6 Tips on How to Be a Leader Others Can Learn From

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Leading by example has never been so necessary. In today's uncertain landscape, people are looking for more guidance and leadership than ever — on how to act, what to read, who to follow and what to believe.

For business leaders, this means there's a big opportunity to demonstrate and articulate the types of behaviors and actions that you hope to see in your workforce. In response to such change and volatility, leaders should aim to model a growth mindset and improve skills like resilience and adaptability. By setting an example of continuous learning, leaders allow their teams and other employees to feel comfortable taking time to learn new skills as well.

A "practice what you preach" approach to learning isn't always easy, but it can be very impactful as a way to create a learning culture. Consider these six approaches to lead by example effectively in challenging times.

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1. Change your mindset

How can you lead your team to embrace learning? It's important to first examine your own thought processes and teach yourself to "mine for gold." As learners, we tend to dwell on what didn't succeed. Instead, think about what was learned from any

experience, whether it went well or not. Even when you “win,” consider how you can apply key takeaways in the future.

Oftentimes leaders feel like they have to have all the answers and always be “up” for their teams. Guess what? You’re human and your job as a leader is not to know everything and be perfect. This can be a hard shift to make. A survey by global leadership consulting firm DDI revealed that 14 percent of managers feel that their organizations don’t embrace failure in pursuit of innovation.

It’s far more compelling to acknowledge you messed up and share what you learned from the experience. I discovered that my team appreciates me being candid about the challenges I’m dealing with. I’ve tried to be open and vulnerable with my teams as I tackle the challenges of working remotely and being so isolated. This transparency helps promote the practice of a growth mindset and gives my team permission to try something new, make mistakes and grow. We’re all learning.

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2. Use different language

Another building block for becoming a leader that others can learn from is to change your vocabulary and the way you frame discussions. Instead of “what did we do wrong,” try “what did we learn.” Also take a future-forward and positive approach by discussing how you can proactively apply these learnings to next steps or future work.

3. Give away your power

Because you’re a business leader, people look to you to answer questions and field requests. However, in a group setting, consider “giving away your power,” or creating opportunities for others with relevant expertise to respond. This is a way

to support employees' learning and growth, particularly younger employees who might not typically have the chance or confidence to weigh in. Although they may not answer the way you would, the goal is learning, not perfection.

4. Build it in

You can focus on changing your own mindset, behavior and vocabulary, but to support others in making the same shift, it's critical to also create the right environment. To reduce stress and normalize talking about learnings in team interactions, set expectations such as everyone sharing a recent learning at the beginning of your weekly team meeting. I have a tradition on employees' work anniversaries of inviting them to share three highlights and three things they learned over the past year. I do this myself as well. We've found we all enjoy it – the lessons shared allow us to reflect on and celebrate our growth over the previous year.

Another great idea comes from our Udemy product team, which has a Learning Club during which someone presents on a topic they've researched, and then they all discuss it. Other teams do a "Hot Seat" or a "Teach Me Anything" activity to find out about a person or topic. Teams can also leverage more traditional ways to capture learnings such as post-mortems and SWOT analyses – just be sure to frame these from a "what we learned" perspective.

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5. Walk the talk

In addition to modeling more positive language and sharing learnings, you also can show how you value learning by regularly taking time to learn yourself. Attend team trainings, be engaged and ask questions. It sends a whole

different message when the boss takes time out to learn, versus just recommending their direct reports take time out to learn. Our CEO frequently signs up first for workplace trainings and leads by example by giving his undivided attention to every speaker.

Also, put your money where your mouth is. It's important to give employees opportunities to learn both on the job and after hours by officially setting aside time for it. Udemy has DEAL ("drop everything and learn") hours each month and provides employees with a stipend to support learning opportunities. Our company also hosts a learning fair twice a year, in which we bring in instructors to teach various activities like cooking, yoga and origami (recently we did it virtually). Additionally, make sure employees have access to an online learning platform to make it easy to do trainings and/or find classes they're interested in.

6. Learn for life

There's a concept I love: "Don't set out to be an interesting person, but an interested one." In other words, there's always something or someone to learn and benefit from if you have a learning perspective. Modeling continuous learning and leading by example will help you create a learning culture at your organization that will ultimately benefit your business. It goes a long way to benefit individual employees, particularly as we all struggle with processing what's happening in our world today. For me, learning is personal as it's the way I process whatever challenges I face, and this year has definitely been filled with struggles and successes.

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