6 Leadership Best Practices to Empower Your Workforce

February 2, 2021 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Leadership is an active, continual process. While certain people may be innately better at empowering and motivating others, leadership is a skill that can be developed — and one that needs thoughtful practice.

At its most fundamental level, leadership is the ability to make situations and people better. The best leaders nurture and inspire their team to perform better and reach their greatest potential. They encourage everyone on their team to exercise their own voice and ideas, regardless of authority, title or position, and to become leaders themselves. If you look at the best teams across industries, they share a common attribute: The best teams are teams of leaders.

Related: 5 Reasons Why Good Leaders Must Be Great Followers

Every human is unique, with each of us having our own motivations, biases and neuroses. So it's no surprise that people who study leadership focus on the space between those differences. They understand behavior and psychology. The way leaders want to lead may not always work for everyone, so nuance and adaptability are key.

Here are six leadership strategies that are universal — regardless of industry or team size.

1. Lead yourself first

The first step to leadership is to first understand how you naturally lead. Are you an upbeat, outgoing leader that enjoys giving praise to keep morale high? Or are you a stoic leader who commands quality and believes praise is to be earned?

When consciously developing your leadership style, the goal should be to understand who you are and what makes you thrive. Once you understand your leadership preferences, you can correct course as needed when speaking with individuals on your team.

2. Be curious about your team

The best leaders I've ever known have an insatiable curiosity about the people who help grow their business. Taking a genuine interest in our staff members allows us to understand what makes them tick. How was their upbringing? What do they enjoy doing when they are not on the clock? What are some of their personal goals outside of your organization?

Try to get to know them as much as they are open to sharing. Understanding your team's motivations allows you to adapt and flex your approach toward those motivations and give them work that helps them shine.

Related: 7 Essential Soft Skills to Elevate Your Leadership During the Pandemic

3. Maximize feedback to get the best results

If the goal of leadership is to make situations and people better, the tool you use is not criticism but constructive feedback. The way to deploy these tools is a critical function of motivating individuals.

Motivating others is hard to do, especially on an everyday basis. Feedback should be given through the framework of *enhancing* or *changing* behavior. If a member of a sales team soared past quarterly goals, don't just proclaim a job well done. Provide feedback that highlights tact and expertise of craft, so they feel empowered to continue the quality output. Additionally, if a project continues to be delayed, provide direct and tangible examples of what needs work and what you're looking for – that way there's no discrepancy in your messaging.

4. Address dysfunction head-on

Transparency is key. Every relationship thrives with transparency, so leave nothing unspoken. Addressing workplace problems immediately and directly will show that you are committed to fostering a unified team. It's also important to not make a team member feel like they have to defend themselves.

Remember, tact and nuance to your approach will be different from person to person, and there's a fine line between direct and upfront and being rude. If fractured relationships don't get mended, it can have long-term business consequences. So when an internal issue inevitably arises, address it and move on.

Related: 5 Ways to Rekindle Your Passion for Leadership

5. Set priorities efficiently

Focus on the long term and distribute the short-term priorities effectively. You have to continually recalibrate priorities and check in on the focus of your team. What are they spending their time on, and what are the most important tasks this week – or today? If a team member doesn't have their priorities right, it's our job as leaders to explain the

project thoroughly and confirm that they understand the deliverables.

When reviewing priorities, start by explaining what the long-term goals are, so they can connect the dots as to *why* they're doing what they're doing. Constantly calibrate and recalibrate to ensure everyone's on the same page.

6. Create a high-performing culture

Sustained organizational excellence is based on the habitual pattern of everyone embodying a shared and common goal. During team wide meetings, everything should point back to the mission. As management consultant, author and educator Peter Drucker (1909–2005) once allegedly said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." Yes, talent matters, but a company culture that celebrates excellence together, wins together (and stays together.) A common message will inspire everyone to row in the same direction.

Striving for excellence in any field has a set of foundational routines and behaviors, and leadership is no different. Being the best leader for your team takes conscious intention and habitual practice.

Leadership in 2021 looks very different than it did at the beginning of 2020. As much as we are still responsible for business results, we are now more than ever also responsible for the mental and physical well-being of the people we employ – and rightfully so.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/363600