



Excellence in Leadership: Critical Characteristics

Brenda Kelleher-Flight Ph.D.
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Those of you that know me well know that I firmly believe in developing realistic, achievable goals and objectives. That belief applies to personal planning as well as to organizational planning. The reason I feel so strongly is because I did not receive any coaching when I first became a leader. Many of the mistakes I made could have been avoided if the appropriate mentorship had been provided. This article is designed to support new leaders. It outlines the keys for effective leadership. If you think that you could strengthen your behaviors develop a strategic plan – Invest in Yourself.

1. Show your strengths

In the 1990s when I first became involved in teaching others about learning styles, it amazed me how many people did not know their own styles and strengths. They did not understand why certain behaviors irritated them and why they gravitated to certain individuals and not others. In many aspects of our lives we can avoid people who have strengths which are very different from our own. However, in our work lives it is essential to embrace those differences. Social organizations and businesses grow when they engage people who have the strengths required to do a variety of tasks efficiently and effectively. Therefore, it is important to become familiar with styles which compliment your own and those styles which do not compliment your own but are essential for the growth and success of your entity. Embrace all styles.

2. Articulate your passions

We do not need to strive for perfection. We need to be honest about our passions and about the things that drive us crazy. Celebrate those passions and the passions of others. The most successful organizations try and find ways for each person to work, at least some of the time, within an area dear to his/her heart. Success can not be attained when team members are bored, are unable to

focus on their passions, feel that expectations are too low, or when colleagues think their only role is to please you or others. Find each person's passions and channel them to benefit the system.

3. Outline what you value: articulate those values as actions

As members of teams we have a right to know the standards. What is considered to be acceptable behavior and what is unacceptable? Effective leaders describe the entity's values as action statements which advise the members of the expectations. They adhere to those standards and do not make an exception for anyone.

4. Acknowledge the strengths of others

One thing that always stood out to me was that as others came to know me they would say, "You aren't like what I thought you were like at all." Where did they get their first impression? Remember we are mirrors of each other.

Characteristics you like in me are characteristics you value in yourself. Those characteristics you do not like mirror those areas which are weaker in yourself and you do not like seeing this reflection. Build on others' strengths.

5. Reveal that you are human

It is easiest to work for persons who can admit to their own mistakes. Those of us that are harsh judges internally criticize ourselves for our mistakes and outwardly berate others when they make mistakes. Why are we so hard on ourselves? Is it a behavior pattern we learned in childhood, do we get temporary relief from our negative feelings when we belittle ourselves or others, or does it give us a sense of power? Acknowledge the reason to yourself. When mistakes are minor learn to take things lightly. The solution to every problem lies within the problem itself.

6. Celebrate small victories

In this hectic fast-paced environment it is easy to focus on what is not done. We forget to celebrate the small positive steps toward our goals and objectives. Everyone needs praise. Recognize and acknowledge the small gains. This action will rejuvenate the team's energy and help to maintain the positive energy required to fulfill the stated expectations.

7. Use positive language

If you believe that our external environment reflects our true thoughts, then it is essential to think in positive terms. Therefore, instead of "I can't see how we can meet the deadline" say "what do we need to do to meet the deadline?" Instead of thinking, "She really irritates me" think "Her positive strengths are x, y, and z." Take time to analyze your self-talk and rephrase the negative. Keep the glass half-full. Positive language is revitalizing.

8. Set the standard

An excellent leader's actions match his/her words. If they do not, the team takes note and the members do not necessarily feel that they should have to meet the verbalized standard either. At the end of each day, empty all negativity when you leave the work environment and do not bring it back the next day. The past is gone. You only have the present. Treat it as such and you will keep your stress level down and enable others to function with ease. Standards are meant for every person on the team.

9. Show Enthusiasm

Have you ever worked with or for someone who hated his/her role? I have and it is demoralizing. If you feel you are in a dead-end or boring role, create ways to be innovative, forward thinking and enthusiastic. When a leader is passionate about something others recognize this excitement and want to be part of that energetic team.

10. Find ways to de-stress

List the ways you de-stress. Some colleagues told me they de-stress by exercising or meditating. One person told me he wrote out each of his stresses on a separate piece of paper at the end of each day, reviewed each one and when he determined what he could constructively do, he balled up the paper and put it in the waste basket. He was determined to start afresh the next day. Each person will choose a method which is personal. The key is to avoid swearing, yelling or any intimidating actions. When you de-stress you spend less time focused on yourself and you have more energy to support others.

11. Give at least one compliment to each immediate subordinate every cycle

Many of us have never learned to give compliments. That is okay. The key is to learn to be thankful, to recognize progress, to honor achievements and to do so sincerely. Excellent leaders know that everyone likes and deserves to receive praise for their efforts, contributions and achievements.

If you are a leader you are placed in that position because you have the strengths to demonstrate all of the traits of an excellent director. Believe in yourself and support others on their journey to develop those traits.



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