

Taking Advantage of Leadership Opportunities Will Increase Your Visibility in a Positive Way by Connie Podesta

Everyone is a leader in his or her organization. Even if you don't hold a titled leadership position, such as supervisor, manager, human resource director, or CEO, you still have many opportunities every day through your actions and behavior to model "leadership" qualities. In fact, all employees must be able and willing to assume a leadership role when the need arises, regardless of their job title. That is why many organizations have eliminated titles like foreman, supervisor, and department manager to reinforce the belief that each employee is a contributing member of the team with leadership potential and opportunities depending on the task at hand.

If you don't see yourself as having leadership qualities, then you'll miss many opportunities to demonstrate your added value to your employer, co-workers, and customers. You will also be undermining yourself, because if you're not confident of your leadership potential, then why should anyone else be? Being a leader simply means you are willing to teach and support others, be a positive role model, and be ready to serve as well as lead when necessary and appropriate. Effective leaders can be found at every level in an organization. Even if you work under someone else's leadership, you can still be a leader in your ideas and attitudes about your job.

While it may be true that some people seem to fall into the role of leader more easily than others, it is possible for most of us to develop the abilities that will help us take charge, motivate others, and make good decisions. Below are some of the top qualities leaders possess.

Leaders are Trustworthy and Act with Integrity

In today's business environment where teamwork is crucial, there can be no doubt that all employees must be able to be trusted by their managers, co-workers, and customers. For example, good leaders do not criticize their co-workers behind their backs, and they don't take credit that belongs to everyone on the team. Instead, they build trust by openly admitting their mistakes rather than blaming others. They give credit where credit is due, and they help others celebrate their successes. Leaders build trust with customers and co-workers by acting with integrity. They make sure their words and actions are congruent all the time, not just when it's convenient. They can be counted on to do what is fair and right.

Leaders are High Achievers Who Strive for Excellence

Many employers who talk about their employees' leadership abilities mention words like "perseverance" and "determination." Leaders keep working to be the best they can be. They stay focused on their goals, but they keep things in perspective and realize that there is always room for improvement. They continually strive to learn more about themselves and their jobs. They integrate excellence into every task. Do you see yourself as a hard worker-as a star performer? Even though you may not own the organization, do you own a sense of pride in your work and your ability to contribute? Do you see yourself striving to outperform others and set new standards of excellence for your department and your organization? A good leader must have a strong desire to be the best by providing outstanding customer service and working hard to create an excellent, cohesive, and productive workforce. Even if they don't succeed at the task, leaders keep working at it.

Leaders Make Others Feel Important and Valued

Leaders value other people's worth and opinions and take the time to let them know they are important. They take the time to pay someone a compliment and keep criticisms, complaints, and negative comments

short and sweet. They also make both their co-workers and customers feel important by asking questions, listening, and tuning in to their needs. They realize that such questions as, "Do you need some help?" and "Do you want me to listen for your phone while you take a break?" demonstrate their ability to tune into others' needs as well as their own. In your leadership role, how generous are you with positive words and actions? Are you committed to helping others feel better about themselves? Do you value people and their ideas? Making others feel important and valuable could help make you invaluable to your organization.

Leaders Are Willing to Serve Others

To some people, serving others may seem like the role of a subordinate, not a leader. But in fact, a good leader believes in service to others. If that sounds contradictory, think of words such as "cooperate," "help," "work collectively," and "share" because they more accurately reflect the true nature of service to others. Organizations need employees who are willing to help each other, not whine and complain saying, "That's not my job." The future will demand that people learn new skills outside their area of expertise and use them to support other team members, even when it's "not their job." Are you willing to do what is needed even if it doesn't fall under your specific job description? Leaders support their co-workers when it counts, not just when it's convenient.

Leaders are Relationship Builders

An effective leader knows how to build good relationships so that individuals care more about the good of the entire team than about themselves and their own personal glory. In the workplace, employers need employees who can "run with the ball" by themselves when necessary, as well as build and maintain good team relationships. Do you work actively to build good team relationships? Hopefully so, because it is an important part of being an effective leader. Equally important are good relationships with clients and customers. In today's world, many companies do business with people they barely know, sometimes people they've never met. But the most successful and rewarding transactions, more often than not, involve parties who have developed a solid business relationship. Good leaders understand the importance of building good relationships with their colleagues and their customers.

Leaders Communicate Effectively

Every CEO, manager, human resource director, employer, and employee must be able to state what they need, want, or prefer with confidence and in a manner that is clear, honest, and forthright. But good leaders must go even further. They must be able to interpret the needs, wants, and preferences of their colleagues and customers to create a cooperative and successful work environment. Effective communication is the cement that binds an organization together. It is the foundation upon which successful teamwork and good customer relationships are built. It is no accident that employees who can communicate effectively and assertively soon find themselves in leadership roles.

While leadership may come naturally for some, for others developing strong leadership skills takes thought, practice, and hard work. But it's definitely worth the effort, because these skills will benefit all of your personal and professional relationships. Leadership skills are life skills.

Being a good leader is a 24-hour a day job. If these are skills you've been neglecting, start developing them now. Today's organizations need employees who are ready and willing to lead at a moment's notice. Your leadership skills and abilities will help determine your present and future employability.