

Lead By Example
By
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Leading by example is something we often hear about, but how many of us actually practice it?

Consider these scenarios: The “boss” goes home to his family as the team works late on a proposal. The manager sets inflexible work hours while he comes and goes as he pleases. Many a manager has explained to me that it was meaningless for him to stay late with his team because there was nothing he could do to contribute. On the contrary, just his presence would have had a positive impact on the team. And, there are always things that can be done.

In the past, when I was not sure exactly how I might help my select group of professionals, I have always asked, “How can I help?” Invariably, there is plenty to do; all you have to do is ask and then pitch in. It might be posting draft revisions on the proposal board, proofreading documents, using your influence to get data or other resources quickly, or any number of other useful tasks.

No matter how trivial the task, the message you will send by simply being there is that you recognize and value the sacrifice others are making. As a business leader, never ask people to do what you are not willing to do.

There is another side of leading by example that many people may not see or appreciate: teaching the next generation and developing your internal talent. On one hand, you don’t want your team learning bad habits. On the other hand, you should be aware that your experience likely exceeds theirs, and if you want your team to grow you need to teach. Teaching in this case is often done by example.

If your vision is of a happy, productive, and fun work environment, then you need to be happy, productive, and fun ... and let people see it! Some of us with introverted personalities may have

a harder time than others with setting this particular example. We can be happy, productive, and have fun all in our own minds. But we cannot create the desired environment unless we make an overt effort.

So, leading by example is both overt and practiced—over and over. Further, the path of leading by example is extremely wide. Beyond the happy, productive, and fun elements of life, there are also opportunities to demonstrate ethical, problem-solving, communications, and empathetic lessons to name just a few. Finally, as a business leader, you should realize that whether you intend them to or not, many will follow your example. Why not make it a positive one?

Suggestions

1. Never underestimate the effect you have on others when you act as a leader. This is especially true the higher you rise in seniority.
2. If you want great team performance, demonstrate by example how to be successful.
3. Act the way you want others to act.
4. Be the person you want others to be.
5. Grow (teach) future leaders by demonstrating and sharing your own experiences.

Dr. Farlow is a partner and coach at Wolf Leadership Development, LLC. He works with executives and preexecutives who desire to increase performance and take their leadership skills to the next level. His specialty is improving performance at work by improving relationship behaviors required of successful leaders. He is the author of *Leaders are Made Not Born: 40 Simple Skills to Make You the Leader You Want to Be* and can be contacted at mfarlow@wolfleadership.com.