



How to build your leadership muscles

By Harvey Schachter / Special to The Globe and Mail / Published 24, 2018

Can you practise leadership?

This is an important question for all leaders, but particularly new ones with less experience and those hoping to move into leadership roles. Just as we practise other skills – from lifting weights to playing the piano – we can build our leadership muscles.

Leadership blogger Ken Downer suggests these [seven exercises](#), plus taking the time to rate your progress:

- **Practise asking good questions.** “Leaders aren’t the ones with all the best answers; they are ones who ask the best questions,” he writes on his blog. In your next meeting, practise coming up with great questions and score yourself by whether they advance the discussion toward a positive outcome.
- **Practise serving others:** Good leaders help others to accomplish goals. Again, score yourself: Have you found a way to help someone today without the expectation of being repaid?
- **Practise communicating:** Pay attention to your presentation skills. “From the way you stand, the words you say, the way you hook your audience and how you organize your material, you can learn from repeated practice,” Mr. Downer writes. Give yourself a score for your presentations, with bonus marks for practising, since that can be vital, and double bonus points if someone you respect gives constructive feedback.
- **Practise your values:** This may seem odd, but leaders need to know what their cornerstone values are and live them. Write down your values and rate how well you live up to them.
- **Practise teaching others:** Good leaders don’t pronounce; they coach and teach. “Do you have a skill that you are good at? Could others benefit by learning to do it or do it better? Offer to show them how,” he advises. Give yourself more points if you helped someone this week.
- **Practise learning:** Good leaders learn from mistakes and make a habit of reflecting on what is happening. “Score yourself: After a key event today, did you pause to think about what happened, what went well, and what you could do better next time?” Mr. Downer says.
- **Practise being proactive:** Leaders act, but they think before doing so, rather than just being reactive. “Before saying or doing anything, they consider their values, think about who they are communicating with and ask themselves what greater good they might achieve by their next actions,” he says. They also think ahead, anticipating. How would you rate your own actions after your most recent crisis?

Four ways new managers can go wrong

From executive coach Joel Garfinkle:

- **Ignoring the big picture:** New managers may be inclined to dive in and fix irritants, but they need to educate themselves first on organizational vision, mission and strategy to get the proper framework.
- **Micromanaging employees:** Trying to maintain total control betrays a lack of trust and will turn your subordinates against you.
- **Assuming executive presence develops naturally:** In fact, you need to consciously work to cultivate charisma. You should also, Mr. Garfinkle advises, practise regulating your emotions in stressful moments.

- **Choosing a leadership style that doesn't feel right:** Don't try and be someone else – your previous boss, for example. Be yourself.

Quick Hits

- Saying no can be tough, so it's tempting to resort to e-mail when asked to take on something you want to duck. But e-mail can be misinterpreted. The networking experts at [Shepa Learning Company](#) recommend a phone call. It allows for nuance, allows you to convey friendliness, and as you get a better idea of what's desired, you may be able to suggest other options.
- Start your day by writing freely – about anything, without stopping, to get your mind flowing. Next, suggests marketer John Gannon, [come up](#) with new ideas, aiming for 10. Not only might you come up with some better ideas for the immediate future, but you will enhance your abilities to come up with ideas at other times.
- Beware of ["I" statements](#), such as "I feel frustrated that you missed the budget deadline twice." Consultant Liz Kislik says they can be seen as expressions of emotionalism (particularly when used by women) and can make you seem focused on what is best for you personally.
- Author Gretchen Rubin says when she is trying to make a tough choice she urges herself to ["choose the bigger life."](#)
- You can quickly [increase the text viewing size](#) on a Windows desktop screen – be it in an e-mail, a website or Word document – by pressing Ctrl while pushing your mouse scroll wheel forward.

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