

3 Things Every Leader Should Do Today!

Being a highly effective leader is a learned skill. Leaders aren't born, they're developed. Therefore, every leader needs to consistently hone their skills and establish a regimented process. Below are three skills and processes every aspiring great leader should begin developing today.

1. Make time for staff

It's amazing (and disappointing) how many times I ask leaders how often they meet with their staff and they tell me, "All the time. My door is always open." Or "We're always talking throughout the day." Sadly, they think that is being a leader. Sorry to say, but that's not leading or coaching; it's simply managing and reacting.

Anyone who claims to be a leader or coach must be conducting regularly scheduled meetings with their staff. It doesn't matter how many direct reports you have or how busy you are; you cannot lead if you're not having dedicated and focus conversations with employees.

The meetings don't have to be long – 15-30 minutes, depending on the frequency – and they don't have to be overly formal. But they do need to occur consistently. Your business and the size of your staff may dictate if you meet weekly or every-other week but that must be the minimum frequency. Anything longer than that is a disservice to them.

And when you've set a regularly scheduled meeting with the staff, only a full-blown act of God should cause you to not keep the commitment. If they say they're too busy to meet, then either insist they make the time or find the necessary coverage for their workload.

The meeting should be 1-on-1; conducted in a quiet, uninterrupted space; turn off all outside stimuli (i.e., email alerts and cell phone). There should be a standard agenda consisting of talking points that are fairly consistent from meeting to meeting.

Keep the tone of the meeting casual and relaxed – this is not the time to address serious performance issues. This is the time for you and them to share ideas and strategy. Both parties should be prepared to listen and talk – make sure it is a solid collaborative dialogue.

In today's world, virtual meetings are acceptable, of course, but working virtually is no excuse for not adhering to the tenants noted above.

2. Position others for success

There are numerous reasons why someone may or may not be successful in their role. As a leader, your job is to find out what the reasons are and which ones you can help develop and grow. For some employees the areas of need will be obvious but for others it will take some effort to identify. Don't be misled however, it is your job as a leader to find out and be as precise as possible in your determination.

From our experience, here are a few primary areas that often inhibit an employee's success:

- Knowledge, skill, behaviors – first, recognize that these three words are not synonymous – they have three different meanings (i.e., someone can have the knowledge but not the skills or behaviors). It is the leader's job to make sure their employees acquire and retain each of the three. And not just new-hires, either; experienced staff needs to polish and hone them just as much, or more. The leader doesn't have to be the primary source for them but they do need to be the orchestrator of the resources necessary to make sure each and every employee gets the up-to-date knowledge, skills, and behaviors to do their job.
- Too many hassles – no one likes jumping through hoops to get something done – members don't like it but neither do employees. Too often, we focus on member efficiency but at the expense and avoidance of employee efficiency. Even your best producers and most loyal employees will eventually grow frustrated with the hassles, inefficiencies, and redundancies of poorly engineered processes. As a leader, focus on how to simplify the operations aspect of every role so your employees can focus squarely on the production aspects of their role.
- Lack of support – this inhibitor manifests itself mostly when it comes to problem resolution. Often, we preach empowerment to employees when it come to solving problems but, in actuality, employees don't have the resources, bandwidth, or knowledge to solve many of the problems they encounter. Many times, employees need to depend on the assistance of another employee and/or department in order to see a problem solved thoroughly and definitively. Come on, leaders: don't just preach "empowerment"; create a support system where employees can truly be empowered.
- Don't believe in the goals/objectives – "Where did they come up with that number?!" is a comment we occasionally hear from employees when discussing their production goals. And when a leader fails to provide a legitimate answer, the employee is challenged, at best, and, at worst, gives up their efforts to realizing that goal. Be prepared to explain the why and how behind the goals.

- Wrong fit – lastly, sometimes it’s necessary to admit that an individual is simply in the wrong role. The demands of the job don’t match their motivations. Maybe the job was misrepresented in the recruiting process; maybe the employee misrepresented their abilities in the interview process; but maybe the role has changed and the employee is unable to change with it. In the latter case, being a good leader means moving them into a new role.

3. Get lots feedback

Whether you’ve been a leader for 20+ years or 20 minutes, become diligent in getting feedback on how well you’re doing as a leader. You spend a lot of your time giving feedback to others but they rarely, if ever, get a chance to give you feedback ... until now.

For many leaders, soliciting and getting feedback is a scary proposition. You really need to be willing to open yourself up to every kind of feedback from a variety of perspectives. From working with leaders on getting feedback, here are four perspectives you should seek out:

1. Direct reports – clearly this is the one that will feel the strangest because it’s rarely done (or rarely done properly). It’s even going to feel strange for your employees for the same reason – they’ve likely never been asked for it. Ideally, the questionnaire will be structured so they are providing feedback on very specific situations; that way, their feedback will be constructively focused on areas to improve and not on personal feelings.
2. Boss – assuming your boss gives you a performance review and that review focuses on your production and operations performance, this additional feedback will be squarely on how to be a better leader. Ask them for specific examples of when you’ve demonstrated good leadership and when you didn’t. Ask them what makes them an effective leader and how do perform in that particular area. Again, specificity in their feedback is critical to success.
3. Peers – this approach may be similar to the one with your boss because the focus isn’t on production but on how you’re performing with the softer side of the role. And they should certainly appreciate what it takes to be good at that “softer” side since they’re likely fighting similar challenges. Peers can also provide feedback on what they hear from others, in addition to their own perspective.
4. Mentors – even if you don’t have a formal mentor, approach someone who will become a mentor. Typically, it’s someone at your boss’ level or higher. They may have limited observations of your leadership performance but, again, they can share what they’ve heard second-hand and together you can determine if it’s relevant or not. Further, like with your boss, ask this mentor to put themselves in your shoes and help identify what your areas of focus should be. It’s highly likely they were in a very similar situation at some point in their leadership development.

If you or your leaders need help developing their skills and establishing their routines, our consultants are poised to help. Using a variety of tools and methods, most leaders need outside help to get over the hump and become the “great” leaders they desire to be. Visit us at www.fi-strategies.com or 636-578-3280 and let’s talk!

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