

Executive Leadership: Principles and Disciplines

Executive leaders need to handle high levels of ongoing responsibility for people, resources, and results. The stakes are high, but so is the satisfaction and pride that come from serving people, helping them succeed, and adding significant value.

Two Principles of Executive Leadership

Principle 1: Earn Trust

Trust is believing that a person will do what you expect them to do. However, it also tends to mean that the person we trust will act with our best interests in mind. As an executive, it is important that you remember that trust is a key to success. People will follow you during times of uncertainty and will be more willing to accept change when they trust you. So, work to build trust every day.

Earning trust every day is the foundation of successful executive leadership. Whether they say it or not, a question on everyone's mind is "Why should we follow you?" The best answer is "Because we trust you."

We trust you to look out for our best interest, to help us succeed, empower us to reach our goals, and do more than we thought we could. To help us be proud of the meaningful work we've done. But there's only one way to gain it and keep it, and that's to earn it.

Principle 2: Serve Your People

The heart of executive leadership is in two words, "serving others." Orient your personal compass to serving others and your impact will be far-reaching.

One of my favorite role models I spoke to in my research is Mike Critelli, the former CEO of postal service giant Pitney Bowes who led them through an era of extraordinary success. Critelli's compass was always pointing toward "serve others," even in passing conversations. At a sales conference he chatted with an employee and learned he and his wife were adopting a child. A few weeks later they received a personal letter from Critelli congratulating them on their new child along with a check for the amount of the new adoption benefit the company just started offering, thanks to that brief conversation.

The little things matter big; they add up. When your leadership compass is pointed toward "serve others," what's the very best way you can serve your people today, this week, this month, this year?

The Four Disciplines of Executive Leadership

Each discipline consists of several practices, each with its own video detailing specific action checklists, to give you clear steps to implement.

Go through the several videos under each of the four disciplines and rate yourself on how well you're implementing the steps in each video's action checklist.

1. Set Direction

- Think strategically
- Take responsibility and be decisive
- Lead from “me” to “we”: define the past, present, and future
- Create a shared purpose and compelling vision

2. Motivate Commitment

- Inspire confidence, even under pressure
- Energize and empower people
- Encourage personal excellence
- Create collaboration opportunities
- Develop others and build a talent pipeline
- Communicate to motivate
- Communicate to replicate

3. Drive for Results

- Establish priorities and focus
- Ensure invigorating accountability
- Influence without authority
- Cultivate creative thinking and innovation
- Lead large-scale change and shape culture

4. Develop Yourself

- Increase self-awareness
- Build resilience and resourcefulness
- Keep learning
- Keep connecting