

LEADERSHIP FOR THE REST OF US

10 LESSONS FOR LEADERS WHO "AREN'T"

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Leadership for Work and Home

INTRODUCTION

My Twitter profile says that I am husband, father, pastor, and blogger. Outside of those hats, I have also had the privilege of working in higher education, retail management, hospitality/restaurant management, and production management.

In each of these roles, I have witnessed many people who miss some basics when it comes to leadership. The purpose of this eBook is to offer 10 lessons of leadership to those that find themselves new to leadership or others who just need a refresher.

My hope is that you'll pick up a couple of things that you can begin to apply immediately and find yourself a better leader tomorrow than you were today. If you find this eBook helpful, please let others know about my website and how to connect with me!

~ Tim Parsons



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LESSON ONE

1. Invest in your successor.

This may seem on the surface to be a longer term thing (and it is), but it actually has application in shorter term leadership moments. The idea here is that you shouldn't do it all yourself.

Leadership is about leading and influencing others – so you should delegate and always be on the lookout for someone to eventually take your place. The best leaders give things away. They aren't intimidated by the talent, skills, and gifting of others. So, this allows them to give the work, the ideas, the planning, and the organization away to others.

Investing in others does require your acceptance of the risk that others will fail. But, you have to allow them to fail well. Training is key and if people are trained adequately in the beginning while using failure as a training opportunity when it happens, the people you're investing in will succeed more often. I would say, however, that failing at the same thing multiple times is not what I'm talking about here – but, rather, giving people the space and freedom to fail once, learn from the failure, and then take positive steps forward.

Investing in your successor requires you to identify those that have potential and then spending time with them. So, who are you investing in right now?

LESSON TWO

2. Be a lifelong learner.

You're reading my ebook right now – so you must be interested in some level of learning. But, I would say that this should be a top priority for you. Of course, learning comes in a lot of different ways, but I would recommend using more than one avenue of education to accomplish this step as a leader. Formal education such as pursuing a degree at a university would be a great thing for a leader. For me, I am carefully considering obtaining a doctorate. The goal should include becoming a better leader through the educational process.

Magazines, blogs, online resources, and webinars are a great way to keep learning. It's something that takes time and you have to make time for – but it's worth it. Find out who the experts are in your industry or area of responsibility and learn from them. Read their blogs or follow them on Twitter. Find out who they're learning from and tap into those resources. Schedule time in your day and/or week to sit down and learn from experts in order to grow as a leader.

What steps are you taking to be a lifelong learner? What are some blogs or other resources you read to grow in your own leadership?

LESSON THREE

3. Reward in public, discipline in private.

Recognizing publicly the folks that you lead should be a way of life for you. People need to hear that they're doing a good job – and they need to hear it from you. This should be scheduled into your team meetings, it should happen spontaneously, and it should happen on the spot when good things are being done. When you reward people in public, it builds up the person that your rewarding and it sets a tone for the rest of the team – but it also reinforces the good things that all team members should be striving towards.

Correction and discipline is a reality no matter what kind of leadership situation you find yourself in. The worst thing you can do is to confront and try to correct the person in front of others... especially their peers. This is true no matter how big or small the error, offense, etc. is. These conversations should be held behind closed doors for a number of reasons – it maintains employee morale, it allows the person who is being confronted to retain some dignity as well as a status in his/her peers' eyes, and it keeps confidential things confidential.

In what way have you rewarded someone publicly lately? Is disciplining in private a practice you employ? If not, what steps can you take this week to be sure you are not crossing this line?

LESSON FOUR

4. People are your most important resource.

It's easy to think that money, or profit, or facilities, or time are your best resources – but it's actually people.

Because it's people that lead you to have sales so that you can have money and profit, and it's people that maintain the facilities so that things are in working order and clean, and it's people that are able to help you so that you can have time to do other things. And, the same way that you take care of money, facilities, and time you should be taking care of your people.

The people on your team should be taken care of financially, emotionally, and relationally. Pay them an honest wage and give them incentives to do a good job. If it's a volunteer situation, give them a gift card every now and then or at least make sure that what you're asking them to do as a volunteer doesn't interfere with their 'day job.' Check on them and ask how they're feeling and how their marriage is. Ask about their kids and their satisfaction with their job/position. Spend time with them. Take them to lunch or out to coffee. Become someone that they can talk to.

Great leaders remove obstacles so that people can do what they do best. Obstacles can be a lack of resources or training, personal issues that affect their work, or others on the team that are not pulling their own weight. Leaders remove obstacles. So, what obstacles are you removing so the people you lead can be more effective? Are you investing in your people financially, emotionally, and relationally?

LESSON FIVE

5. Vulnerability leads to trust.

I think I first heard about this thought from Patrick Lencioni, but I find it to be true on a regular basis. Trust is foundational in any relationship if it is to have a positive return. Building trust takes time – and losing trust can only take a second – so it is important that you are intentional about earning the trust of those who are following you. And the best way to do this, in my opinion, is to be vulnerable with your team.

Now when I say be vulnerable here, I am not talking about being sappy and crying together (although there may be times for that) or even sharing your deepest and darkest parts of your life with others. I simply mean that those you lead must know and understand that you are human. That you deal with human emotions and the ups and downs of life, just like them. Often as leaders we feel that we must look like we have it all together and that if we are vulnerable it will lead to others doubting our ability to lead. I have found the opposite to be true.

So, share some of your life with them. Invite them to your home for dinner. Tell them stories about growing up or what it was like when you first started doing the job you're currently doing. But also tell them about a time you messed up or a time when you learned something new. Tell them about your family and your ups and downs of married life or raising kids. Once again, be strategic about what you share and who you share it with, but the point is to become human to them and show them that you are just like them.

Who are you being vulnerable with? What steps can you take in the next few days to be vulnerable with those you lead? I believe it will lead to a deeper level of trust! Give it a try!!

6. Own Communication.

The communication or lack thereof squarely falls on the shoulders of the leader(s). It is up to you to communicate things to those that you lead and do it in a clear and timely manner. There is nothing that leads to a loss of excellence or a lack of motivation for a team than to feel as though they are out of the loop on things that directly impact them and their responsibilities. People naturally want to be on the inside of things – and it’s your job to make sure that they feel like they are. And this happens, mostly, through communication.

You see, when people do not feel like they are on the inside of things, they can begin fabricating things based on limited information – and this is most often a bad thing for you and the organization as a whole. There are times to keep things confidential and a time to keep things to yourself, of course. But, what I’m referring to here is much simpler than that. One question that should be asked in every conversation that deals with organizational policies/procedures or change or direction should be “How and who will we communicate this?”

We have no one to blame but ourselves when the people we lead say that they didn’t know something. So, make plans now to over-communicate. The complaints of over-communication are never as disastrous as not communicating or under-communicating. How can you make this a priority this week?

LESSON SEVEN

7. Know the numbers.

No matter where you're leading – in business, not for profit, the church, or at home – there are numbers that help you to measure what you're doing and how well you're doing it. You, as the leader, should know the numbers. And not just know them, but know them well. Know what the numbers mean and how to use that data to make decisions and set direction. Numbers and measuring things tell us the health of the organization, family, or department that we're leading.

Numbers should be reviewed regularly. Not only by you as the leader, but also by those that you lead. They should know what numbers are being measured, why they're important, and what they are. They don't necessarily need to know them as well as you do – but taking some time once a month or once a quarter (depending on what you do) is certainly valuable to the overall effectiveness of the team. Numbers shows us that what we're doing matters.

Do you look at the numbers regularly? How do the numbers affect your decisions? Do you do a good job of informing those that you lead of the numbers? How could you do this one better?

LESSON EIGHT

8. Goals lead to growth.

On a vacation, the goal is the location where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you will never know when you get there. Goals do that for us in leadership. Goals tell us where we're going and let us know when we get there. In goal setting there are both short-term and long-term goals – and both are important. Equally important is the idea of setting both organizational and personal goals that will, both, help you reach success as a department, family, or organization.

Set **SMART** goals. I wish I could take credit for this one, but I can't...so I won't. But SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound. And all goals, whether small or big, should be structured according to SMART goal setting. This will increase the effectiveness of your goals and the likelihood of achieving them.

Finally, you should share the goals with your team and you should all take part in holding each other accountable to accomplishing the goals. Regular review of the progress toward the goals is important and key to keep them in front of you. I've even seen these goals made into business card sized handouts that employees tape to a computer screen or put in a binder to constantly remind them. But review the results and be honest about them – and re-adjust as necessary to make sure that the goals do not become an energy and motivation killer for your team.

What method do you use to set goals? What do you struggle most with as it relates to goal setting?

9. Have Confidence.

These may seem a little silly, but so many leaders that I come across lack confidence either in small part or large part. Often, having confidence is confused with not having humility – and that couldn't be further from the truth. There is a humble type of confidence, although it's a balance, that can be found...and must be found. People respond well to confidence, but they respond in an even bigger way when leaders lack confidence.

Have you ever worked for or with a leader that lacked confidence? The result is a team that doesn't listen to or follow the leader. Or, even worse, the result can be a team that has no respect for a leader and therefore doesn't pull their own weight or they sabotage the goals of the organization or department. A leader's confidence is no more on the front stage than when crises arise. The team is looking for the leader to say everything is going to be ok and to point towards answers or plans.

Once again, I am not advocating a false confidence in any way. There is never a time for a leader to have or show a false sense of confidence. However, confidence can be found in many places for a leader and does not always reside in him/herself. A leader can have confidence in the team they lead. A leader can have confidence in the processes or technology or machinery that they have at their disposal. A leader can have confidence in the leadership that they follow. If the leader is Christian, the leader can have confidence in God and that He will work things out.

How would you rate yourself on the confidence scale – are you a 1, 10, or somewhere in between? How have you seen a lack of confidence from a leader (maybe you) impact an organization?

10. You need a mentor.

Someone who's just ahead of you helping to point the way. Someone who's been there and done that – and done it well...or not so well. In either case, there are lessons to be learned. This point goes hand and hand with the point about being a LifeLong Learner. You should have someone who you are able to talk to about the things you're doing and get wisdom and sound advice from.

The key with getting a mentor is that YOU have to ask. It is very rare that someone would approach you and say they would like to mentor you. You have to do the homework and you have to ask. And when you ask, be prepared with the next step and the plan. Don't ask someone to be a mentor for the rest of your life. Ask them to come along side you for 6 months or a year. Then if it blossoms into more, so be it. But, be sure to be clear on what you're asking them to do for you and with you. Take some time to sit down and jot down some goals.

And, finally, remember that someday you will make a great mentor in the life of someone else. So, be ready and be that rare person that will actually approach someone and offer to be their mentor. You will be blessed by it and so will they!

Who's mentoring you right now? What have you experienced because of this relationship? If you don't have a mentor, who are 3 or 4 people who are doing it well in your industry that you could ask (don't get discouraged if they say no, that's why I say 3 or 4)?