

What Is Leadership?

Having a Title Doesn't Make You a Leader

In the business world, a title (executive, manager, supervisor, etc.) seems to imply that the holder of the title is a leader. What a title actually conveys, however, is responsibility for an area or outcome. The person who holds that title also has, as does everyone else in an organization, the *opportunity* to be a leader. There is a difference, it turns out, between being responsible for an area and displaying leadership in the discharge of that responsibility.

Neither does being promoted to a position that involves supervising others automatically make a person a leader. It is how the person acts in discharging the duties of his or her job that will show leadership, as opposed to merely exercising the authority that comes with the position.

Leadership Is Defined by Behavior, Not Title or Position

Leadership is not an innate characteristic that can be measured in the way, for example, that we measure height or weight. Instead, leadership flows from many sources that affect behavior. We recognize leadership when we see a person displaying leadership behavior, such as giving people the tools to succeed, being an active listener, and acting with integrity.

Thousands of words have been written on the subject of effective leadership behavior. Here are four of my favorite indicators of leadership:

- Encouraging people to grow on the job by having high expectations and providing positive accountability
- Taking responsibility when the group drops the ball by making it possible to find solutions
- Ensuring that the team gets the praise when it succeeds
- Recognizing the importance of setting an example for others – for example, doing the difficult right thing instead of the easy wrong one.

When you see a person in your organization who consistently displays these behaviors, you are looking at a leader in the making. Anyone, at any level in the organization, can display leadership because it is always defined by behavior.

Do You Want to Be a Better Leader?

Simply recognizing what you ought to do to be a better leader is not enough; you have to actually do those things. This is where it can become difficult, particularly if you are not in a job right now in which you seem to have much scope to display leadership behavior.

There is one thing you can do, however, no matter what your job or title, that will help you develop leadership behavior. That one thing, simply put, is *always strive to improve*.

Striving to improve means maintaining an awareness of the possibility that whatever you do can be done a little bit better the next time. Put another way, it means always trying to find ways to do better at *how* you do something. As you go about your day, look for opportunities to improve what you do – both the large things and the small ones – and you will increase the odds that you will find them, and that doing so will become a habit.

Striving to improve *includes*, but is not limited to, looking for ways to improve the way you cooperate with your co-workers or supervise your staff. Do you try to do better at how you communicate, assist, or encourage them? Do you try to find ways to set realistic expectations in constructive ways, and do you encourage them to try to do better? People usually live up to our expectations for them, whether we set those expectations low or high.

It's Worth the Effort

The making of a leader lies in developing the habit of seeking improvement. Making yourself into a leader is an inside job, an inner refusal to do only what is “good enough.” Striving for improvement is your responsibility to yourself.

Leaders are made, one extra effort at a time, not born.