

STEPS TO LEADERSHIP SUCCESS

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Every single one of us can become an effective leader. But it takes hard work and commitment. I would like to share with you some steps I believe we each can take to become successful leaders. I have identified seven steps that I think are key:

1. Just do it
2. Believe in yourself and your ideas
3. Communicate
4. Value each person and her ideas
5. Have high expectations
6. Love and serve others
7. Say "Thank you."

1. As the Nike commercial says "Just do it."

In my opinion, as important as any other leadership skill is the ability to take action. This action is probably in an area where you have a passion, and I strongly believe that one person can make a difference. Candy Lightner founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving in 1980 after her 13-year old daughter, Cari was hit from behind and killed by a drunk driver. This was one person with a passion, a sense of purpose, a stick-to-itiveness that didn't take no for an answer. Look at the organization she has spawned.

And then there is Thelma Sibley. After her five-year old daughter Nancy was killed when a drawstring in her coat got snagged on the playground, Thelma embarked on a letter writing campaign to 128 clothing manufacturers as well as government agencies, news organizations, and prominent individuals including Hillary Rodham Clinton and Tipper Gore. One federal agency, the Consumer Product Safety Commission and its chief, Ann Brown, persuaded 32 clothing manufacturers to voluntarily remove the drawstrings. Did this happen overnight? No, it took almost two years. Thelma had decided taking action to prevent this occurrence from ever happening to someone else's child was her way, not suing a clothing manufacturer. And, it became her passion, her "fire in the belly."

Think about people of whom you are aware that have made a difference. This list might include Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King. Other people who would merit being on such a list are Dr. Virginia Apgar, Rachel Carson, Admiral Grace Murray Hopper, Lucretia Mott, and Sojourner Truth, all of whom have been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame to recognize their accomplishments. In fact, Admiral Hopper embodied the "Just do it" philosophy with her saying that it is always easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission.

I have seen many examples of the “Just do it” aspect of leadership within the Society of Women Engineers (SWE). Mary Rogers of the Santa Clara Valley Section has a passion for scholarships and an in-depth knowledge of fund development techniques. Each year she raises \$20-40,000 for scholarships that are awarded to deserving young women who plan to study engineering.

Mary McCarthy, also of the Santa Clara Valley Section has a passion for teaching young people about math and science. She brought the 4-H and SWE together in California and eventually on a national basis to enable such 4-H programs as “Sciencing with Snails” and “Planted Earth” to reach more students.

Terri Morse of the Pacific Northwest Section conceptualized and worked hard to establish the Boeing Team Tech Competition in SWE. This annual contest, with prize money, emphasizes the key role of teamwork and interface with industry in the engineering educational process. Competing teams of from four to twelve students are evaluated on 1) the ability of the team to work together, 2) use of engineering processes, 3) product, 4) the quality of the results, and 5) the ability of the team to work with industry. Competitions have been ongoing since 1992.

There are many other examples of leaders within organizations like SWE and the Women in Engineering Program Advocates Network (WEPAN) who acted on their passions. The dedication of the founders made both organizations possible. Many individuals, such as Miriam Maslanik from the Women in Engineering Program at the University of Colorado-Boulder, have decided that their city could host a conference and, lo and behold, the conference was held in their city. Scholarships have been envisioned, funds raised, and endowments established through the efforts of passionate individuals.

I recently heard a story about Katherine Drexel of the Drexel furniture family. Apparently she was a very religious Catholic, who was concerned about the plight of Native American education. During a visit to the Pope, she asked him “What can you do about the education of the Indian children?” His response was “What can you do about this problem, Sister?” She came back to the U.S. and had schools built for the children’s education. She was now responsible, and had become a leader.

Katherine Drexel now also understood that she could do something about the problem she had seen. We need to learn from this story that we don’t need to wait until someone tells us to do something; we don’t have to wait to be empowered or wait for permission to be empowered. We each have the ability to grab the ball and run with it, now. Just do it!

It is almost always easier to complain about situations than to take action, and it is also easier to expect others to fix problems. But to be a leader, we must each take responsibility to fix problems, to make the world a better place. We must, as leaders, do the difficult things and own them. We must set an example by what we do. Determination, focus, and hard work. Remember, “The harder I work, the luckier I get.” And from the book of Proverbs, “Hard work always yields its profit; idle talk brings only want (Proverbs 14:23, The Jerusalem Bible)” and “Diligence brings a man to power. (Proverbs 12:24, The New English Bible)” Don’t talk about it endlessly. Just do it! And do it now!

2. Believe in yourself and your ideas.

Abraham Lincoln said in 1858 when he was nominated to run for the U.S. Senate “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” These were very powerful words that

communicated his position to others. Leaders assume power, that power is not granted. Think about who takes the leadership role in a volunteer setting - probably the person who believes that she can accomplish the task at hand. Those people usually radiate self-confidence. Because they believe in themselves, tremendous energy comes through and others pick up on that energy. Note that we are not talking about arrogance. I want to give you an example that I always think about when I come to the concept of belief in oneself.

Gina Holland, another SWE member from Denver, and I caught a cab in New York to the airport. The cab driver was very concerned because the traffic was very heavy, it was hot outside, his heat indicator was going up, and he was afraid his car was going to overheat. Gina told him that by turning up the heat all the way, he wouldn't overheat the car. He did not want to do this. I very calmly told him that she knew what she was talking about. (Of course, I did not know why he should do this.) Several times, insistently, I repeated that, yes, I knew that it was hot outside, but, he needed to turn up the heat. Well, he did finally turn up the heat, was amazed that his cab did not overheat, and we made it to the airport. I could tell that Gina knew what she was talking about and that we had to convince the cab driver or end up with an overheated cab. She believed, and thus I believed in her. I later found out why this was the right solution - the fan moves hot air off the engine into the car when the heat is turned on.

You can do what you set your mind to, if you believe in yourself and what you want to accomplish. And you can practice the WOWSE concept - I will move forward to do this "With or without someone else." A leader must be so committed to an idea that she will do it WOWSE. She will do whatever it takes to see the concept through - none of the "This is not my job" attitude. She will lead by example. Everything becomes one's job from the stuffing and stamping of envelopes to accepting and presenting large checks - the good, and the bad. A good leader does not ask anyone to do something she is not willing to do herself. A good leader pitches in on anything and everything that needs to be done. As Harvey Firestone said, "You get the best out of others when you give the best of yourself."

Now this does not mean that you know all the answers or aren't afraid of certain situations. If we wait to deal with all of our fears or wait for them all to disappear before taking action, we will probably never get started. Fear of failure is normal. Successful leaders are highly motivated not to fail. Waiting for the perfect time is a great excuse and rationalization not to move forward from where you are.

3. Communicate

There are a couple of really key points here. Remember, first and foremost, communication is both listening and speaking; not just speaking - listening is very important! One cannot truly communicate without both listening and expressing oneself.

And when you do talk or write always communicate the truth, without hiding information. People can sense if you are hiding the truth. Only when you are open does trust, love, and learning begin. Do not have a hidden agenda - no secrets. Behaving secretly indicates a lack of trust and arrogance which tends to breed resentment and retaliation. Again from the book of Proverbs, "The upright man is secure in his own honesty (Proverbs 14:32b, The New English Bible)."

Trust will be built when you behave as follows: listen, remember the little things, keep promises, clarify expectations, be loyal, admit when you are wrong, and admit that you don't know. These are, of course, also the seeds of friendship.

Keep people informed and include everyone who has or might have a need to know. It is better to tell some people about a topic in which they are not included (or interested) than to exclude someone who really did need to know.

I want to relate a story from my term as SWE President. Admiral Grace Murray Hopper, the 1964 SWE Achievement Award recipient, received the National Medal of Technology from President Bush in September 1991, having been nominated for that award by SWE. She died shortly thereafter. At the Board of Directors meeting in early 1992, we discussed the concept of endowing a scholarship in her name, decided it was a good idea, and determined that I would take the lead in the fundraising effort. Mary Rogers, the fund development chair, and I discussed how we would solicit funds from the members of SWE; our plan required the cooperation of and work efforts from each director. I called and talked to each director telling her what I was planning to do and what I was asking her to do. Every single director jumped on the band wagon and promised her support to this project. It was a wonderful experience for me. One scholarship was endowed in 1992 and three are now endowed. You better believe that I wrote thank you notes (see step 7)! It was an eye-opening and confirming experience for me.

4. Value each person and her ideas.

Each person has value and her ideas have merit as well. In the current environment, this might be called "diversity". Treat everyone as an equal, treat them as you wish to be treated, value them personally, and listen to their ideas.

During the time that I served as SWE President, there was one particular member of the Board whose views were almost always different from the rest of the Board. Sometimes others on the Board did not want to hear her opinions because they were so different. But I believed then and still believe that it was very important to listen to her views because by doing so we were able to consider different outlooks and make better decisions.

I have discovered that by treating everyone fairly, with caring, and with value, they will respect you and actually be happy to help you with your requests. In addition, you will be able to function better within a team. Again the book of Proverbs provides guidance in this area "The tongue has the power of life and death; make friends with it and enjoy its fruits (Proverbs 18:21 The New English Bible)."

The results of your work efforts will also be better because many different viewpoints will have been considered and incorporated in the process of coming to decisions. People who are engineers approach problems differently than people who are lawyers or accountants or marketers. And as most of us now admit, women and men approach problems differently. This is, of course, why female directors on corporate Boards of Directors should be actively sought, to help those Boards make better decisions.

People have different dominant thought processes which experts label as 1) analytical, 2) structural, 3) self-awareness, and 4) conceptual. Through having complete teams with representation from each process (referred to as whole brain teams), better results can be obtained. Value diversity and the ideas that each person brings.

5. Have high expectations

My experience truly demonstrates that people perform up to high expectations and down to low expectations. But people wish to be challenged, to push a little harder and have the feeling of success associated with meeting high, but not unreasonable, expectations.



In conjunction with high expectations, people will need to be held accountable for their efforts. Accountability has been called the cornerstone of empowerment and personal growth. If a person is not held accountable for the results of a specific effort, he or she will not have the benefit of the growth and experience of the effort itself. As people accomplish projects for which they have been responsible and held accountable, they will gain self-confidence and become increasingly successful. When negative feedback is required, make sure positive comments are given first - "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." People are more receptive to hearing something negative if something positive is said first.

Although people need to be held accountable, good leaders do not let them "sink or swim." If a person is having trouble completing a project or assignment, a good leader will be around to answer questions, suggest alternatives, and provide direction. All good leaders offer encouragement and urge people on so that they may have successful experiences. A Wise Man once said "A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought they could." Good leaders stay in contact, not to do the work themselves, but to be available for support and guidance.

6. Love and serve others.

This step to leadership success ties directly into valuing each person and her ideas. When you genuinely care for other people and demonstrate this through your actions, helping them with their problems and listening to them, the love and service they will return can be amazing.

I realize that not everyone is capable of receiving or returning that love, respect, or trust, but the overwhelming majority of people will. Don't get discouraged by a few bad apples!

You have probably heard the saying, befriend the secretary because she is really in charge and you can get anything you want and need. What this says to me is by being sincerely interested in other people and caring around them, and believe me our antennas detect insincerity in others in a split second, others return our friendship and wish to love and serve us as well.

7. Say "Thank you"

My former assistant used to display an article on her door comparing two ten-item lists, the first was what employees wanted from their employers and the second was a list of what employers thought employees wanted. The first item that employers thought employees wanted was money. But what did employees want? First and foremost, appreciation. A thank you. A pat on the back. A gold star. Recognition for a job well done. An atta-girl or an atta-boy. Zig Ziglar said "A sincere compliment is one of the most effective teaching and motivational methods in existence."

I was raised to always say thank you. As SWE President, I took the time to write many hand-written thank-you notes. This helped to demonstrate my appreciation to many people for their efforts. I had taken my time to remember to thank them for their actions. And I believe that time spent saying thank you is always repaid many times over by those thanked.

Conclusions

I do not think and I will not tell you that taking these steps for leadership success are always easy or fun. They take much hard work and must reflect a passion in what you are doing. However, I do think that following these seven steps:

1. Just do it,
2. Believe in yourself and your ideas,
3. Communicate,
4. Value each person and her ideas,
5. Have high expectations,
6. Love and serve others, and
7. Say "Thank you."

will help make you a successful leader.

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Biography

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Acknowledgment

This is a modified version of an article originally published in the *SWE Magazine*, the magazine of the Society of Women Engineers, May/June 1996.