Characteristics Of Solution-Oriented Leaders And How To Foster This Mindset On Your Team

 By Deanna deBara | Published on December 10, 2020 | 9 min read

It doesn't matter how effective a leader you might be—at some point, you (and your team!) are going to run into some common problems.

Leadership isn't about creating a problem-free work environment. It's how you choose to approach and manage the inevitable bumps in the road that arise that will set you apart as an effective leader.

If you want to maximize effectiveness—for yourself and your team—the best way to approach and manage those problems is with a solution-oriented mindset.

Being a solution-oriented leader is a great way to better and more swiftly manage challenges in your business—and to encourage your team to do the same.

But what, exactly, is solution-oriented leadership? What are the top characteristics of solution-oriented leaders? And how can you foster a more solution-oriented mindset—both within yourself and in your team?

THE TOP QUALITIES OF SOLUTION-ORIENTED LEADERS

First things first. Before jumping into how to become a more solution-oriented leader (and to inspire the same kind of solution-focused mindset in your team), let's quickly touch on what solution-oriented leadership *is*.

Some of the top characteristics of solution-oriented leaders include:

They Know When To Take Action—And When To Take A Step Back

When a problem arises, solution-oriented leaders don't sit around waiting for a solution to present itself—they get out there and take action to find the solution themselves.

"Leaders who are solution-oriented are really focused on action conversations," says Heather Marasse, Executive Coach and Managing Partner of Trilogy Effect. "They want to keep things moving and they're very curious when things stop; they want to dig into what's stopping the action. Because action is what produces results and solution-oriented leaders are results-focused."

But interestingly, the opposite is also true. While solution-oriented leaders don't hesitate to take action when necessary, they also recognize when they're more likely to find the solution by taking a step back, sitting with the problem, and approaching the issue from the right headspace.

"Very often, we think a solution-oriented leader is very quick to action. But I think it's essential that you can stop, to pause before you respond," says Victoria Roos Olsson, a Senior Leadership Consultant at FranklinCovey with over 20 years of experience in leadership development and coaching. "It's very easy to jump into action…but *solution*-oriented is not necessarily the same thing as *action*-oriented."

THEY KEEP THEIR FOCUS FORWARD

Solution-oriented leaders don't spin their wheels stressing about past problems or what's going wrong; instead, they keep their eye on the prize—and keep their focus on what needs to happen for themselves and their teams to continue moving forward.

"We get so caught up in what's going on in the moment and what's happened in the past, we kind of lose sight of that future horizon and the longer game," says Marasse. "Most solution-oriented Leaders tend to have a very relentless focus on the future. They keep the horizon in front of themselves and their teams."

THEY INSPIRE THEIR TEAM TO FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

When you're a leader, it's important to cultivate a solution-focused mindset within yourself. But that's only part of the equation, the most effective solution-oriented leaders inspire the same "let's roll up our sleeves and figure this out" mentality in their teams.

"Just because you are a solution-oriented *person*, it doesn't necessarily make you a solution-oriented *leader*," says Olsson. "The whole purpose of you being a leader is that you can create that [solution-oriented mindset] in others."

How To Strengthen A Solution-Oriented Mindset As A Leader

Cultivating a solution-oriented mindset is a must for effective leadership. But how, exactly, can you cultivate that mindset for yourself?

ASK FOR FEEDBACK

You can't find a solution if you don't recognize there's a problem. And when it comes to things you could do better as a leader, chances are, you've got some blinders on.

That's where feedback comes in. Asking your team for feedback on how you can improve can help identify problems that you may not be able to see on your own—and, more importantly, find solutions to those problems so you can become a more effective leader.

Ask your team to help you identify areas in your management or leadership style where they see opportunities for growth or for things they feel like you could be doing better. Then (and this is the important part!), stay open and receptive as you receive that feedback.

Having an open and receptive attitude towards feedback will help your team feel more comfortable being honest with you. "How we listen shapes what people feel they can say," says Olsson—and for your team's feedback to help you identify problems and shift to a more solution-oriented place, you need their feedback to be genuine.

And, as a bonus, not only can getting feedback make you a more effective manager, but giving your team the space to openly share their feedback can help their performance as well. According to Atlassian's research, among high-performing teams, 57% of employees said they feel comfortable delivering feedback to people higher up on the org chart—compared to just 15%on low-performing teams.

ASK THE QUESTIONS TO FIND THE RIGHT ANSWERS

You might think that being a solution-oriented leader means finding the *answers* to problems. But if you want to find innovative and effective solutions, it might do you better to focus on the *questions.*

"If you want the best answers, you first need to ask the best questions," says Olsson. "So, really looking at 'What are the things that are not working? What is it that we're needing? What should we look for now? Where's the gap? Why did we do it that way? What's happening here or what if anything was possible?'"

When faced with a problem in your business, get curious. Get inquisitive. Dig into the questions. By engaging your curiosity, the answers to your questions—aka the solutions to your problems—will naturally emerge.

STOP PLAYING THE BLAME GAME

When you're dealing with a frustrating problem, it can be tempting to point the finger and find someone or something to blame. But if you truly want to get to the solution, stay open-minded and collaborative.

"When you start getting into finger-pointing and accusations and upsets, it's probably a red flag that you're now getting into the problem instead of focusing on the solution," says Marasse.

The next time you find yourself faced with a problem, instead of trying to find something or someone to blame—which is completely subjective—focus on objective facts.

For example, let's say you find out your products are shipping a full month past their target date as a result of a warehouse error. "It's one thing to say that the product shipped 30 days late. It's another thing to say, the development group didn't have their act together," says Marasse. "You want to focus on the facts."

By refusing to play the blame game (and, instead, focusing on the facts at hand), it's easier to stay objective and find a solution instead of getting caught up in feeling frustrated or angry at the situation.

BUILD A SOLUTION-ORIENTED CULTURE WITH YOUR TEAM

You know by now that having a solution-oriented mindset is important. But if you truly want to be a solution-oriented leader, it's important to inspire that same kind of mindset throughout your organization.

Try out these strategies to ensure that your solution-oriented approaches inspire the same kind of mindset in your team.

EMPOWER YOUR TEAM TO FIND THE ANSWERS

There's an old saying that goes, "Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them how to fish, and you feed them for a lifetime."

Well, it's the same thing with solutions. If you want your team to become more solution-oriented, you can't just *give* them the solutions to all their problems—you have to help them develop the skills necessary for them to find those solutions for themselves.

"If you want a solution-oriented team and culture, you need to stop giving them the answers," says Olsson. Instead, try asking them open-ended questions to help them explore the issue and brainstorm solutions.

"Say, 'Hey, that's a really good question. Let's think about it. What's your thoughts on it? How would you approach it?,'" says Olsson.

The more you put the ball back in their court, the more your team will realize that coming to you with a problem isn't going to get them the answers they want/need—and the more empowered they'll feel about finding those answers themselves.

"Eventually, they'll stop coming with the problems and…[instead], they'll come with, 'Hey, I thought of this, would that be a cool idea?' or 'I have three different solutions to this problem, can we talk about it?,'" says Olsson. "And that's exactly where you want to go."

EMBRACE MISTAKES

The road to finding solutions is rarely a smooth one—especially when you and your team are pushing boundaries or trying new things. So, if you want to keep your team motivated to keep pushing towards solutions, you need to embrace and celebrate every bump in the road.

"If you're wanting your people to be innovative and dare greatly with their actions, then there needs to be room for mistakes," says Marrasse. "There needs to be room for failure, and there needs to be a sense of compassion and acceptance around things breaking down."

When you or someone on your team makes a mistake, celebrate the fact that you figured out something that doesn't work—and then use that as a springboard for figuring out what *does*. Otherwise, "you're going to shut down innovation around you and you're going to shut down communication around you," continues Marasse. "That's the last thing you want if you're trying to move forward and get solutions in place."

Taking a positive—or even celebratory—approach to mess-ups "shows to your team that it's safe to make mistakes," says Olsson. "And if you're never making a mistake, you're never going to progress and find the solutions you're looking for."

CELEBRATE THE WINS—AND THE JOURNEY IT TOOK TO GET THERE

The whole purpose of being solution-oriented is to find solutions to problems. But once the solution has been found, many leaders and teams are so focused on moving on to the next problem. Instead, they don't take the time to acknowledge their win—and what they can learn from that win to make them more effective problem-solvers moving forward.

"Teams get so focused on problem-solving that often they step over celebrating the wins—and not just what the wins *are*, but what it took for them to *get* the win."

For example, let's say you and your team finally gained a lead you've been nurturing for a year. Instead of immediately moving on to the next lead, take a moment to celebrate—and then figure out what lessons you can take from the experience to be more effective in your pitching moving forward. What about the final pitch pushed the client over the edge and made them close? Did your sales team change something about their process? Did you find a more effective way to speak to the client's pain points?

By looking at how you and your team problem-solved your issue and effectively came to a solution, you can better prepare yourself for the next time a similar problem arises—and get to the solution faster and more effectively.

CONJURE A SOLUTION-FOCUSED MINDSET AND ENCOURAGE YOUR TEAM TO FOLLOW SUIT

It can be easy to get stuck in a problem. But now that you know how to become a more solution-oriented leader, you have everything you need to get yourself—and your team!—out of the problem and into the solution.

So what are you waiting for? Get out there and cultivate a more solution-focused approach to work: for yourself, for your team, and your organization as a whole.