

7 Habits to Make You a Better Leader and Give You an Edge on the Competition

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What makes a leader effective?

Anyone can put a title by his or her name and call himself or herself a leader. But it's those that inspire action and better performance in the people around them – and do so day in and day out – that really set themselves apart.

In the business world, effective leadership (or “great leadership,” as some would say) is not only key to enhancing workforce productivity, but also to optimizing employee confidence, buy-in and, ultimately, retention. It instills the confidence employees need not just to stick around, but also to take ownership of their roles and give their all to achieve larger organizational objectives.

That might seem like nothing more than high-minded idealism. But effective leaders really can make a powerful impact on teams and companies in need of a boost. It's the “getting there and actually becoming a stronger leader” part that can sometimes leave entrepreneurs, managers and even entire businesses a little stuck.

Here's a look at seven core habits to heighten effectiveness and become a leader that drives results.

1. Take ownership of your situation

Becoming more effective starts by taking responsibility for your actions. That may sound cliché, but learning how to own and take charge of your personal situation provides an essential shift in perspective that empowers better, more effective leadership down the line.

Owning your behavior means becoming a more proactive player in your own life and focusing on things you have the power to change rather than those out of your control. This begins by enhancing your ability to manage commitments to yourself and those around you. By establishing small but clear goals and sticking to them, you develop the skill to accept and take control of your own behavior.

Over time, this not only shifts your perspective, but also instills the foundational confidence and sense of self needed to maximize your impact.

2. Identify what's important to you

Identifying what really matters to you, both personally and professionally, helps bring your long-term vision into focus, providing a clearer idea of your end goals and shaping how and where you take action in the future. Once noted, these long-term accomplishments give rise to the values that will (ideally) guide your behavior and set the stage for stronger, more targeted decision-making down the line.

Answering crucial questions like “What do I want to be?” and “What would I like to achieve and contribute?” can help identify these core values and provide the lifelong reference points needed to thrive as a leader. With firmly established principles to guide and reinforce your actions, you're better equipped to retain your focus and stay on track when new challenges pop up.

3. Prioritize commitments aligned with your values

This next habit involves prioritizing commitments aligned with your core principles while simultaneously de-prioritizing those that don't. When you have a solid process for filtering out tasks and commitments that don't serve a greater purpose (i.e., address what you value most), you're better able to direct energy and resources at directives that do matter, maximizing impact and progress along the way.

Careful evaluation is key to separating value-based commitments from those that miss the mark. Before taking each new action, it's important to ask:

- Is this centered on my core values?
- Does it support or enhance my ability to achieve long-term objectives?
- Does it align with my professional mission statement?

Once you learn to prioritize behaviors that match your values, you can reduce inefficiencies and target more energy and effort at making meaningful change across your organization.

Related: [Prioritize This Guide to Learning How to Prioritize!](#)

4. Pursue outcomes from a mutually beneficial mindset

For the ultra-competitive entrepreneur, adopting a more collaborative leadership approach may seem a tough pill to swallow. After all, who wants to give up the excitement or independence that comes with growing a small business on your own, or of being the sole provider of ideas, motivation and decision-making that pushes the enterprise beyond the

competition?

Yet, organizations rarely, if ever, achieve optimal results without a collaborative team effort. And leaders that not only understand that, but also actively pursue mutually beneficial outcomes – solutions that benefit everyone involved – tend to be the most effective, at least when it comes to maximizing efficiency.

Cultivating an interpersonal leadership mindset means adopting a win-win approach to management, one centered on cooperation and building relationships, agreements and processes that benefit everyone. This approach helps strengthen trust and buy-in among the people you depend on, providing even more incentive to follow your example.

5. Become an active listener

Active or empathetic listening is the art of listening to employees and colleagues with the intent of understanding. This doesn't just mean showing an interest in what employees are saying, but actively digging into each conversation to understand other people's perspectives and cultivate the trust essential to honest, forthright communication.

The habit of listening to understand isn't always intuitive or easy to develop. That's probably because so many of us are geared to reply rather than really dig into what the other person is saying. Still, breaking through that instinct and building active listening skills is a big part of effective leadership and key to optimizing organizational efficiency.

On the one hand, it creates the foundation of trust people need to open up and share honest, reliable information with you on a consistent basis. On the other, that reinforced trust provides a gateway through which to share your own thoughts and ideas with your team.

With empathetic lines of communication established, what you say has even more credibility, increasing its impact and ultimately making it much easier to get things across and get things done.

Related: [6 Strategies for Being a Better, Active Listener](#)

6. Maximize creativity through synergy

To some, synergy may seem like little more than a throwback corporate platitude. But when taken seriously, a synergistic approach to behavior and social interaction can provide a powerful lift to leaders looking to make a little more impact across the organization.

The beating heart of value-driven leadership, synergy combines principle-based behavior with a mutually beneficial mindset and empathetic listening to cultivate unity among the individuals and teams you lead every day. Synergy emphasizes the value of creative collaboration among groups to unleash the potential and promise of the whole, striking that sought-after balance so important to maximizing creativity and output.

When leaders strive to see and act through synergy's interdependent lens, they help facilitate the open, principled collaboration and communication workplaces need to thrive. In synergistic ecosystems, people feel not only free to share ideas, but also to engage and collaborate with others in a trust-based environment – one where they are valued and motivated to work toward goals bigger than themselves.

7. Focus on personal wellbeing

(tend to yourself)

As a leader, it is up to you to take control of your decisions and develop the habits that empower better outcomes. And as the instrument of your own success, it's imperative to attend to your personal wellbeing and your health regularly and on a consistent basis.

Tending to your physical, mental, emotional and even spiritual health regularly and often ensures you're prepared for both the opportunities and the pitfalls that come with being a leader.

A well-cared-for mind and body provide the machine through which to stick to your commitments and follow through on your goals. They also enable the continued performance and personal growth needed to keep up with a dynamic, synergistic environment – and to be the resource of leadership and impact your team needs to realize its full potential.

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Incorporating habits that address and improve your mind, body and emotional health into your routine is key to maximizing self-efficiency and sharpening your leadership approach and aptitude.

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