



**DOUG
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VIEWS FROM THE TOP

Taking the lead

The better you know yourself, the better you can lead others

Before leaders can effectively lead others, they must first learn how to lead themselves. Only then can they help others. 'Help' is the key word in this paradigm, as leaders need to realize they can't motivate others — they can only help people motivate themselves.

Leaders should first determine the way a person likes to be approached and then strive to determine where their goals intersect. This is the fastest path to win-win agreements. These methods come into play when interacting with employees as well as vendors, customers, partners and other stakeholders.

Getting to know yourself and pre-planning how you want to approach each interaction can increase your effectiveness significantly. Most quality leaders realize the biggest barrier to reaching the next level is the person they see in the mirror. Even great leaders get in their own way sometimes.

Try adapting your approach for each situation. Factors to consider include the volume of your voice, your pace, using direct vs. open-ended questions and whether to use an intense focus or a gentle approach. In some cases, you might want the other person to feel a little nervous, but in other cases, you may want them to feel relaxed.

Also consider the amount of time to allocate to each interaction. You may want to give the other person plenty of time to express their feelings or you might want the conversation to move quickly. Another factor is the setting. Direct conversations might be best held in your office, but if you need the other person to relax, it may make sense to meet with them in their office or even off site.

Lastly, be sure to properly set your state of mind for each interaction. This might require some time to psyche yourself up or perhaps relax with mind-clearing exercises, listening to music or going for a short walk. Many leaders go through a regular routine before each interaction where they practice the opening sentences of the conversation.

After utilizing a behavioral assessment tool, a local business owner I advised came to realize she is an extremely high driver. She tends to be very goal-oriented and direct, and she often talks fast and loud. She used this approach in almost all of her interactions.

But after taking the assessment, she understood how her approach was not always effective in one-to-one discussions. She learned it's sometimes better being soft spoken, talkative, open and unrushed. She especially began to take this approach after her company experienced high employee turnover. She became aware that her extreme tendencies were a contributing factor to the turnover, so she learned to tone down her approach considerably.

In another example, a business leader tested as being very people-oriented and inspirational. He tended to treat employees well, but he also discovered that employees sometimes took advantage of his tendencies and were not always diligent about implementing improvements. At one point, this leader began to realize from other employees that a longtime employee was pushing boundaries too far.

The leader realized he needed to bring out the driver approach since the employee was not responding to previous coaching. The leader gave specific consequences and followed through with them. At first, this leader did not like conflict and found this approach difficult. But after receiving feedback from his peer group, the process became easier. This approach also proved to be helpful for the employee, serving as a wake-up call.

Five steps to improve leadership

1. Know yourself and your tendencies
2. Choose and manage your behavior according to each situation
3. Understand the tendencies of others and learn their personality types

4. Approach others in a manner that matches their tendencies

5. Address their needs before yours

The first step can be the most difficult, but leaders can assess themselves using behavioral assessment tools that can involve receiving feedback from a wide variety of audiences. Here are few of the many resources to consider:

- External coach or consultant
- Peer groups
- Internal human resources professional and leadership team
- Key customers and vendors
- Employees

Many behavioral assessments allow respondents to provide anonymous feedback so they feel comfortable providing positive as well as critical feedback. But it's also helpful if they can answer follow-up questions so the leader can better understand the feedback.

When leaders become good listeners to the feedback these assessments provide, they can effectively absorb the information and react productively. They can then follow a modified version of the Golden Rule and "treat others the way they want to be treated." Not only does this improve their leadership capabilities, but it also sets a good example for the entire organization. If employees see that the boss can learn and improve, they know they can, too.

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