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LINE**HOW TO:**

# BE A GOOD LEADER

We all know a great leader when we come across one, but find it difficult to explain what makes him or her better than the rest. There is no single formula that fits the profile. Is it the charismatic personality, or the courage to take risky decisions on the fly, or, for that matter, the intellect that enables celebrated judgments? Those in leadership roles know that it is a combination of all these—and much more.

When it comes to leadership, there are no cut-and-dried methods to success. According to Ramesh Emani, co-founder and CEO, Insta Health Solutions, a comprehensive hospital management solutions company: "A good leader is born with a certain set of traits, which are further nurtured during the individual's early years and by his or her initial managers at the workplace."

Wisdom says that, with a little effort, managers can improve their leadership skills. This makes sense—considering the medley of character traits and skills that make a good leader, it seems far-fetched to conclude that the brain cells possessed all the winning traits right at birth. The opposite is also true—acquiring top-notch management degrees do not immediately qualify you as a good leader.

Being a good leader is the outcome of being a certain kind of person and doing the right things. As the late John Gardner, a successful American politician and author of books on leadership put it, "Executives can be given subordinates, but a following must be earned." Here a few effective ideas to guide the contemporary leader. —By Charu Bahri



# BECOMING A GOOD LEADER

## **1** Qualities of a leader

*A people's person:* A good leader genuinely loves people and enjoys being amid them. According to Rajeev Karwal, CEO and founder director, Mila-grow, a consultancy for micro, small and medium enterprises: "It does not matter what leadership style you practice, you will only be able to bring results when you develop a genuine interest in the progress of the people you're responsible for."

In practice, this interest translates into taking effective steps to empower your people. "Leadership is not only about who you are for yourself, but who you are for others," says executive leadership coach Ashu Khanna. Tap into the talent pool of your team and encourage them to attend training programmes or courses that sharpen their skills and raise their confidence in handling new tasks.

There is another benefit from focusing on your people. "After a point, people get their greatest kick from learning and being creative, not just from money," feels Khanna.

*Listen attentively:* "A good leader really listens and practises appreciative inquiry," says Gopal Shrikanth, a coach for chief executives. Give your people full attention when they have something to say, instead of listening half-heartedly, because you're mentally planning what to say next!

Moreover, ask for ideas instead of telling people what to do. Good leaders give their followers a voice. "Nothing stifles energy and creativity more than telling people exactly what to do and

how to do, and making them excessively dependent on you," cautions he. Even when you have to fix the targets, focus your energy on clearly outlining the aims and objects, and then sit back

## Develop a genuine interest in the progress of the people you are responsible for.

and allow your team to figure out how to get the work done. In short, good leaders do not micromanage.

*Appreciate and acknowledge:* Money as a motivating factor does not work for everyone. Even when it does, it may not always be valued as highly. After a point, employees need to feel their worth in the organisation they belong to. That is why good leaders inculcate a sense of belonging and worth in their followers by acknowledging their presence and contribution. Khanna suggests converting this into practice by giving people their due credit for their contribution (especially in front of clients or seniors), setting in place reward and award systems, issuing letters of recognition, offering suitable development and training options, enhancing job descriptions and providing challenging career opportunities. Remember, the most effective praise is specific, and directly reflects the employee's actual achievement. In most cases, team members are acutely aware of what they have done well and take

pride in it. Receiving praise that diminishes or sidesteps that achievement can be worse than receiving no praise at all.

## **2** A leader is as a leader does

*Invest in yourself:* A good leader, points out Karwal, never stops his quest to acquire more knowledge. "He has a vision—and that is an outcome of staying relevant and abreast of changing scenarios over a long period of time. Trends,

technologies and techniques are rapidly changing. As a leader, you should be able to foresee which of these trends and technologies are likely to prevail in the near future. Remember—the more you grow, the more people around you will grow."

*Focus on feedback:* If you are genuinely interested in the progress of your people, do not postpone the process of giving feedback. Says Shrikanth: "If you're looking to fix the problem, you will give your followers timely feedback. If you're looking to fix the person, you will wait until the annual appraisal is due!" Feedback should be given consistently, whenever you feel that there is room for improvement, and in a positive manner. This also calls for excellent communication skills. Good leaders use the right language and tone in an appropriate environment.

*Create an open environment:* "Nurture risk-taking abilities that are critical to creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship by not 'punishing'



failure," says Shrikanth. When employees fear failure, they start feeling vulnerable and only deliver what is expected of them. In contrast, if there is no fear of punishment, they are likely to get more involved with their job and stretch the envelope. An open environment that accepts failure as a part and parcel of moving forward is both healthier and cheerful.

### 3 Improve your skills

You don't have to be born with the "good leader" gene. Rashmi Bansal, media entrepreneur and author of *Stay Hungry, Stay Foolish*, believes that people can mould themselves into becoming good leaders. "Leadership is about carrying people along with you by cap-

turing their hearts and minds, and not being stuck in yourself. More than particular skills or aptitude, it requires an inner reserve and intangible people-friendly qualities. These qualities may be cultivated by attending workshops, reading books, and working on yourself," she says.

According to Meena Ganesh, CEO and MD, Manipal K12 Education, every individual has a certain style and temperament. As a leader, it is important to introspect and evaluate what would work best in a particular situation, and adjust yourself accordingly. A strong mentor may help this process to a certain extent, but at the end of the day, leaders get better at their task when they reflect and grow within.

Consider yourself to be on the right track, if you are able to see a little more in your people and delegating responsibility has become a tad bit easier.

Emani also suggests exposing yourself to managerial cadres outside your organisation. Business networking or engaging with successful leaders is a good way to do this. Getting a coach might also help you hone your leadership skills. An expert can teach you about techniques related to situational leadership so that you adapt well to changing circumstances. Emani concludes with a personal experience, "It's lonely at the top. An experienced coach makes a good confidante and relieves you of the stress that sits as a blockage on the route to being a good leader."

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