

Why Every Leader Should Write a “How to Work With Me” Manual

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Do your team members really know how you work? Recently, I created a “Working with Our Leaders” resource for Lemonlight team members that outlines how I prefer to work, collaborate and lead. Inspired by Claire Hughes Johnson, the former COO of Stripe, each member of our leadership team now has their own version of this manual.

As I wrote my profile (which you can see [here!](#)), I realized how much we assume our colleagues understand our working styles without ever explicitly sharing them. Here’s why I believe every leader should create a manual to set the tone for effective team collaboration – and what yours should include.

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Why it matters

Creating a “How to Work With Me” manual is a valuable exercise for any leader. It provides a clear framework for your team to understand how you work best, fostering better communication and collaboration. Here are some of the specific benefits.

Gain clarity on your own preferences and tendencies

Writing your manual isn’t just a tool for your team – it’s a

valuable reflection exercise for you as a leader. You might think you know exactly how you operate, what drives you and what you expect from others, but until you sit down and explain these thoughts, there may be things you haven't fully explored. This process forces you to think critically about your leadership style, helping you find areas where you may be unclear or inconsistent.

For example, you might discover that you prefer direct communication but have never clearly explained that to your team, leading to misunderstandings. Or you might realize that you value quick decision-making but haven't been prioritizing that day-to-day. By taking the time to write down your preferences, you can set the stage for better collaboration and build your self-awareness.

The more you understand your own tendencies, the better you can manage your reactions, make informed decisions and create a work environment that aligns with your values.

Set clear expectations for team collaboration

Next, your team can't meet your needs if you've never communicated what those needs are. A "How to Work With Me" manual bridges this gap by providing a clear, concise guide that outlines your expectations, preferences and working style.

For example, in my manual, I explain that if we've discussed something in person and I owe you action items, sending me a follow-up email ensures I don't miss anything. This might seem like a small detail, but without sharing this, team members might have to guess at best practices. These assumptions can lead to inefficiencies, miscommunications and frustration.

By clearly outlining your preferences, you remove the guesswork for your team. They'll know exactly how to approach tasks, how to communicate with you and how to align their work with your expectations. Everyone knows what's expected of

them, which reduces the chances of misunderstandings and makes it easier to get things done.

Plus, setting clear expectations helps build trust. When your team knows that you've taken the time to communicate your needs, they'll feel more confident in their interactions with you. This trust is the foundation of a high-performing team where everyone feels valued and understood.

Related: The Power of Clear Expectations Between Managers and Employees

Open the dialogue for others to share

Finally, as leaders, we set the tone for how our teams operate and how people communicate with each other. By creating and sharing your "How to Work With Me" manual, you're not just clarifying your own preferences – you're also encouraging others to do the same. This can lead to a more open, transparent work environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their own working styles.

Imagine if every team member had their own "ways to work with me" guide. It would normalize discussions about individual needs, preferences and working styles, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding. When people are open about how they work best, teams can collaborate more effectively and lean on each other's strengths.

For example, some team members might prefer detailed written instructions, while others might prefer verbal communication. Understanding these preferences can help in assigning tasks, organizing meetings and structuring workflows. Encouraging your team to create their own manuals also promotes self-awareness, requiring them to reflect on their own working styles and communicate them effectively.

What to include

When creating your “How to Work With Me” manual, think about the key aspects of your working style that could impact your team. For example, my profile includes practical details like how and when I respond to emails, a few professional areas I’m focusing on improving and even my habit of tweaking the design of Excel spreadsheets I receive (it’s me, not you!).

You might consider including sections about your communication style, typical work hours, expectations from direct reports, leadership style, how you structure your day, how you like to run meetings and anything else that could facilitate smoother collaboration.

Don’t be afraid to add a personal touch, too. My manual includes tidbits about my hobbies, my dog Oliver, my favorite author (Augusten Burroughs) and even my results from common personality tests. Adding a “human” element to your leadership can help your team connect with you on a more personal level.

If you assume your teammates – and especially your direct reports – already know this information about you, I encourage you to write it out. You might be surprised by what you learn about yourself and how much clarity it brings to your team!

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