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10 Ways to Beef up your Leadership Skills

By Megan Tough

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Have you ever heard someone say, "Actually, I have to admit that I think I am really bad at managing other people. My staff all hate me and I'm incapable of doing my job".

The answer is no, of course. No one says this either because they don't believe it, or because they don't want to appear incompetent. Unfortunately research tells us that from the employees' perspective, there aren't that many terrific managers out there.

What should we take out of this dichotomy? Perhaps at the least, we could all admit to ourselves that there is room for some improvement in the way we lead others. After all, it's not the sort of skill that is easy to get 100% right all of the time. It might just be that we don't specifically know what improvements to make, so here's 10 ways to start:

1. Get a reality check

Finding out what others think of our leadership style can be real eye-opener, and is often the most powerful driver for change. Using a 360 survey where you receive feedback from your staff, peers and manager, gives you some concrete information on a sometimes intangible subject. Use an existing tool (and there are some highly regarded ones out there) or else simply let your staff know that you are seeking feedback from them in order to improve your style.

A word of caution though, your staff may not feel safe in giving feedback if they believe you are going to use it against them, or become defensive about what they say. It's up to you to create a safe environment so they feel comfortable in being open and honest with you.

2. Don't use the power of your position to get things done

If people are questioning why certain things are done, or the logic of decisions, never pull rank in response. A critical component of effective leadership is getting the buy-in from your team and colleagues. You don't get buy-in by telling them that the decision is the right one because you are the boss and you made it. Your team may not always agree with what is being done, but they are more likely to respect you if you take the time to explain your rationale.

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3. Don't think of employees as things that need to be controlled or managed

Instead, give them the latitude to take actions and make decisions. Trust is a vital component of leadership. If you can't trust people to do their jobs well, then you either have the wrong people in the jobs, or you have the right people but you haven't trained them sufficiently. Let them do what they are there to do, without leaning over their shoulders all the time, or demanding to know how they spend each minute of their time.

4. Listen, listen listen

If there are unhappy or disgruntled people in your business, you can guarantee that at some stage they've tried to tell you what the problem is. It's likely you weren't listening (or didn't want to listen), or perhaps your initial reaction made the person think twice about bringing the problem to you. Truly

listening is one of the greatest skills to develop, regardless of your role. Good listeners are genuinely interested, convey empathy, and want to find out what's behind the conversation. Great leaders are great listeners -without exception.

5. Stop providing solutions

Managers often achieve their positions after being technical specialists, and so will have an opinion or view on how to "fix" situations or problems. They believe that it's faster to tell someone what to do, or do it themselves, than give their employees an opportunity to figure it out. By always providing the answers, managers take away opportunity for their employees to learn and come up with alternative (and potentially better) ways of doing things.

6. Always be constructive - always

Language and communication skills set great leaders apart from mediocre ones. Don't patronise or be critical of others – take complete responsibility for how you are heard. If you catch yourself about to make negative remarks, take a breath and rephrase your words to get your message across without the emotional attachment. Great leaders always find a way to say things calmly and constructively.

7. Judge your success by the success of your team

The true success of a leader can be measured by the success of the people that work for them. As a manager of others, your prime responsibility is to ensure the success and development of your team. If they are successful, you will automatically be successful. Focus on building their skills and removing obstacles in their way. If you can achieve this, you will see the results in the productivity, motivation and satisfaction of your employees. This in turn filters through to bottom-line results.

8. Don't do things just because they will "look good".

Nothing is more transparent than managers who make decisions and behave in ways simply to look good to their superiors. If you want to improve as a leader, one of the qualities you need is integrity. The integrity to make decisions because they are right, and the integrity to stand up when you truly believe something is not in the best interests of the business. Whether or not it is in your personal best interests is much less of a consideration.

9. Include humour in your diet

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Nobody likes to work in an environment that is devoid of any fun. People are more productive when they are enjoying themselves. Creating a workplace where fun is permitted and encouraged can make a significant difference, and it's even more effective when the boss participates. It increases team spirit, and encourages people to see you as a person, not simply as the boss.

10. Let people get to know the real you

Being open about yourself helps to break down the barriers that hierarchy puts in place. When your employees know the person behind the façade, that's when you start to build the foundations of good leadership – trust and respect.

Megan Tough, director of Action Plus, works with small business professionals who are ready to do more than 'just get by'. Increase your income – decrease your stress! To learn more and to sign up for more FREE tips and articles like these, visit www.megantough.com

Business Simulations - The Next Generation Of Corporate Training?

By Gabriel Adams

Business simulations - the next generation of computer games, or the next generation of corporate training? Well, perhaps they are both.

Business Simulations are essentially computer "games" which are designed to replicate a certain aspect of your industry, and are used for training employees, honing your skills, or learning new ones.

There are many different types of business simulators - here are a few, just to give you an idea of how business simulations can help you in your business.

Role playing simulations – Role playing programs allow your employees to interact with a "person" on the other end of a "phone". Role playing simulations are ideal for phone sales, call center employees, customer service employees, secretaries, etc.

Leadership Training Simulators – Business simulators can also be used to train your leadership staff in leadership principles. These programs will teach you leadership principles, then allow you to test your skills by making a series of real world like decisions.

Employment Simulators - Ever wish you could find a shortcut to hiring the right people every time, without getting any incompetent, lazy, dishonest employees? With an employee assessment simulator, you can do very in-depth assessments of employees before you hire them.

There are many other types of business simulators. Virtually every aspect of a business, from product development to legal compliance, can be improved in your company with business simulators.

Of course, a business simulation will not replace real world experience, but simulators can assist you in making employees more prepared for real world experience. Plus, errors made on the simulators won't cost you a penny.

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Business simulations can be integrated into your company in many ways. Some are designed to be used before the employee is hired. Others are designed for use in the initial training program, while others can be used for ongoing training or pre-advancement training.

If you want to improve your employee training, try business simulations!

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