



# LEADERSHIP

in  
the

# OFFICE





Leadership is not a black art. It can be learned, practised and polished by anyone who is prepared to make the effort. In that sense it is no different to other professional attributes required in your field. If you want to get better at it - you have to spend time on it.

There are many of us who could improve our leadership in one way or another. You might find it helpful to read this pamphlet when you join a new organisation, are promoted or take on new responsibilities. Six months later it may be worth having another quick read to help review and refresh your leadership knowledge. It might also be able to give you personal guidance if you are confronted by a particularly difficult leadership challenge.

Improved leadership leads directly to improved effectiveness. We have recognised the gains of the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the Social Revolution and the Computer Revolution. The next step up in performance needs to come from a Leadership Revolution.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "James Hamilton-Nyatt". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

## *Leadership style*

Study of great leaders, past and present, shows that in one way or another they had the gift of getting people to give their best. We are all born with an individual set of talents. We can acquire some more; but others are more difficult to develop. Most people can improve their communication skills but find it difficult to acquire a sense of humour.

The first thing to do in developing your own leadership style is to make the best use of what you have and not to worry too much about what you haven't. A sense of humour is certainly a great help on many occasions, but there have been many successful leaders who have got by without one.

To develop and build on each talent you need to match your own character and personality to the range of leadership tools and qualities. There is no mould or blueprint. But do not hesitate to follow the example of others whose leadership you admire, provided there is some match to your own personality.

So you must be yourself and not pretend to be what you are not. You must also be ready to adapt your leadership style to varying situations. Being first on the scene at a road traffic accident calls for very different style of leadership to chairing a meeting. There is nothing dishonest about adapting your style to suit the situation; indeed it is good leadership to do so.

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## *Leadership - through qualities or through application?*

Drawing up a list of the qualities desirable in leadership has the unfortunate effect of making us feel terribly inadequate. There is comfort in the knowledge that even the greatest leaders can be faulted in some respect.

Concentrating solely on the application of leadership has drawbacks too. For example, mastering the host of modern communication techniques will be less effective if you cannot deliver the message with confidence and commitment.

Some might think that a qualities approach is more about leadership and an application approach is more about management. Many hours can be wasted discussing whether management is the servant of leadership or vice versa. In practice, great inspiration tends to fail without sound management and highly organised management tends to fail without inspiration. So we must all try to develop our personal qualities which underpin our leadership style and at the same time work at the practical functions of leadership in our daily lives.

For ease of presentation and consideration, this pamphlet first makes suggestions about the *application of leadership* and then highlights valuable *leadership qualities*. But in your own mind ensure the two are interleaved, or preferably indivisible. If you think some are under the wrong heading, then you are getting warm!

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## *The Application of Leadership*

*Listed below are some practical functions of leadership, which each of us can improve, generally by thinking about them more and trying harder.*

### RELATIONSHIPS

**Relationship with your boss.** The key thing to realise is that your relationship with your boss will be watched closely by your own team. They will be looking for many of the same features of that relationship which they expect to find in their relationship with you. In particular they would expect to see clarity of delegation through a shared understanding of responsibility and accountability; reciprocated trust and respect; and, support for your judgement.

**Relationship with your deputy.** You may not think you have a deputy. But there should be times when you are away and your boss and your team members need to know who is deputising for you. In your absence your deputy should, if at all possible, have precisely the same authority as you. If your deputy does not, then it must be clear in what circumstances your boss is to be consulted, or others are deputising. Do not confuse the role of your deputy when you are away with that person's normal role when you are present. Your deputy may well have three distinct roles: deputising for you in your absence, coordinating team activities for you and some specific responsibilities of their own post. You, your deputy and all team members must be clear about the extent of each of these.

**Relationships with your section heads.** You may have several heads of sections of your team. One of these may also be your deputy, in which case everyone must know who it is. However, they each may deputise for you on different subject matter, in which case clarity is even more important. Team members will be watching the relationship between you and your section

heads. Work with each of them evenhandedly; do not have favourites; take them into your confidence; be clear in your instructions to them and uphold their relationships with their section members.

**Relationships with your team members.** There is a knack in establishing a close working relationship with each member of your team without undermining the position of any intermediate management, such as section heads. You have to allow this to evolve. Key components are to show appreciation for good work; to be approachable at all times, especially to give advice to the less experienced; to be alert to imbalances in work load, particularly if some of the work is nugatory; to be able to spot if instructions given to you by your boss have become corrupted by the time they arrive at the team member who is actually doing the work; and to finally understand and react if necessary to any pressures on each individual.

## COMMUNICATIONS

**Lines of communication.** Avoid over elaborate lines of communication. It is not necessary to pass all instructions down the "chain of command", especially if your team is small. But it is important not to undermine by omission any supervisory function of a head of section. Clarity and visibility of the lines of communication within your team are important. There are bound to be interactions between the work of team members. Shared visibility of who is working on what, for whom and by when, is a great help. In fact effort put into this should be a labour saving device through the avoidance of under- or overlapping work. Likewise it should be helpful to your team effort if members generally have visibility of communications between you and your boss. Regular team meetings are the most obvious method, but you need to devote some personal effort to internal communications every day.

**Giving instructions.** There are three key requirements: clarity, clarity and clarity. The greatest waster of time in any organisation is effort spent struggling

with trying to understand "what the boss is on about". Do not mistakenly be vague when what you are trying to do is allow your team to be creative. If your requirements are complex, do not hesitate to write them down. This has the added virtue of helping you to be clear about them yourself. Be alert to signs of your instructions not being fully understood. Consider asking for an early outline plan or draft so that both you and the person doing the work can check whether you are on the same track.

**Getting "the idea" across.** A more difficult area of communications is getting across ideas, as opposed to instructions. This means you should spend proportionately more time thinking about how well you are getting ideas across. Think how you are going to do so; look for signs that you are failing to do so; and of course, be wise to the possibility that the idea is not a good one. If you sense resistance to an idea, have it out. Find out whether the resistance is because the idea is not understood, or disagreed with, or perhaps just too much on top of a heavy workload and you have not made space for the idea to be developed.

## RESPONSIBILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AUTHORITY and RESOURCES

**Responsibility.** Your boss should have made it clear to you what your responsibilities are. Hopefully they are written down and available, so that your whole team know what they have to deliver for you. You must write down for each member of your team what their responsibilities are. They should agree to these, not least because each of them will wish to ensure their competence will enable them to carry out their responsibilities. It is highly desirable for all team members to be able to see each other's responsibilities, especially as some of the responsibilities are likely to be delivered outside the standing hierarchical arrangements. For example, some team members may work to different section heads on different subject matter, or even outside your area of responsibility altogether. It is also important that any coordination responsibilities are clearly articulated and visible.

**Accountability.** There is one simple rule. Accountability must match responsibility. This is for you to enforce in your team. While you must be accountable to your boss for the output of your team, so must they be individually accountable to you for their contribution to that output. So for example, a team member might be responsible and accountable to you for the timely preparation of some draft advice. You are then responsible and accountable for offering that advice to whoever has called for it - but no longer in draft form. This does not mean that all work has to come through you. You might wish and encourage team members to offer advice directly. This is fine, but it does not let you off being clear about responsibilities and accountability.

**Authority.** Some members of your team may have authority for certain functions. For example, making cash payments or approving expenditure to be made by someone else. Your role as leader is to ensure that any delegated authority is clearly written down, understood and matched by accountability. But there is also an important wider interpretation of the term authority. You expect your boss to uphold your authority over your team; you do not expect to be undermined. You likewise must uphold the authority of your heads of section. This type of authority is largely a matter of confidence; it develops through its own application. So provided you are consistent about it, it should flourish, both upwards and downwards.

**Resources.** It is your responsibility that your team members have the resources necessary to carry out their responsibilities. As well as financial and personnel resources, this also includes professional skills, time, tools and working conditions. In practice there will be constraints on all of these. So you have to exercise this responsibility not just by seeking the right resources, but also by guiding your team members on how to manage with fewer resources than you would wish. You must devote some of your own time to this through, for example, prioritising work, insisting upon training and creating a reasonable working environment even if the fabric of the workplace is poor.

## YOUR TEAM MEMBERS

**Honesty.** Being honest about money or a security breach is a given. Much more difficult is to be honest in what you tell each of your team members about themselves. Of all aspects of leadership, one of the most testing is having to tell a member of your team that they are not doing well or are lazy, and then expect them to carry on working dutifully for you. But you have to do this; it is an inescapable facet of leadership. Spend time - probably quite a lot of time - thinking what you must say and how you are going to say it. And be sure to accompany any criticism with advice on how to improve. You must then follow this up by making time, or arranging training, or whatever is necessary on your part to allow that individual to improve. It is equally important to be honest with members of your team who are doing well. Do not falsely raise hopes of promotion or of securing a new post. You both will have to reap the harvest of any disappointment.

**Appraisal and report writing.** The buck stops with you. This is a clear personal responsibility of the leader, to which you should probably devote more time than you already do. You must make sure you have the resources to do this properly - training, time, privacy and care. There will be plenty of guidance on procedural aspects, so you should be concentrating on the words, both written and spoken. Probably the best personal guide on appraisal and report writing is to refresh your memory on all the bad experiences you have had on the receiving end - and vow to avoid them yourself. Likewise you should learn from the good experiences. This is a good example of where your leadership skills can be developed by observing others.

**Promotion.** It is likely that the appraisal and reporting system in your organisation has links to the promotion system. There should be internal guidance on your responsibilities for reporting on your team members' suitability for promotion. Avoid the trap of seeing promotion as a reward for good service. The most pragmatic test is whether you would have the person

you are recommending for promotion working for you at the next highest level. Or are you really only making the recommendation in the hope that the person will end up working for someone else? You should be concentrating on whether the individual could carry the responsibilities at the next level - not on how well they have worked at their present level. Clearing your thoughts on these points helps you write the report and will help when it comes to explaining the rationale for your recommendation face to face with the individual concerned.

**Dismissal.** Sooner or later as a leader you will find yourself wanting to remove a member of your team. In many ways this is easier in leadership terms than having to soldier on with someone who is mediocre and struggling to improve. There should be procedures for moving a member of staff and that procedure is likely to be more lengthy than you would wish. So you have to start early. This is no bad thing because starting out on the warning procedure may well have the effect of causing a significant improvement by the individual, in which case you may not need to go any further. What you should avoid is coming to the conclusion that a member of your team needs to go and wishing you had started the procedure six months earlier. Trust your own judgement and act on it early.

## YOURSELF

**Personal example.** Your team will always spot your mood, any impatience or any pressures from beyond work. You would undoubtedly prefer it if your team members did not themselves show such traits in similar circumstances. So try really, really hard to set a good example yourself of the kind of behaviour you would wish from your team members. Do not take out your passing irritation with one team member on everybody else you meet that day.

**Consistency.** Inconsistency in a leader is particularly debilitating for the team. You may well be able to remember being on the receiving end. Not only is it

irritating and undermining, but also it is immensely wasteful of effort. Members of your team need to be able to express your views and carry out your wishes with confidence, derived from the knowledge that you will lend support should the need arise.

**Fairness.** You must be impeccably fair in your dealings with individuals. You must also be intellectually fair, in being prepared to hear arguments and counter-arguments and only then make up your mind.

**Decisiveness.** Do not confuse decisiveness with undue speed in making decisions. There may well be a hurry to decide something, but often there is more time than it first appears. But when you have made up your mind, be firm and be clear to all concerned what it is that you have decided.

**Reliability.** This is as much to do with timeliness as quality. Meet deadlines yourself and deliver your part of any bargain, particularly if a decision is needed at your level. Your team will deliver more for you if they can utterly rely on you for your contribution.

**Trust.** Trust is the partner of delegation. It has to be nurtured; it is reciprocal; it is very valuable; but once broken it is extremely difficult to repair. Mutual respect grows from trust.

**Manners.** Manners do matter. Saying please, thank you and well done are some of your most valuable free resources. If you have made a mistake - apologise.

## GETTING THINGS DONE

**Delegation.** This takes practice and there is really no other way to develop the skill. You just have to keep on delegating until you frighten yourself - then draw back a little. But keep on pressing at the boundary of the amount of delegation with which you still feel comfortable. Then go a little further because

to delegate well you have to take risks. The rewards for you and your team should be immense. For areas where you are hesitant about delegating, the leadership trick is to have some method of monitoring without interference or conspicuously double checking.

**Involvement.** Involvement is the counterweight to delegation. The degree of your involvement in your team's work will probably vary with each piece of work. The important thing for you to remember is to decide early how involved you need to be, depending on factors such as the importance or complexity of the task. It is vexing for you, and irritating for a team member, if you become involved in an important piece of work late in the day and then ask for major adjustments to be made. So think about your degree of involvement in good time.

**Professional competence.** It is not necessary for you to be professionally competent at all the activities carried out by each of your team members. But you should be professionally competent at your own job. You will need to consider what this means for you in striking a balance between detailed knowledge and the ability to direct intelligently the efforts of others. You may also have to educate your boss what to expect in terms of the balance of detailed professional knowledge between you and the experts in your team. Generally you will be expected to add breadth of knowledge, experience and judgement to your team members' specialist ability.

**Standards.** There are two things to remember about standards. Standards are absolute, not relative; and you must set standards. If you want a piece of work done quickly but not particularly thoroughly, then you must say that this is what you expect. Or if you want to put the emphasis on presentation rather than quality, or on intellectual content rather than presentation - then say so.

**Training.** In most organisations there are tensions between getting people away for training and getting through more immediate work. The best way

through this is to plan training well ahead. Most people can either clear their work for a few days, or make arrangements for a colleague to take over temporarily - provided they are given sufficient notice. And that is up to you.

**Time off.** It is inexcusable not to let members of your team take their entitlement of holiday. As with time off for training, a good plan that looks well ahead is the key. If members of your team are not getting away as they should, then it is your fault for bad organisation, not their fault for being behind or too busy. Ideally you should also give people time off for important personal matters, such as a parent-teachers meeting.

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## *The Qualities of Leadership*

*Below are some qualities of leadership, which we should try to develop in ourselves and encourage in leaders working for us.*

**Integrity.** Integrity is important in all walks of life. It encapsulates such things as honour, trustworthiness, honesty, sincerity and soundness of moral principle. No amount of ability, knowledge, experience or cunning can make up for a lack of integrity. Nor are there any half measures with integrity. One lapse and you have lost it. A reputation for integrity is a priceless asset.

**Loyalty.** Loyalty works upwards, downwards and sideways. Misplaced loyalty must not override integrity. A spirit of loyalty is a great help in developing teamwork. The best place to start is with your own loyalty, which will be obvious in your personal behaviour. Certainly avoid obvious disloyalty such as publicly speaking ill of a superior, or rebuking a team member in front of colleagues. On the other hand commendation given publicly should foster loyalty.

**Sense of duty.** This is not as old fashioned as it sounds. It merely means placing your responsibilities above your self. It may involve working on a Sunday, or being prepared to drop whatever you are doing in order to help a team member who is struggling because your instructions were inadequate. Essentially it is the manifestation of team commitment through your personal commitment.

**Humanity.** Humanity involves the qualities of kindness, sympathy, unselfishness, modesty and understanding. An understanding of the feelings and failings of our colleagues is a necessary quality in a leader. With self discipline and forethought each of us can improve our humanity.

**Cheerfulness.** You probably know what it is like to work for someone who is chronically miserable. Then you also know how debilitating it is. So if being cheerful does not come naturally to you - do try.

**Creativeness.** This is quite difficult to develop if there is not some creativeness in you. But at least you can encourage others to be creative. Making space for creativeness is an important facet of leadership. You do not need to have the monopoly of good ideas; in fact that can be an irritant for your team. The knack is to develop the creativity of your team as a whole, either through your own creativity or the creativity of others. Or preferably some of each.

**Adaptability.** This is largely an attitude of mind. And it probably becomes more difficult as we get older. So you have to work at becoming more adaptable as your experience and judgement grow - rather than becoming less adaptable because you have seen it all before. Not being adaptable is likely to be a serious impediment to the development of your team and the quality of their work - particularly with so much emphasis on change.

**Common sense and good judgement.** To have both is clearly a great help. They can both be developed in all of us. As we grow up, we have more common sense about fire, or the dangers of mixing water and electricity. Our judgement can improve on choosing holidays or finding a genuine bargain in the sales. We do this through the sensible application of experience. We can all improve our commonsense and judgement through taking an analytical approach to problems and decisions.

**The dynamic qualities.** These are qualities such as energy, enthusiasm, drive, initiative, self-confidence and so on. All of them are infectious - which is why they are so useful. The bored and lethargic are not the people who get things done. Any organisation will be severely hampered if it lacks enthusiasm for the task. This does not mean that to be a successful leader you need, like Montgomery, to be able to stand on top of a tank and give direct encouragement to the troops. But if your team cannot see clear and frequent personal enthusiasm from you, then they are unlikely to give of their best.

**Moral courage.** This is the courage to disagree, to be different, to admit one's own mistakes, to accept blame, to accept responsibility, to be able to make unpopular decisions and to stand up and be counted. Moral courage is willpower. It can only come from within you and you will easily recognise the anguish of its absence.

**Tolerance.** You should be particularly cross with yourself if you have been intolerant. But do not confuse it with putting up with incompetence - which probably needs administrative action not tolerance.

**Stamina.** In most forms of work you do not need to be physically fit. But you probably do need to be able to take decisions and give direction when tired, or very busy or under pressure at home. Stamina is a key part of consistency of judgement. If you find yourself lacking stamina for each day's work, try delegating more. You will probably be pleasantly surprised by the stamina of some of your team members.

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## *Leadership in Federated Organisations*

*In federated organisations it is probably wrong to lean too much on strict "chain of command" leadership. A softer style might be needed which gives greater freedoms to individuals - but not to the point of team ineffectiveness. Here are some suggestions:*

**Monitoring.** It is most unlikely that you will want all work to come through you. But you will still need to keep up to date with issues your team are handling and keep an eye on the quality of their work. Looking at correspondence after despatch is an example of how to do this. Do not hesitate to point out errors and, if necessary, be prepared to take responsibility for putting them right. Resist the temptation to reintroduce closer supervision unless you have a serious problem with quality of work. Much better to encourage, to train and to direct.

**Delaying, delegation and dumping.** Delaying and the associated delegation are essential in a federated workplace. But all too quickly this can become work dumping which is when work is delegated without the necessary direction or resources (including training) to carry out that work. You must make sure this is not happening to you or being caused by you.

**Modern IT systems.** These make the rigid control of traditional lines of communication impossible to enforce. Do not even try. In fact you should be encouraging modern office methods to break down rigidities in communications. Encourage the ebb and flow of ideas, provided you are not left out.

**Labour saving devices.** Many of the habits of a traditional, hierarchical office are actually quite efficient because they prevent nugatory or duplicated work. For example, the weekly meeting which you require everyone to attend

might seem to be odds with a federated working style - but it can save hours of wasted effort. Unclear instructions also waste time. A free working atmosphere is not an excuse for people being unclear about what they are supposed to be doing.

**Very small organisations.** You might have only one or two people in your team. The principles in these notes are still just as important, even if you are as much part of the team as you are the team leader. With only two or three of you, wasted or poorly directed effort is almost certainly something you cannot afford.

## *Conclusion*

In countless organisations those who expect to be led, find leadership wanting at all levels. Most people in leadership positions underestimate the extent of leadership sought by those who work for them. All leaders find some aspects of leadership difficult.

You can take heart from this. There is no need to be coy about your own development or application of leadership. In fact quite the opposite. Those who work for you expect you to demonstrate leadership just as much as they expect you to be polite, punctual and professional.

In a nutshell, leadership is the skill of getting things done. It is getting people to give of their best and then harnessing their contributions through good management. You expect this of your leader and your team expect it of you.

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