

Simple Truths of Leadership

What's in it for me? Discover the simple truths that shape every great leader.

It's a well-known fact: organizations are only as good as the people who lead them. Without great leadership, a company and its staff can't reach their full potential. It's just not possible. But what is great leadership? It may sound counterintuitive, but being a great leader actually involves . . . being a servant! Servant leadership is a way of leading that puts your employees and customers first, and you second. It's not an easy skill to develop, but it can have a big impact on how effective you are as a manager – and on the results of your team. In these blinks to Ken Blanchard and Randy Conley's *Simple Truths of Leadership*, you'll discover common-sense leadership tips that make a big difference. Although we can't cover all 52 truths, we've cherry-picked what we think are the most useful takeaways.

Great leadership involves serving others.

To figure out what type of leader you want to be, you need to do one simple thing: listen to your heart. What does it say? Does it whisper that you should serve the common good? Or does it tell you that you should follow your own narrow self-interest and not care about who gets hurt along the way? Once you understand your inner motivation, you'll know whether you want to be a bad leader – or a servant leader. As a servant leader, your priority is to serve your subordinates and your wider organization rather than yourself. In practice, that means giving your people a strong sense of direction. A servant leader's team should understand exactly what results they're working toward – and what success looks like. So far, this might sound like pretty standard leadership behavior. But the servant leader does something else, too. Once you've given your people some goals, you help your subordinates achieve these goals. You serve your staff by offering feedback and training opportunities. You also take the time to listen and find out what support they need. By providing strategic direction and a lot of day-to-day support, you'll enjoy great results and great working relationships with your people.

Give your staff a vision of the future.

Do you have a vision for your company's future? To be a great servant leader, you'll need to create one – and share it with your staff to inspire and motivate them toward a common goal. Creating a vision isn't complicated. But it does involve answering three big questions. The first question is, What's the overall purpose of your company? In other words, what kind of business are you actually in? To find your answer, try to go as deep as possible. Take, for example, Disney. Disney's vision isn't to be an entertainment company; instead they describe themselves as being in the “business of happiness.” The second question is, What does success look like in your company? After all, once your people know what they're aiming for, they'll be able to get there faster. Disney is very clear about what success looks like: smiles on customers' faces from the minute they enter their theme parks to the moment they leave again. The third question is, What are your company values? These values will guide your firm along the path to success – so

it's important that you get them right. Disney's number one value is safety, followed by courtesy and ensuring that every staff member puts on a great show for their theme park visitors. Once you've pulled the answers to these questions together, you'll have created an inspiring vision to share with your people.

The best leaders disrupt the traditional hierarchy.

Who's at the top of the food chain in your business? For most companies, it's the leader. And the job of everyone below the leader is to be responsive to their wants and needs. But this kind of setup is a mistake. Why? Because leaders shouldn't be at the top of the pyramid. The top spot belongs to someone else: your customer. The best businesses revolve around what the customer wants - not the big boss. Everyone in your company, no matter how senior, should try to cater to the needs of your customers. They should also pay special attention to the people working on the front lines who actually interact with customers on a daily basis. Great leaders know that listening to their front-line staff is the only way to truly understand their customers. Not only do great leaders listen to their employees, they also encourage them to come up with their own ideas. This is another way of disrupting the traditional leadership hierarchy. So instead of giving top-down orders, foster an environment where everyone helps set the agenda. As a result, responsibility will flow down the chain of command, and every staff member will become a leader in their own right.

Successful leaders use plenty of praise.

Bad leaders are a lot like seagulls - when their colleagues aren't making enough progress toward their goals, they swoop in, make noise, dump on their team, and then make a quick exit. Luckily, making the transition from seagull to great leader is easier than you might think. It all comes down to a secret weapon: praise. Instead of showing up when things go wrong, the best leaders arrive when something goes right. Rather than looking for reasons to criticize, good leaders are always searching for something to praise their employees for. They know that, by praising good behavior, they're making it more likely that the person will repeat this behavior in the future. But how do you bestow praise effectively? First, be specific. As soon as you see someone who's performing well, take them aside and tell them exactly what they're doing right. Make sure they know how grateful you are, and explain why their stellar performance matters so much. Finally, encourage them to keep doing what they're doing, and let them know that you have a lot of confidence in them. Wrap up the conversation by making sure your colleague knows that you appreciate - and will continue to support - them.

Sometimes, a redirect is better than a reprimand.

As you're probably aware, humans make mistakes. And your staff are no exception! As a leader, it's your duty to pay attention when mistakes are made - and to make sure the same mistakes don't happen again. How you react when an employee makes a mistake should depend on how experienced they are. If someone's underperforming but has the

skills to do better, then a short reprimand is in order. When you reprimand the person, make sure you criticize their behavior rather than them as a person. But what should you do when someone performs poorly and doesn't know how to do any better? Well, in a fast-changing world, we're all constantly learning. And criticizing learners isn't fair – or productive. When learners make mistakes, it's your job as a leader to redirect rather than reprimand them. You can do this by going through their performance step-by-step and reviewing what went wrong. During this review, make sure your colleague understands exactly what their goal is and how they can better work toward it in the future. Finally, let the person know that this one mistake does not define them – and that you still have plenty of confidence in them to get it right next time.

Vary your leadership style according to your team members' competence and commitment.

Once a leader has developed their own style of leadership, they usually stick to it. In fact, half of all leaders never vary their leadership style at all. But the best leaders know that flexibility is important; to get optimal results, they lead different team members in different ways. Instead of having a one-size-fits-all approach, look at the profile of each of your subordinates before deciding how to lead them. Specifically, ask yourself how competent the person is – and how committed they are to their job. Then lead accordingly. For instance, an enthusiastic beginner is someone with a low level of competence but a high degree of commitment. Enthusiastic beginners need clear and direct leadership, and to have someone closely watching what they are doing. On the other hand, a disillusioned learner is somewhat competent but has a low level of commitment. This person could do with a coaching style of leadership to improve their performance. Finally, you may be lucky enough to have a self-sufficient achiever on your team. This person combines a high level of competence with equally high commitment. Self-sufficient achievers do best with leaders who simply delegate tasks and let them get on with their work.

Your employees are your customers, too!

Most leaders understand that their company's customers should be their top priority. But great leaders know that the most important customers sit inside – not outside – their organization. That's because they consider every single person who works for them to be a customer, too. This might sound bizarre, but when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. After all, customers are so precious because they create profits for your business. But isn't that exactly what your staff members do, too? It's only thanks to their capabilities in areas like sales, marketing, product development, and customer care that you even have external customers. Therefore, your staff are actually your most important customers; their hard work drives your bottom line. With this in mind, leaders should focus on empowering, developing, and listening to their people – and creating an environment where their needs are prioritized. It might feel uncomfortable to focus more on your employees than your customers, but just remember that this approach will lead to greater customer satisfaction, not less. When your staff are happy and feel

supported to do their jobs in the best possible way, then your business will go from strength to strength. Ultimately, that will benefit your customers by providing them better service and better products.

Your staff need boundaries to work freely.

Some leaders think that empowering their people means giving them the freedom to do whatever they want. But great leaders know that the best way to make their people autonomous . . . is to give them boundaries. Not convinced? Consider a fast-flowing river. Without river banks on either side of it, this mighty river would quickly become a big puddle. But with boundaries in place, the water is channeled to create a powerful force. Your team is a lot like the river; they need boundaries to keep them flowing in the right direction. How can you put these boundaries in place? In most cases, it's as easy as making sure your employees have the right information. For instance, your people should be clear on their goals – as well as on your expectations of their performance and what standards they should meet. They should also have a good working knowledge of all the rules and regulations that govern your industry. Finally, your staff should always be up to speed on your company's policies and procedures. Put together, these policies, rules, and expectations form the boundaries your employees will work within. They might not sound exciting, but they are the river banks that channel your people's energy in the right direction.

A trusted leader is a compelling leader.

Trust is an essential part of leadership. When your people trust you, they'll be more creative, work more efficiently, and enjoy better levels of morale. On the other hand, if you're viewed as untrustworthy, then your team will meet you with resistance, lower productivity, and disengagement. But what qualities does a trusted leader embody? First off, they're competent. Everyone in the team believes that the leader knows how to do their job. Second, they have integrity. When they say they're going to do something, their people know that they're actually going to do it. Last but not least, they're warm. These leaders can be trusted to make their employees feel safe. Not only are they friendly, they also demonstrate real care and concern for their people's well-being. There's a great way to find out how much your colleagues trust you: ask them! It might feel daunting, but don't be afraid to ask for feedback about your competence levels, your integrity, and your interpersonal skills. Not only will you receive valuable information you can act on, but you'll also demonstrate vulnerability by opening yourself up to criticism in this way. This is important; letting yourself be a tad vulnerable around your team is a vital part of servant leadership.

Your people shouldn't be afraid of you.

Some leaders treat fear as a leadership technique; they believe that people work harder for leaders they're a little afraid of. These are the leaders who shout at people, criticize them, and highlight every little mistake they make. But great leaders know that instilling fear doesn't get good results. In fact, it's the opposite. When people are afraid of their leader, they don't perform better. Instead, they simply work harder to hide their

mistakes. They also avoid taking on big, challenging goals because they know that failure will not be tolerated. On the other hand, great leaders work hard to minimize or eliminate any fear their employees might feel toward them. But how? Well, the most important thing they do is act consistently. Your staff will be much less afraid of you if they can confidently predict how you're likely to behave in certain situations. If you show support to a new employee who's tried something new but hasn't quite made it work, other employees may feel supported if they try something a bit bold. Second, instead of yelling and criticizing when people make mistakes, good leaders turn these mistakes into teachable moments – and they provide coaching on how to do better next time. Finally, the best leaders minimize fear by simply being polite. Saying please and thank you costs nothing, and it goes a long way to building a good relationship with your employees.

The most effective leaders prioritize integrity.

Great leaders all have one quality in common: integrity. The word integrity originates from Latin and, roughly translated, means whole or not fragmented. When you have integrity, your whole self is aligned, and your words match your actions. When you act without integrity – when you talk the talk but don't walk the walk – the trust crumbles between you and your employees. Why? Because they can no longer trust a word you say. You can act with greater integrity by staying true to the Five P's of Ethical Leadership. The first P stands for purpose; leaders with integrity use their overall purpose to drive their daily behavior. The second P stands for pride; rather than being egotistical, good leaders have a healthy sense of pride that's based in self-confidence. This self-confidence comes from knowing that they're competent. The third P stands for patience; leaders with integrity believe that, as long as they stick to their guiding values, things will eventually work out. The fourth P stands for persistence; every good leader has the grit to stay the course when things get tough, and they stay loyal to their principles. The last P stands for perspective; leaders with integrity not only keep their whole self in alignment – they keep their actions aligned with their company's bigger picture, too.

A hallmark of great leadership is being able to apologize.

It's sad but true: at one point or another, we all break someone's trust. Although this break can feel irreversible, there's actually a simple thing you can do to get a relationship back on track. You can apologize. That being said, there's an art to making an effective apology; if you want to restore the relationship, you have to say sorry in the right way. When making an apology, start by taking responsibility for what you've done. Don't try to excuse it or use conditional words like "if" and "but." These words imply that you're shifting the blame. Second, make it clear to the person that you understand the pain you've caused them; don't try to minimize this pain to make yourself feel better. Give the person space to tell you about this pain, too. Listen to the impact that your actions have had on them. Finally, be sure to end your apology by committing to not repeating whatever you've done. Remember, your apology is only worth something if you don't duplicate the trust-shattering behavior.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: The best leaders place trust in their employees and work to build warm, supportive relationships with them. Rather than placing themselves at the center of the company's operations, great leaders put the focus on their customers - and their staff. And here's some more actionable advice: Information is valuable; share it freely. As a leader, it's vital to place trust in your people. One of the best ways to demonstrate this trust is to freely share information with your employees. If you hoard information and keep your staff in the dark, things can quickly unravel. In order to fill the gaps in their knowledge, your staff will start to make assumptions and create their own stories about what's going on. These stories might be negative and damaging to morale. So have a policy of giving out information, speaking openly, and being as honest as you possibly can!