

FIVE KEYS TO GREAT LEADERSHIP

A GUIDE FOR ALL NEW LEADERS



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INTRODUCTION

So, you recently became a leader of other people. Congratulations!

You have now entered a different stage of your career and life. Leadership responsibility will change you as a person.

This document has been written specifically for you. I was there, just like you are now, and I wondered: "What is a leader, really? How do I know when I'm doing it right?"

What follows here is direct advice to guide you to your own answers to those questions. Don't take brevity for lack of depth. These are all things I learned the hard way.

I wish someone had told me what I am about to tell you - it would have saved me a lot of mistakes. What I learned from my own decisions, good and bad, I am committed to teaching you and others.

Maybe you will find yourself doing the same one day.

Let's get started.

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1 THE MINDSET OF A COACH

When you become a leader of people, you are no longer accountable for individual work the same way as you were before.

Think about it.

As an individual contributor, you are rewarded for the value you bring as an individual, even though you may have been working as part of a broader team.

You see a problem and solve it yourself? Awesome. Here is a reward. Job well done.

As a leader, you need to figure out how to **work through others**. You are no longer get credit for being the smartest person in the room. You should now be focusing on enabling others to do their highest and best work.

“THE ULTIMATE LEADER IS ONE WHO IS WILLING TO DEVELOP PEOPLE TO THE POINT THAT THEY EVENTUALLY SURPASS HIM OR HER IN KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITY.”
- FRED A. MANSKE JR.

1 THE MINDSET OF A COACH

As a new leader, you have become **a coach**, whether you realize it or not. People will look to you for guidance, clarity, leadership, and support.

Imagine that one of your employees is in a moment of self-doubt. They aren't sure they have what it takes to achieve the task in front of them, and they trust you enough to express this.

You recognize this, and you offer your help. Not by showing the answer, but by telling them that you believe in them, even when they might not feel that way about themselves. You then reiterate your support for them, and help them navigate the situation, whatever form that takes.

This is an example of Doing It Right.

The best leaders know this, and spend quality time with their people. They listen. They adapt. They respond instead of reacting. Sometimes this involves saying open and honest things that need to be said, even if it is sharp and correcting.

Coaching others is not about false praise, it is about intentional growth.

1 THE MINDSET OF A COACH

Great leaders realize the influence they hold and they act mindfully as such. They work to become better, both for themselves and for those around them. Others see this, and are inspired by it.

Some leaders never learned any of these things. They bring their own insecurities and personal baggage to the role. They feel like they must be the smartest people in the room, micromanaging and diminishing anyone who appears to threaten that fragile mindset. *This behavior is weakness, not strength.* It destroys morale and weakens the team.

Don't be that kind of leader. If you notice these characteristics developing in yourself, it's time to take a look inside and work on yourself. This is also a life skill shared by the best leaders.

It is impossible to be everywhere as a leader. You cannot be in every detail, every decision, and still focus on business objectives. For this reason, you must coach those around you to handle situations as you would expect.

Adopt the mindset of a coach.

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2 INSTILL CLARITY

Most organizations devote much time and effort to defining the strategic goals of the company.

Much less attention is given to ensuring that the teams doing the work understand how that work contributes to the strategic goals. The results are predictable. Without clarity, success falls into the realm of the accidental, defined by stress and personal heroics.

In fairness, clarity is not easy. It takes work. You may think you are defining clear and aligned goals, when you are not. Be open to that possibility.

As a leader, a major part of your role is translating strategy into clear goals for your team. This is especially important for knowledge workers like engineers, because they will engage more strongly in their work if they know why they are doing it, and to what ends.

Make sure you are regularly clarifying the strategic goals with your team, and that you are actively watching and listening for their interpretation of those goals in their words and deeds.

“CLARITY IS THE PREOCCUPATION OF THE EFFECTIVE LEADER. IF YOU DO NOTHING ELSE AS A LEADER, BE CLEAR.”
- MARCUS BUCKINGHAM

2 INSTILL CLARITY

For example, imagine you are in the middle of a meeting and you notice a lack of understanding of the goals coming out in the conversation. Perhaps the team begins to re-evaluate strategic outcomes. These are signals that you need to work on instilling more clarity.

In practice, clarity is really about these things:

- Consistently communicating and over-communicating
- Using precise terminology where it is needed
- Messaging with mindfulness of the intended audience
- Awareness of the downstream implications of decisions

Clarity is not just in goals and outcomes - it is also important in setting behavioral expectations and culture.

Even if you are in an organization that does not consciously or intentionally design its culture, you can create it within your team.

You play a key role in designing a winning work environment though clear expectations.

Instill clarity.

It can be the difference between success and failure.

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3 BE THE EXAMPLE

Some of the best leaders I know are inspirational for one major reason: they are **examples** of the attributes, behaviors, and attitudes that I admire.

They mirror what they expect in others. People follow them because they want to be like them, around them, or to learn from them.

This is no accident. Here is an often misplaced quote from Mohandas Gandhi:

"If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him."

To paraphrase: as we seek and work to make ourselves better, we also affect others, and - to some degree - the world around us.

It is a simple matter to see this in life. We commonly take inspiration from those struggling and overcoming obstacles that strike a chord within us.

"THE WAY WE DO ANYTHING IS THE WAY WE DO EVERYTHING."
- MARTHA BECK

3 BE THE EXAMPLE

There is no duality between the person showing up as a leader to their team, and the person living a life outside of work. One side ripples into the other like waves on a pond.

What you improve in yourself will improve in your work.

Conversely, if you are out of alignment with your own values in your personal life, that will also show up in your leadership. Your team will notice. It will become your organization's culture.

If you treat one person favorably and another unfavorably, expect negative consequences. If you react in unpredictable ways around your team, your team will respond by reducing their trust in you.

My advice here is to spend a certain amount of your own time to make sure **your own house is in order**.

This means working to achieve and maintain **personal integrity**, which is harmony between your words and your deeds.

You may find that this is something you will revisit at many points in your life and career, as you are faced with things that challenge you deeply.

This is not easy to do. It takes serious effort. I promise you, it is well worth the pursuit.

3 BE THE EXAMPLE

All this philosophical stuff starts with some prescriptive practices you can use immediately in day-to-day activities:

- Treat people how you would want to be treated
- Own your decisions and mistakes, and correct them as needed
- Don't ask someone to do something you would not be willing to do yourself
- Stay calm, rational, and collected under pressure
- Practicing your own growth, as you also grow those around you

As a leader, it takes continual work to refine your skillset and bring your best self to the table - probably more than you may have had to do as an individual contributor.

Putting yourself out there to be a good leader will be a major growth challenge. When done well, it will positively impact all the other areas in your life.

Your team, your family, and your friends will thank you for the effort.

Be The Example.

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4 OUTCOMES OVER ACTIVITY

Today's work environments have a high degree of complexity - of processes, of technology, of organizational dynamics.

It is very easy to get lost, fixating on the minutiae and losing sight of your priorities and goals.

Sometimes, busy activities are necessary, sometimes they are not. Sometimes they are required, and sometimes they are entirely wasteful. Other times, it can be hard to know the difference.

It is well known in knowledge work such as engineering, that when one spends a lot of time and energy working on a problem, their worldview shrinks to the bounds of that problem, and they become overly focused on the problem space.

This is commonly referred to as "being too close to the problem," or "tunnel vision."

"NEVER MISTAKE ACTIVITY FOR ACHIEVEMENT."
- JOHN WOODEN

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4 OUTCOMES OVER ACTIVITY

One of the strengths a leader brings is the ability to realize when this tunnel vision is occurring, and reset the conversation to ensure that the work is driving to an outcome.

This can be a challenging mental shift. The ability to make this shift requires personal practices such as an adaptive mindset, openness to feedback, and a healthy lifestyle outside of work.

This is why when I coach people, I don't stop at the work boundary - the reality is, you and your work are not separate. Waves on a pond, remember?

Work on the ability to make this mental shift in yourself, and coach your team to work on it also.

To ensure that you are focused on outcomes, ensure that:

- The right **people** are in the right roles
- **Processes** are at appropriate levels of maturity and execution
- Appropriate **technology** is deployed to help you get full transparency over the work

These elements will increase your confidence that things are moving in the right direction.

Outcomes Over Activity.

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5 FEEDBACK IS GOLD

In my experience, only a very small number of leaders are interested in feedback about themselves. A similarly small number give meaningful feedback to their direct reports. Some give no feedback at all.

Weak. No feedback means no growth.

Feedback - meaning real, honest, and candid feedback - is required for any of us to grow in any manner. It is particularly important as a leader, because your own growth will also mean growth of your team.

This is one reason why the best of the best work with coaches and mentors. They realize that their own growth is critical to their success, and the success of the people they lead.

As a leader, you are surrounded at any given time by at least five great feedback channels:

- Your own self-assessment
- Your team
- Your boss
- Your peers
- Your friends and family

“LEARNING TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK FROM EACH OTHER IS WHAT LEADERSHIP IS ALL ABOUT.”

- SHEILA HEEN

5 FEEDBACK IS GOLD

As a practical example, anytime I do a one-on-one meeting with a direct report, I will ask: "Is there anything I can be doing more or or less of?" Another technique is to simply spend more time listening and less time talking.

There are many ways to seek and to give meaningful feedback. Don't wait for HR to tell you to do it. You can simply ask. It is a practice that will serve you well.

Not all feedback will be valuable, and not all of it will be easy to hear.

Sometimes, feedback that is difficult to hear is more valuable, because it points to something in us that we have been too afraid or too ashamed to address.

What do you do with feedback that you receive?

My advice on handling feedback:

- Give yourself some space where you can contemplate it seriously. Look in the mirror, put aside your ego, and contemplate it deeply.
- Decide for yourself whether the feedback has merit. For example, are you hearing the same feedback from multiple sources?
- Take action. There is no growth without action.

Feedback Is Gold

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WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

You should think about these things deeply, with an open mind. There is a lot to learn as a leader, it is important to be open to paths of growth that may be in front of you.

Go out into the world and practice!

Build and refine your skills. Observe the leaders around you, good and bad. You will **grow**. You will experience **success and failure**. You will **develop**. You will formulate your own set of values and principles by going through difficult things as a leader. This is how it is done.

Take the things that can serve you well, bring them into your heart and soul, and practice them with sincerity.

Similarly, work to discard what is not serving you well when you see it in yourself.

Consider these five keys as a start on the journey of your growth. My hope is that it is every bit as fulfilling as possible, enough for you to pass on your own lessons to others.

See you out there.

-Cory Berg

“SUCCESS IS THE NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF CONSISTENTLY
APPLYING THE BASIC FUNDAMENTALS.”
- JIM ROHN



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QUICK RECAP

1

ADOPT THE MINDSET
OF A COACH



2

INSTILL CLARITY



3

BE THE EXAMPLE



4

OUTCOMES OVER
ACTIVITY



5

FEEDBACK IS GOLD



NEED HELP?

If you need help, you can reach out to me directly on LinkedIn.

If you are ready for more immersive leadership training/coaching experiences for you and/or your team, I have programs and strategies that can help you. I cover everything you see here, and a lot more - everything I have learned from 30+ years in technology and leadership.

See www.coryberg.com for details, or contact me directly. If I'm still alive, I'll be doing this stuff.

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