

Leadership and You

Introduction: A leader is someone who bonds with his/her fellows; they win together, lose together, share successes and failures. A leader doesn't worry about who receives the credit or the blame, as long as the work gets done. A leader has a combination of qualities which inspire confidence, draw others, and cause them to follow willingly. Some leadership skills are: goal setting, good communication, taking initiative, optimism, delegating authority, motivating others, solving problems, reinforcing teamwork, time and task management, enthusiasm, and coaching others to lead. A good leader shares his/her responsibilities with other members of the team.



Becoming a Leader

You can convince others that you are a leader by being willing to assume responsibility, by being a good listener, and motivating others to share responsibilities with you and other members of the team. A good leader knows that before you become a good leader you must first be a "good follower."

Becoming a leader will help you gain maturity and self-confidence. It will give you an opportunity to learn skills and earn the respect of others. You will learn to face new challenges and overcome them.

Becoming a leader isn't easy. It means being willing to work harder than anyone else. It means keeping informed. It means being positive and enthusiastic even though you may not always feel that way. A good leader assesses his/her weak and strong points and strengthens the weak points. He/she studies the qualities that make a good leader and works toward becoming that kind of a leader.

Leadership Styles

All leaders do not lead in the same way. Nor are all leaders good leaders. We can all cite examples of leaders who lead their followers in the wrong direction.

- An autocratic leader is one who has all the power and makes all the decisions. He/she closely supervises the workers and doesn't let others have a say in planning, organizing or controlling the activities of the team. He or she is more interested in getting the job done than in respecting the rights and feelings of others. There may be times when a leader has to use this style to accomplish a job or a task, but it is often not an effective leadership style. It may work well if the team is uncooperative.
- A democratic leader involves the team in making decisions and respects the opinions of others. He/she listens to others, allows team members to use their own judgment and supervises only when necessary, is considerate of the feelings of others, rewards team efforts, and is tactful in providing constructive feedback. This style works well with a cooperative team and is a style increasingly used on the job. One of the most positive results of this type of leadership is that it allows for a free flow of information and ideas.

- An informal (laissez-faire) leader allows team members to “do their own thing” most of the time and uses very little control. This style only works well with teams who are very responsible, have few problems, make few decisions, and manage their time well. This style does not work if a lot of decisions must be made in a short period of time.

Consistency in Leadership Styles

Not only do all leaders not lead in the same way; some leaders do not lead in the same way all of the time. Why? First, because there are differences in people. They think differently from one another, use time differently, communicate differently, handle emotions differently, etc. The leader of a motivated, enthusiastic team might only need to facilitate and channel their energies into meeting project goals. The leader of a team that is less motivated, not confident, and inexperienced might need to use more direction, involvement and encouragement to meet project goals.

Not only do people differ from one another, they also may differ themselves from one time to another. A good leader is able to assess people and situations and provide the skills necessary to help a team meet its goals. Thus, one leader may display all three leadership styles, depending on the current situation and the needs of the team.