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# **How to be a Successful Leader in Today's Work Place**

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# How to be a Successful Leader in Today's Work Place

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## I. Introduction

Engineers and other technical professionals often have a difficult time in moving into leadership roles. Many of us have not had any formal training in leadership, yet are expected to become leaders and managers in our organizations. This course presents the essentials of leadership along with 10 secrets of successful leaders in today's workplace. It is intended for anyone in a leadership position, or considering moving into a supervisory or leadership role in an organization.

Finding and keeping solid technical talent is tough. Businesses don't want to lose technical talent by promoting someone into a leadership position and then have them fail for whatever reason. Losing technical talent is expensive. It's even more costly when a top technical talent is promoted and then leaves the organization. This scenario is lived out in businesses hundreds of times each year. If you are considering moving into the managerial ranks, then this course is for you. It can help you succeed in making the transition from technical expert to leader.

Some technical folks might say, "well I'm don't manage or lead anyone." What about working with suppliers or contractors in a Project Management role? Most of these same principles apply to that role as well.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics there are approximately 12.6 million technical workers and 7.4 million scientific workers in the U.S. workforce. Each year there are about 610,000 of these who may have an opportunity to move into a leadership or management position.

There are at least five reasons you should take this course if you are considering making the transition from technical expert to the management and leadership ranks; if you are new to the management ranks; or, if you are a manager planning to promote technical persons into the management ranks.

1. There are more openings now for managers and leaders with literally tens of thousands baby boomers approaching retirement.
2. The boundaries between the technical arena and the management arena are increasingly blurred. Technical folks are expected to have many of the “soft” skills associated with leadership.
3. Many times the technical expert or engineer must interface with outsourced service providers, so are in effect ‘de facto project managers and need many of the same skills as managers.
4. More technologically complex processes and businesses require managers to be technical experts.
5. At any level in the organization, one must be able to deal with both tasks and people.

In considering the move from technical expert to manager and leader; there are three paradoxes that one must deal with almost daily:

1. Engineers (read technical guru) have a strong need to be right versus the fact that “analysis paralysis” cannot be allowed to delay decisions in the fast paced world of management.
2. Technical gurus often focus on the exact solution to a given problem versus the overall considerations of the ramifications of implementing the solution.  
Sometimes the solution is worse than the problem!
3. Dealing with gray areas versus the black and white of mathematical or technical solutions. People don't respond like equations!

So, if you want to make a successful transition you'll have to understand these three paradoxes and work within them while realizing their potential effects on you and others. Talk about stress! This could do it. So go in prepared and ready to meet them head-on and win.

## **II. What is Leadership?**

Leadership is about people while management is about tasks, products and processes. Credible and Effective Leadership is the #1 Essential Factor for successful businesses and organizations of all kinds. Leadership, according to General and President Dwight Eisenhower, is getting other people to do what you want done because they want to do

it. Some definitions have said leadership is directing others to get the tasks of the organization done on time and correctly. In any case, leadership involves people!

To help you assess your organization, or your role as leader, consider the following five questions:

**1. Are leaders at all levels in our organization credible and competent?** The most solid foundations in an organization are built on the trust of the people in their leaders. Leaders must make every decision in the light of maintaining their credibility. Competence of leaders can be an issue if “the good ole’ boy” system is used to move people into a leadership position as opposed to having effective selection criteria.

**2. Do our leaders lead with integrity?** Integrity is how we do things no matter who is watching or not watching. Integrity involves the basic character traits that demonstrate our honesty and commitment in all areas of life. It is a function of “who we are,” and is the demonstrated character we show others. Effective leaders guard their integrity—it’s easy to lose and impossible to recover.

**3. Do leaders at all levels demonstrate concern for the people they lead?** People know very quickly if their leaders are not sincere or are being manipulative and you can be assured poor performance will follow.

**4. Have leaders defined and communicated the basic work expectations for everyone who reports to them?** This is the most fundamental of all leadership tasks.

People have a right to know what is expected of them.

**5. Do our leaders set the proper example for our people?** Leaders must set the example in work behaviors, work ethic, ethics, integrity and yes, even in how we dress for work.

You may say this is too basic. Well, for those of you who remember it, the Green Bay Power Sweep was simple but when run to perfection it worked every time! Leadership is about the fundamentals not about the latest and greatest fad in the workplace. Fads come and go, but credible and effective leadership is built on a solid foundation of values and principles.

With this background and these questions, let's begin the journey to being a more effective leader.

### **III. What is Expected of Today's Leader or Manager?**

During engagements with clients the question is often asked about the expectations for managers in the fast paced world of business today. There are six essentials for managers:

- Character
- Flexibility
- Loyalty
- Technological “Agility”
- Problem Solving Ability
- Resource Utilization

1. **Character** has been defined as who we are when no one else is looking.

Character traits include factors like personal values, honesty, dependability, fairness, sincerity, helpfulness and initiative. Without a solid foundation a manager is doomed to failure. There must be a solid foundation for success.

2. **Flexibility** is the ability to adapt to changes in the business or workplace environment. Change is a constant today! As change occurs, it is also important to know what should not change.

3. **Loyalty** is a two way street. The organization and the person are both a part of the loyalty equation. Managers are to be loyal to the organization and to their people. When tough decisions are required, the manager is counted upon to carry out those decisions.

4. **Technological “Agility”** is the ability to adapt to changing technologies. For those who can remember the workplace before e-mail or faxes, think about all the

changes in communications you have experienced. Managers should be willing to lead the way in technological changes. Some organizations are being held back in terms of productivity by senior managers who are unwilling to investigate and/or use technology effectively.

5. **Problem solving ability** is a must for the manager. Remember, the basic steps for problem solving: Define the problem; gather facts about the problem; analyze the situation and data; determine the root cause; consider the alternatives; identify the correct solution; implement the solution and follow up to see that it was effective. The first and last steps are where we often go wrong in solving problems.
  
6. **Resource utilization** is often a forgotten expectation. The effective leader will identify and effectively utilize resources such as people, materials, energy, infrastructure, time and money.

#### **IV. Honesty and Integrity are the Foundations of Success**

**Honesty** is simply “being real” in what you say and do. It is simply telling the truth in all of your communications. In a survey of several hundred supervisors and managers by my consulting firm, Management Methods, honesty was identified as the #1 trait required for one to succeed in a leadership role. Honesty includes how you deal with data and information as well as conversations, discussions and meetings with employees and others with whom you come in contact.



Even in light of many recent moral failures among high level leaders in organizations, we are seeing return to values based leadership in many organizations today. Honesty is not optional, it is essential.

**Integrity** is the combination of basic character traits that demonstrate our honesty and commitment to what is right in all areas of life. It is a function of “who we really are,” and is demonstrated by the character we show to others. Effective leaders must guard their integrity, it is easy to lose and almost impossible to recover.

Watch what you say and do. Let integrity guide all your dealings. As a friend once said to me, “don’t do anything in your office that you wouldn’t want to see in the morning newspaper.” We need to expand that to include don’t put anything in emails, on the web or anywhere else that could compromise your integrity. Stay away from compromising situations to be an effective leader.

## **V. Successful Leaders Treat People with Dignity and Respect**

Successful leaders work to earn the respect of the people who report to them and of the people with whom they interact. This means employees, co-workers, customers and suppliers. The attitude employees develop towards their bosses is based upon the qualities and actions of the person in charge. Employee attitudes are critical to the leader’s success as well as productivity in the work place. The #1 secret is to treat all

people with dignity and regard them as individuals. The “in your face” shouting at people in front of their peers just won’t get it today! That’s a quick way not to be regarded very highly in the work place.

### **What Really Matters**

Effective managers work every day to earn the respect and trust of their employees. Both are earned by how the boss responds every day in the little things as well as in the big things. People will follow someone in authority who is honest, hard working, treats people with dignity, sets a good example, makes the tough decisions and sticks by them, and who supports his or her people.

Successful leaders will manage everyday to earn the high regard of employees, co-workers, customers, suppliers and all with whom they come in contact. It’s not easy to do it right, but it’s the only way that will yield positive lasting results.

### **Case Study**

Early in my career I became the manager of a department of skilled personnel. This department was an administrative nightmare and the people had lost trust in their previous manager. Each day I worked at building relationships based upon treating each person with the dignity they deserved. It was hard work and not very rewarding on a daily basis. Many of the people did not like me because of the decisions that had to be made and the changes that had to be implemented. Years later several of these people

came to me and told me that while they may not have liked me or the things I did in the department, yet they respected me as their manager. They said, “You told us like it was and treated us fair and right.” Several also said, “It didn’t matter who it was, you treated us like we were somebody.” What more could the manager ask? While the rewards weren’t immediately recognized by me on a daily basis, the delayed rewards were even more gratifying.

## **VI. Practice Strategic Leadership**

### **Strategic Leadership**

- Creates the vision of what’s necessary
- Communicates it clearly
- Executes the plans

### **Strategic Leaders**

- Know themselves
- Know their organizations
- Understand the different players
- Understand the rules of the “game today”
- Understand the conditions of the “field”
- Build relationships based on solid values

## **VII. Ten Secrets of Successful Leaders**

### **Secret #1: Treat People Right**

Successful leaders work to earn the respect of the people who report to them and of the people with whom they interact. This means employees, co-workers, customers and suppliers. The attitude employees develop towards their bosses is based upon the qualities and actions of the person in charge. Employee attitudes are critical to the leader's success as well as productivity in the work place. The top secret is to treat all people with dignity and regard them as individuals. Really, just treat others like you want to be treated to paraphrase the Greatest Teacher, who gave us the "Golden Rule."

### **Secret #2: Define Expectations for Each Employee**

Every employee has a need and a right to know what their boss expects. Managers have a responsibility to define and communicate expectations for each employee. Failure to do so leads to frustration and poor performance.

The essential expectations for each employee are the five or six key requirements that must be met for a person to be successful on their job. This is not a job description of detailed tasks, but rather the major requirements for success on the job. Simply take out a sheet of paper and write each employee's name in one column and then write in your expectations. Next, the hard part: communicate them one on one with the employee.

When you do this, you may be amazed to learn that you and an employee have different expectations. Many times people have become frustrated or even left organizations just because expectations were not clear. There is no need for you to

ever allow unclear expectations to become an issue. It is too simple to prevent this leadership issue.

### **Secret #3: Have a Clear Vision for the Organization and Articulate It**

Vision is simply looking ahead and seeing the things others don't see; and providing a long term sense of direction for the organization. Spend time to look beyond today. Look ahead five or ten years and make your best estimate of what needs to happen in your business to continue being successful. Setting the vision and clearly communicating it to the organization is one of the two most important functions of leadership. (The other one is establishing and communicating the values.)

Vision sets the overall direction for the organization and gives the people something to "hitch their wagon to" and should be relevant and practical, yet challenging for the organization to really embrace it.

### **Secret #4: Delegate Effectively**

Delegation is making effective work assignments based on the competencies of your people. Many managers today are overloaded with work and yet fail to realize the importance of effective delegation, however the successful ones know what can and should be delegated, make the assignments and leave their people alone to get the job done. Ineffective ones will take care of many tasks themselves, stay busy and fail to fulfill their role as a manager.

Many times those in charge just give direction without getting input or checking for understanding. When delegating a task it is essential to know that the employee understands what is to be done. It is difficult to delegate a job, because with delegation comes the right to make a mistake and the person in charge is still responsible for all that happens in his or her work group. Yet, it is impossible to be a very effective in leading a work group when one is trying to do all the work themselves.

### **Secret #5: Pay Attention to Details**

The details we're talking about are little things that make the difference between success and failure.

The effective leader is careful to take care of the details, especially where employees and/or customers are concerned. Managers must be involved in the details, especially on the big projects. It is a myth that the people in charge can avoid getting involved in the details of the work to be done. The challenge is to avoid getting so deeply involved in details that you bother your people or fail to manage the overall operation or organization.

The big issues in the work place will be resolved, often times it's the little things that are harder to focus on every day. Remember, when you've got a little rock in your shoe, nothing's right!

### **Secret #6: Evaluating Alternatives**

Alternatives are the different potential courses of action to reach a solution to a problem, work place situation or to achieve an objective. Failure often comes from a single minded approach to problems. Being “boxed in” without understanding alternative courses of action can lead to even more trouble in some situations.

Focus is important, but managers need to practice developing alternatives when faced with problems or situations in the work place. Developing reasonable alternatives enables us to identify multiple approaches to a specific issue or situation. Practicing the discipline of developing alternatives will make you a better problem solver for your organization.

In most situations faced by a manager, there are multiple possible solutions or actions. The effective manager will develop alternatives that will enable him to approach problems more objectively as opposed to being “fixed” on one solution or course of action. Encouraging those who report to you to bring several alternatives when discussing problem situations will build a more competent work force for your organization. This practice will help you develop your people.

### **Secret #7: Asking the Right Questions**

Sometimes simply knowing the right questions to ask can make a person much more successful as a leader. Of course, the simple “Why?” when asked about five times can help us get to the root cause of many problems. Generally, we arrive at the root cause about the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time we ask why. Here are other questions to consider:

1. How are your overall business results as compared to your goals for the year?
  
2. Is your safety performance for the year on target, or are you having too many first aid cases, accidents or lost time injuries?
  
3. Is there an established process to evaluate your compliance to regulatory requirements which affect your organization? (i.e. IRS, EEOC, OSHA, EPA, ADA, FDA, DOT and a myriad of other federal, state and local regulations and/or agencies) Have you conducted and documented compliance reviews? Are corrective actions effective?
  
4. Are you meeting your customers' expectations? Is it time to assess customer satisfaction?

### **Secret #8: Knowing When to Make Exceptions**

An exception is when a policy, work rule or procedure is knowingly violated in the interest of an employee, customer or business need. While it's important to follow work rules and procedures, there are times in the real world when work rules or procedures may restrict a manager from acting in the best interest of an employee, customer or the business.

Wisdom dictates that managers realize these unusual situations for what they are and make rare exceptions. Whenever exceptions are made to work rules or procedures, a



legitimate justification should be readily recognizable. The problem, of course, is for the manager to recognize the situation and be willing to take a calculated risk. When an exception is made, the situation should be carefully documented and clearly communicated to all interested parties.

Exceptions that are not legitimate or that are not clearly communicated generally lead to misunderstandings, setting undesirable precedents or charges of favoritism. Thus, clear communications are essential. Also, if procedures or rules need to be changed, document the changes and update the procedures.

### **Secret #9: Be Decisive**

Gen. George Patton said, "When in command, command." In the business world the work force is looking for leaders who will make decisions based on the facts of the situation and not just "what someone will accept." So when you are the leader, lead!

It's a disgrace and a waste when the work force is waiting for those in charge to stop procrastinating and make decisions. Too often the top people delay progress or even worse let a situation force the decision by not making a decision. Workers don't respect indecisive leaders.

Learn and use a systematic process for making decisions. Make effective decisions in a timely manner. For example, define the problem or situation, get the facts, look at the options, get input where appropriate, evaluate the consequences and make a decision.

### **Secret #10: Follow Up to Let People Know You Care**

Follow up is just letting people know that you care by seeing that work assignments are performed properly. Effective follow up is not “looking over the shoulder” of an employee, but rather asking how the work is progressing or observing results. It lets the employee know the work is important and that you care.

When the boss doesn't care enough to follow up, why should anyone else care?

## **VIII. Successful Leaders Measure Performance to Improve Results**

It has been said, “If you don't measure it, why do it?” In the business world today factors that are critical to success are not always known or measured. Many times businesses have lots of data, but it is meaningless if it is not converted into useful information.

Measuring results involves identifying the key factors or variables for your business, determining how to measure them, establishing goals, tracking how well employees are doing relative to the goals, and following up on what you learn. Too often managers see situations subjectively and make decisions based upon emotions and supposition instead of measuring and evaluating using real data.

**How to Improve Results by Setting Individual Targets:** Identify the five to seven critical factors that tell the health of the organization or work group. Know the appropriate units of measurement to use, for example: # work orders completed in a shift; labor hours/work order; good pounds per day; # good parts/shift; lbs. of

waste/shift; # loads/day; mpg; # of students sent to detention; grade distributions; environmental incidents; safety incidents; etc. Next, establish the baseline, or “where you are,” using actual data for several months if it is available. Then, set targets to monitor and evaluate performance using the data and information from the process. Make it visible to provide effective feedback for individuals and the team.

**Case Study:** Recently, one of our clients was experiencing a decline in productivity.

After discussing the situation baseline productivity data was determined for each operator. Since it was a small family owned business, all employees were included, not just the production personnel. It was a bit challenging to identify measurable factors for some of the folks, but together we did it.

Next, we began using a simple graph to show actual performance for each person for each day, week or month depending upon what was being tracked.

In the production area the average productivity per shift increased from 68% to over 79% in one month and up to 85+% within two months. They set a target of 75% and awarded the folks with a luncheon if the overall team averaged 75% and no individual was below the baseline of 68%. They were ready to eat the first month! This was simply due to monitoring and providing feedback. The senior manager made a habit of reviewing the graphs and making notes on them. The graphs were posted so that everyone could see them. This provided individual and team peer pressure as well.

**Action Steps:**

- 1) Identify the five to seven factors critical to your unit's success;
- 2) identify the units of measure;
- 3) determine the frequency of measurement;
- 4) clarify how the information will be communicated;
- 5) establish a way to make the information visible and readily available;
- 6) provide simple tangible rewards for meeting goals; and
- 7) implement corrective actions when the desired targets are not met.

Now, just get busy and make it happen! This simple process can help you move to more fact based decision making and improve your profits by using key indicators.

**IX. Leadership is not About “Being the Boss”**

One definition of management could be helping employees do their job by meeting their needs and serving the organization. If managers serve their employees instead of being aloof or arrogant the employees will usually respond by meeting or exceeding expectations and goals.

Today, perhaps more than at any time in our history, folks need to be appreciated for what they do and have their need for “belonging” met by their supervisors. Look for ways to serve. For example, stay and help clean up the conference room after a meeting; pour the coffee during meetings; pick up paper in the parking lot; or, a myriad of other small tasks that will demonstrate to all who see that you are serious about

serving. Sure these are small examples, but they illustrate the point quite well. Another personal example is in order here. Recently while conducting a series of management workshops for a client I helped the secretaries bring in the food and arrange the tables and chairs in the training facility. The people arriving noticed the leader was willing to do what needed to be done. Now, when I call the secretary is always helpful; the people I work with respond more rapidly and provide more than I expect from them. It kind of goes back to the *"Golden Rule."*

Your success as a manager is ultimately determined by the success of your people. Thus, when you help meet their needs and help them succeed you are helping yourself and the organization become more successful. This is just another of those "paradoxes of leadership and management."

Think about how you go about a "routine" day at work. What are two or three simple things you could do that will demonstrate your commitment to serve or help others be more successful?

## **X. Successful Leaders Empower Others**

Providing competent people the freedom to make decisions related to their work and holding them accountable for the results is what empowerment is really all about.

Generally speaking, people like to have a say in their work and the decisions that affect them day to day.

The successful manager will allow people to be involved and give them the freedom and responsibility to make decisions that are within their realm of knowledge and competence.

There are decisions that must be made by the manager or leader. Know what these are and communicate them to your people. Then, give them the framework of the decisions they are free to make on their own and hold them accountable. This empowers them to learn and grow from their work and the decisions being made. It will go a long ways towards motivating most workers.

## **XI. Leadership Is Ultimately About Relationships**

Relationships can be defined as the association or companionship of two or more people in the work place. It is important to realize that people in organizations generally care about each other.

Trust is the basic building block for relationships. Good relationships are the path to success for managers today. Effective managers know that ultimately the work of the organization is accomplished by people working together. Good relationships among employees are critical to having a productive work place. Many managers spend too much time on administrative stuff and/or production concerns and too little time building relationships.

Studies have shown that about 80% of the failures of people in the work place are due to poor relationships. To be effective the manager or leader must work every day to build solid relationships based on trust. This sort of sounds like where we began with the survey that showed honesty is the #1 trait of effective leaders.

## **XII. Five Critical Questions to Consider**

In reviewing this course, now it is time to reflect upon and answer five critical questions that can make the difference in your success as a leader:

1. How are your relationships with your employees?
2. How about with other departments, business units, customers or suppliers?
3. Do you carry “baggage” around due to previous issues with employees? (If so, get rid of it.)
4. Can you identify any areas where honesty or integrity are being or have been compromised? If so, address them “head-on.”
5. Are there any situations where you need to go to an employee or co-worker and get some issues resolved? If so, why wait any longer?

## **XIII. You Can't Manage History So Lead for the Future**

### **Learn from History**

The past is history, and we cannot manage history. Managers and leaders spend hours reporting on history at the expense of preparing for the future. What is done is done.

Sure, we must learn the lessons of history so that we don't repeat it. However, most organizations will still repeat "history" in a lot of situations instead of learning the lessons and taking preventive action for the future.

We can define the future as any time after today, or even after this minute of your life. Effective leaders prepare for the future so that when it arrives they are ready for the challenges of that day and they have prepared their people for those challenges.

As a wise plant manager once told me, "just because you do not have a problem today, it doesn't mean this won't be a problem a month from now." Look ahead and plan for the future. Prepare for the future but don't worry about the future.

Successful leaders realize the importance of planning for next week, month quarter and year. Many businesses develop three year strategic and operational plans with annual reviews and updates. Practice the discipline of looking ahead, anticipating problems and considering the future effects of decisions that are made today.

### **Lead for the Future: Ask and Answer the Right Questions**

1. What critical factors in your business need to be reviewed for future effects?
2. What decisions are being made now that can or will affect the future?



3. How will these decisions impact the people and the business?
4. What potential problems, external or internal, lie ahead for your business?
5. What preventive actions can you take now?

### **Take Action Today**

Identify the 3—5 areas where you need to be planning for next month, quarter or year.

Write out your plans with action items and targets. Look for preventive actions you can take now. Focus on people and relationships to get the most from your organization.

When you take care of the people, production will be taken care of by the people.

Remember, poorly served employees provide poor service!

### **XIV. Leadership is.....**

Now, I'll leave you with an acronym that perhaps you'll remember long after the details of this course are forgotten:

***Listen to your employees, associates and customers***

***Expect top performance and settle for no less***

***Address problems when they occur; don't ignore them***

***Delegate effectively AND know what not to delegate***

***Encourage people regularly***

***Respect employees and their families***

***Sincerely show appreciation to customers and employees***

***Honesty in all you do is ESSENTIAL***

***Involve your employees in decision making***

***Provide positive reinforcement for desired performance***

***In closing, I encourage you to be an effective leader. Leadership can be tough, but it can also be rewarding. Learn and grow as a leader. Pay attention to what is really important every day at work!***

***Here's to your success as a leader. The best is yet to come!***