
Grow The Leader Within

"For what we've discovered, and rediscovered, is that leadership isn't the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It's a process ordinary people use when they're bringing forth the best from themselves and others. Liberate the leader in everyone, and extraordinary things happen." -- James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations*.



Leadership is a verb, not a noun. Leadership is action, not a position. Leadership is defined by what we do, not the role we are in. Some people in "leadership roles" are excellent leaders. But too many are bosses, "snoopervisors," technocrats, bureaucrats, managers, commanders, chiefs, and the like. Conversely, many people who have no formal leadership role are excellent leaders. In today's fast changing world, we all need to be leaders.

To lead is to show the way by going in advance. To lead is to guide or direct a course of action. To lead is to influence the behavior or opinion of others. We all need to be leaders, regardless of our formal title or role. This starts with inner self-leadership and moves outward to influence, guide, support, and lead others. The process of becoming a leader is the same as the process of becoming a highly effective human being. Leadership development is personal development. Leadership ultimately shows itself in what we do "out there." But it starts "in here."

It would be easy if we could all become leaders by following a simple set of steps. But the journey of personal growth means finding our own way. There are, however, critical areas of personal development based on timeless principles. The distance we need to grow along each leadership dimension will differ for each of us, but defining and continually growing along each of these paths is the way of the leader.

Strong leaders are well-rounded and constantly expanding their personal leadership across these key areas:

Choose Not to Lose. Whether we choose to focus on our problems or our possibilities is a key leadership issue. When we are faced with obstacles and failure, those who can overcome adversity and learn from their experiences, turning them into opportunities, are the ones who will be truly successful.



Focus and Context. The core of my being: This is central to our growth along all the other dimensions. Our Focus and Context is shaped by three vital questions: Where am I going? (my vision); What do I believe in? (my principles and values) and; Why do I exist? (my purpose or mission).

Responsibility for Choices. If it's to be, it's up to me: Leadership means accepting responsibility for our choices in life. Leaders realize that life accumulates, that choice more than chance determines their circumstances. They refuse to succumb to the "Victimitus Virus" ("it's all their fault" and "there's nothing I can do").

Authenticity. Getting real: Leadership isn't just what we do, it's something that we are, which then drives what we do. Genuine leadership comes from within. It's authentic, and based on honesty, integrity, and trust. We must ring true to ourselves by exploring our inner space, gathering feedback on our personal behavior, and ensuring consistency with our stated values and principles.

Passion and Commitment. Beyond near-life experiences: Successful people are energized by a love for what they do because it brings them ever closer to who they are. They overcome apathy and cynicism, develop a burning commitment to their cause, and with discipline achieve their dreams and desires.

Spirit and Meaning. With all my heart and soul: What is the purpose of our work? Of our lives? Material success alone is not enough. Leaders seek within and find something more. In what is too often a mad dash from cradle to grave, we need to take time in work and life to nourish our inner selves.

Growing and Developing. From phase of life to way of life: The popular goals of security, stability, and predictability are deadly. The closer we get to these dangerous goals, the more our growth is stunted. True and lasting security comes from constant growth and development, based on regular reflection and renewal.

Mobilizing and Energizing. Putting emotions in motion: Leaders don't motivate with rewards and punishments. Whether at home or in the workplace, they energize people to motivate themselves. Highly effective leaders boost the energy of others with their passion and appreciation. They engage people's hearts as well as their minds. They get them involved and participating. They actively nurture the "being" or culture of the group, not just the "doing."

The more the world changes, the more leadership principles stay the same. Leadership principles are timeless. And they apply to all of us; no matter what role we play in society or organizations.