find there are always people who don't want to do as you say. So what do you do in this situation?

As before, you are not to reprimand, threaten, or punish the individual. Once more, this is not only morally a dubious position to take – it is also simply a bad strategy! This is because, isolating, alienating, and aggravating someone who already intends on disrupting your leadership is a bad idea. Doing this will only cause that person to recruit more of your team to their cause, and to spend their time thinking about how wrong your style of leadership is!

This strategy can often work wonders, as it turns that critic into someone who is now working with you to improve your leadership. They can see first-hand the challenges you face, and that perhaps life isn't quite as simple as they believed it to be. Not only that, but it ensures they feel valued and cherished by the organization, rather than ostracised.

CHALLENGERS FOR MODERN LEADERS

Being a leader today is different than it ever has been before, and this is particularly true within organizations. If you are a leader within an organization, then there is a high chance that you will find yourself dealing with a range of new situations and tools that alter the way that you lead.

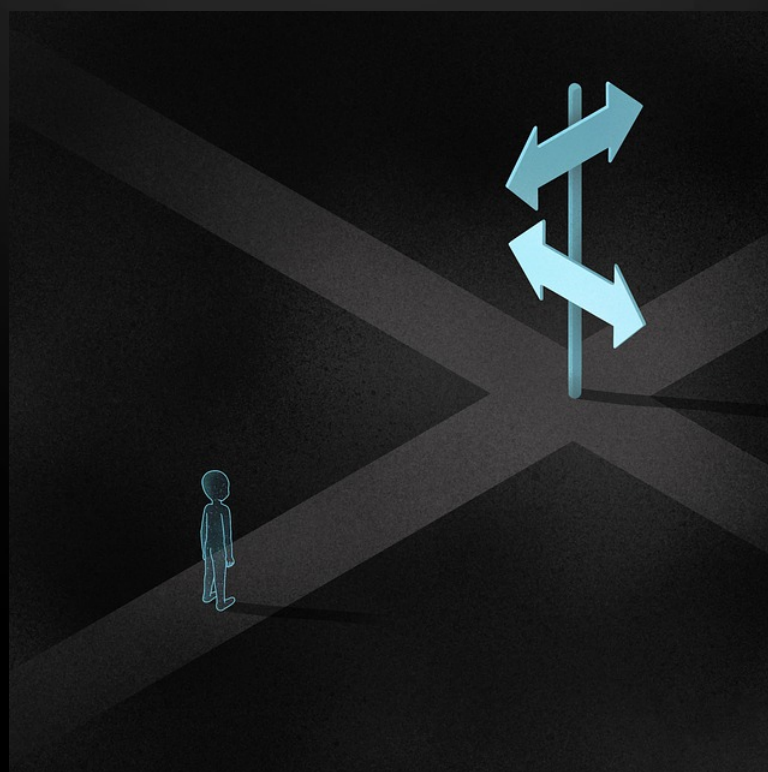
For instance, you might today need to lead from afar. That means in other words, that you are going to be using collaboration tools to work with distributed teams all around the world. This can make life much more difficult, as you won't be able to know precisely what your staff are doing, or whether they're really carrying out the work you set them!

There are several ways that we can react to these changes. One of the most common, is to try and reign in our followers even more – to place even stricter and more controlling rules and restrictions on them. The hope is that we can this way get a better idea of what they are doing and thus control their actions.

But the truth is that doing this actually often has the opposite effect. Again, the most powerful way to motivate someone who is miles away from you, is to make sure that the tasks you give them are inherently motivating.

That is to say they should be rewarding in their own right – because they offer a sense of ownership to the person completing them, and a sense of being highly involved. If you notice that someone is falling behind, don't assume it is because they are lazy! Instead, ask why they aren't motivated enough to complete the work you have set them?

Your job as a leader is to protect, to inspire, and to guide. It is NOT to control. This is true even when you are dealing with the modern, complex challenges of leadership. In fact, that only makes this approach even more vital.





THANK
YOU!