

How to Build Leadership Skills and Develop Powerful Teams

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

Leaders are not born. They are made. To be an effective leader one must cultivate essential skills and at the same time be cognizant of the needs of the people who will follow you. Strong leaders set an example with their passion and energy, their determination to set a good example, and their willingness to take responsibility. They ask for and learn from feedback to focus on tasks at hand and achieve positive results. Everyone has the potential to take a leadership role under different circumstances. Knowing how to proceed is critical when the occasion arises.

Build Relationships. Leaders set forth values and guiding principles while promoting caring and respect for others. They establish common ground and mutuality of purpose, making sure everyone benefits. You do not have to be at the top of the totem pole to lead. Cultivate face-to-face interactions. Learn to leapfrog--to interact at all organizational levels in order to develop contacts and build relationships.

Empower Those Around You. Listen to those around you before establishing a plan. Let those who are involved know that what is going to be accomplished is their idea. Set goals and inspire your followers to do their very best. Getting people to focus on what needs to be done will help facilitate a quicker resolution. You may delegate tasks and assign responsibilities but it is best not to tell people what to do. Create a nurturing environment that encourages participants to achieve and rely on their resourcefulness in the process. Then, guide them with a softer touch that will deliver better results. And don't forget to give credit.

Mentor Others. Great leaders are more than positive role models. They are mentors who provide a nurturing and challenging environment in which people can grow and develop. You can be an effective leader by participating in formal and informal mentoring. Help those you mentor move through different positions, and draw on your network to refer, find jobs, and open doors for them. Always be available to give constructive advice and suggestions.

Promote Internal Communication. Create an atmosphere of fulfillment that fosters information flow and open dialogue while keeping everyone in the loop. Offer simple objectives communicated easily. Make sure you repeat and clarify as much as needed. Consider establishing internal panels of experts to whom you can refer. This will not only facilitate the completion of tasks, it will make those you select feel good about the contribution they are making. If something doesn't go as planned, don't place blame. A leader knows this is counterproductive.

Nurture Teams. Create excitement and build consensus. Then take the exceptionally talented people you have found and encourage them to work as a team with the rest of the group. Promote participation and organize everyone involved to grow effective teams that happily

produce positive outcomes. And don't forget that pat on the back. We all like to receive a compliment when we have done a good job.

Being a good leader is a tough job. But it is also a rewarding one. Showing people the way and getting them to work together to achieve a common objective can be personally rewarding. Seeing goals achieved is something leaders and teams can take great pleasure in.

Carol Dunitz, Ph.D. is president of The Last Word LLC, a communication and creative services company. She is a professional speaker and author of 'Louder Than Thunder,' a parable about listening and interpersonal communication. Dunitz is the playwright, lyricist and composer of 'Bernhardt on Broadway,' a musical about Sarah Bernhardt. She can be reached at 312.523.4774, cdunitz@lastword.com or www.DrCarolDunitz.com.