5 habits
of successful
people leaders

and how to develop those skills

The 5 habits that help people leaders become better business leaders.

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Introduction

Shape behavior from the top down.

Happy employees are [12% more productive](#).

Leaders at all levels help set the tone for their organizations. The way you lead can have a major impact on both employees and company performance. The best leaders take an intentional approach to their workplace behavior and embody the values of their organizations.

To help you refine your leadership style and get the most from your people, here are five habits shared by highly successful people leaders and tips for developing them.

Habit 1

Lead with empathy.

Leading with empathy means you're fostering an environment where people feel at ease—clearing the path for them to perform at their very best.

What does that look like? At its core, it's about crafting an experience with employee needs in mind. Show employees that the company is invested in supporting them so that they're, in turn, willing to invest their time and energy in supporting the company.
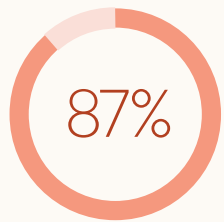
87% of CEOs believe a company's financial performance is tied to empathy in the workplace

Source: Businessolver, State of Workplace Empathy 2018

What this signals to employees
You put their needs first, so they can focus on doing their best work.

The cost of not adopting this habit
Retention and engagement can suffer when employees believe their leaders don't care about how they feel.

Become an empathic leader.

Always listen.
The single most critical element of empathy is listening. The more you listen, the easier it will become to adopt another person's perspective.

Don't assume.
Show employees your commitment to understanding by asking clarifying questions so you avoid making assumptions. Use statements like, "It sounds like you feel…" to encourage employees to correct you if you've misunderstood.

Be present.
It's much harder to assess emotions over email, which makes it harder to react empathetically. Set up in-person meetings or use video conferencing to connect with remote staff.

Tips for success

+ For team leaders
Meet regularly with team members on a one-on-one basis to gather feedback and understand how they're feeling. Focus on what they're saying, rather than thinking ahead to how you're going to respond.

+ For executives
Show employees their voices are being heard by circulating frequent updates on what you're doing to improve and why.

+ For department heads
Make an effort to connect with employees. Set up virtual Q&A sessions and have employees submit questions beforehand.

Habit 2

Embrace change.

The best leaders aren't content with standing still.

They know that the world of work is evolving fast, and they're visible proponents of changing with the times— encouraging employees to adopt the same mindset of constant improvement and innovation.

This is especially true when it comes to technology. Leaders who invest in exploring and adopting new technology set themselves apart as forward-thinking, making it easier to attract and retain great talent.
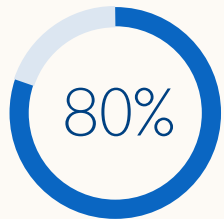
80% of job seekers say their desire to join a company is greatly influenced by the company's use of the latest digital tools

Source: Randstad, A Formula for Success from Today's Most Profitable Companies

What this signals to employees
You value innovation and work with employees to steer the company into the future.

The cost of not adopting this habit
You'll see higher turnover if employees feel the company is using outdated tools and practices.

Habit 2

Become a leader who embraces change.

Get employees involved.
When it comes to fixing broken processes and identifying opportunities, employees who interact daily with customers or tools know what works and what doesn't. Make it easy for them to share feedback or propose potential solutions. And celebrate successful suggestions to inspire others to get involved.

Encourage experimentation.
Change will always involve some degree of risk. Avoid getting comfortable with the status quo by taking calculated risks and encouraging employees to do the same. Give clear direction about how and when employees can act on their own, but be forgiving of failure.

Tips for success

+ For executives
Pay attention to employee survey data and use it to inform decisions that will have an impact on your workforce—and customers.

" The only way you survive is you continuously transform into something else. It's this idea of continuous transformation that makes you an innovation company."

– Ginni Rometty, Former CEO, IBM

Source: IBM, IBM's Ginni Rometty Honored with 2019 Edison Achievement Award

Habit 3

Act as a mentor.

Even the most successful leaders recognize they can't lead forever. Being an effective leader means thinking long term—like mentoring potential replacements.

By playing an active role in employees' professional development, strong leaders help advance the careers of their team members. This shows employees that both the company and its leaders are invested in their future. And by investing in employee development, company retention is higher and institutional knowledge is retained.
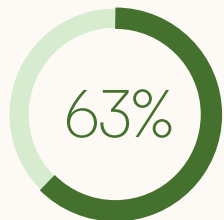
63% of millennials feel their leadership skills are not being fully developed by their employers

Source: Human Resources Professionals Association, HR & Millennials: Insights Into Your New Human Capital

What this signals to employees
You care about their professional development and want to help them grow and succeed at your organization.

The cost of not adopting this habit
Employees may feel like they have no future with your company—increasing the likelihood they'll start job hunting.
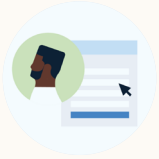
Habit 3

Become a leader who mentors.

Identify needed skills.
Evaluate ahead of time what skills and knowledge are needed to sustain your organization in the future, so that when you're hiring you'll hone in on the right candidate faster.

Prioritize professional development.
Help employees plan their career path at your organization and empower them to reach the next step by providing professional development support. Whether it's a structured leadership training program or informal mentorship, every opportunity is a chance for them to grow.

Establish cross-generational mentoring.
Help age-diverse teams discover their best selves by supporting cross-generational mentoring to discover future leaders and encourage innovation.

Tips for success

+ For hiring managers
Ask these 30 essential behavioral interview questions to screen for leadership and other soft skills.

" Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others."

– Jack Welch, Former CEO, General Electric

Source: Inc., Jack Welch Always Wanted His Team Members to Take Ownership of Their Work. Here's Why

Find your next leader.

When the time comes to hire your next leader outside of your organization, use solutions that help you hone in on candidates with the right skills. This isn't just true for external hires; when internal candidates apply for an open role, use it as an opportunity to determine whether they'll fit a fit for leadership roles.

Find your next leader.
LinkedIn Jobs

Add screening questions and skills assessment directly to your job ads using [LinkedIn Jobs](#) to start gathering insights on candidates right away.

Attract your next leader.
LinkedIn Career Pages

Build brand awareness with [LinkedIn Career Pages](#). Engage your future leaders with a page that showcases your company and your open roles.

Engage your next leader.
LinkedIn Recruiter

Identify the right skills needed to find your next great leader, then use a hiring solution like [LinkedIn Recruiter](#) to quickly identify them.

Habit 4

Welcome different views.

Consensus isn't necessarily the sign of a harmonious workplace. Often, the healthiest companies are the ones where employees feel comfortable speaking up.

Top leaders don't try to eliminate dissent—they focus on using it to identify better ways of working. By inviting employees to share their opinions openly and often, without facing punishment or embarrassment, leaders can catch and fix potential issues before they escalate.
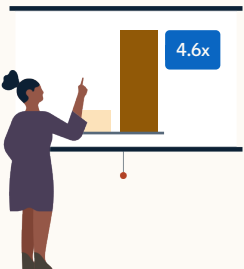
Employees who feel their voices are heard are 4.6x more likely to feel empowered to perform their best work.

Source: Salesforce, New Research: How Leading with Equality and Values Impacts Your Business

What this signals to employees
You respect their opinion and take it into account before taking action.

The cost of not adopting this habit
Employees may feel disempowered and struggle to speak up about real issues, leading to lower morale, higher turnover, and a loss of valuable insights.

Become a leader who welcomes different views.

Seek second opinions.
Strengthen your ideas and initiatives by brainstorming with employees to tap into a wide range of perspectives. This ensures they are accounting for any blind spots.

Embrace an open-communication policy.
While an open-door policy can encourage team members to come to you with issues and ideas, some employees may be less comfortable with face-to-face communication. To ensure their voices aren't lost, make sure everyone knows they can reach out to you in other ways, such as through email.

Don't take it personally.
As a manager, your reputation is closely tied to the performance of the organization. That can make feedback feel more personal, and harder to take. Remind yourself that it's not about you. It's about making the organization better.

Tips for success

+ **For team leaders**
Listen to feedback neutrally and avoid the urge to interrupt, even if you disagree. If you do feel that an employee voiced their dissent in an unproductive or disrespectful way, privately follow up or you may inadvertently discourage others from sharing their perspectives in the future.

" Business is built by [those] who care—care enough to disagree, fight it out to a finish, get facts. When two [people] always agree, one of them is unnecessary."*

– William Wrigley Jr., Founder, Wrigley Company

Source: Quote Investigator, When Two Men in Business Always Agree, One of Them Is Unnecessary

Habit 5

Encourage age-diverse hires.

Today, four generations make up the bulk of the workforce.

But ageism—prejudice or discrimination in the workforce based on a person's age—is still a very real thing. Strong leaders see that every generation can bring unique insights and strengths into every role, and those who are tapping into all the skills from this wide-ranging workforce reap the benefits.

Help your organization become more well rounded by thinking intentionally about how you structure departments and teams, balancing experience with fresh talent and allowing employees to learn from one another.
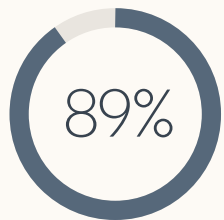
89% of talent professionals say a multigenerational workforce makes a company more successful

Source: LinkedIn, Global Talent Trends 2020

What this signals to employees
You see the potential in employees of all ages and play to their strengths.

The cost of not adopting this habit
Employees may feel like management undervalues them because of their age, and start looking for an employer that won't.
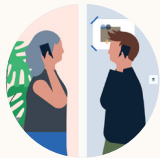
Habit 5

Become a leader who hires diversely.

Leave assumptions at the door.
Generational stereotypes can cause you to overlook great talent and leave knowledge untapped. Employees can surprise you. The youngest may be the most emotionally mature, and the oldest may be the most innovative.

Promote cross-generational bonding.
Employees can't benefit from the wisdom of others if they never interact. Have more conversations with employees outside of your sphere, and encourage people of all ages to get to know one another, giving everyone the opportunity to pick up new skills and knowledge.

Tips for success

+ For department heads
Bring employees from different generations together—like pairing older and younger workers up during group training sessions.

+ For executives
Create reverse mentorships where executives meet with younger employees to stay up to date on digital skills and generational trends.

+ For team leads
Intergenerational conflicts can happen. Show respect to everyone on your team and employees will follow your lead.

Conclusion

Lead by example.

It is often said that leaders should always lead by example. Employees will follow your lead, so it's up to you to decide what kind of example you want to set.

This will vary depending on your company's mission and values. But by developing constructive habits and giving up unhelpful ones, you can ensure you're walking the walk so your employees are certain of the right path to follow.

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