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The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership



In *The Student Leadership Challenge*, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner—today's premier leadership experts—demonstrate how any student can be a leader, regardless of age and experience. Grounded in over 30 years of extensive research, they have identified *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®* that are common when leaders are able to make extraordinary things happen.

What they are saying...

"A fantastic resource for leadership educators looking to further develop students' understanding of *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* in a tangible, hands-on way! It offers engaging activities that are sure to make an impact on your student leaders. This activity book is a great supplement to *The Student Leadership Challenge*, bringing the original concepts off the page and into the real world."

— Kimberly Piatt, coordinator of leadership development
The College at Brockport.

Model the Way



The most important personal quality people look for and admire in a leader is personal credibility. Credibility is the foundation of leadership. If people don't believe in the messenger, they won't believe the message. Titles may be granted but leadership is earned.

Student leaders Model the Way by finding their voice and affirming shared values.

As captain of his volleyball team, Mark Almassy talked about the critical importance of leading by example: "I always showed up early to practice and oftentimes stayed late. There was nothing I wasn't willing to do. I was not too good to mop the floor or too cool to shout words of encouragement to a freshman. I knew that my actions spoke louder than my words, so I made sure to show people what to do rather than tell them what to do."

Leaders are supposed to stand up for their beliefs, so they'd better have beliefs to stand up for. Leaders must be clear about their guiding principles. They must find their own voices, and then they must clearly and authentically give voice to their values. Yet leaders can't simply impose their values on others and expect commitment. They have to engage others in common aspirations. Modeling the Way begins with the clarification of personal values and involves building and affirming shared values that all can embrace.

Eloquent speeches about common values are not nearly enough. Exemplary leaders know that it's their behavior that earns them respect. The real test is whether they do what they say—whether their words and deeds are consistent. Leaders set an example and build commitment through simple, daily acts that create progress and build momentum.

The personal-best leadership case studies we examined were distinguished by the fact that all of them required relentless effort, steadfastness, competence, and attention to detail. It wasn't the grand gesture that had the most lasting impact. Instead it was the power of spending time with someone, of working side-by-side with colleagues, of telling stories that made values come alive, of being highly visible during times of uncertainty, of handling critical incidents with grace and discipline, and of asking questions to get people to focus on values and priorities.

Inspire a Shared Vision



When students described their personal-best projects, they told of times during which they imagined an exciting, highly attractive future for their organization.



Leaders are driven by their clear image of possibility and what their organization could become.

Student leaders Inspire a Shared Vision by envisioning the future and enlisting others in a common vision.

"I soon found myself responsible for leading all these people in a controversial program at our school that had never been attempted," explained Kyle Ozawa. "I needed to inspire my peers with the vision I had. In order for this to work out, every one of the upperclassmen involved in the program needed to share the same vision. . . . I explained why our help was needed and how we had the ability to really make an impact on their lives. I learned that leaders are not the people who set the goals; they are the ones who help people envision them as their own."

Leaders gaze across the horizon of time, imagining the attractive opportunities that are in store when they and their constituents arrive at a distant destination.

Leaders passionately believe that they can make a difference. They have a desire to make something better than it is today, change the way things are, and create something that no one else has ever produced. Yet visions seen only by leaders are insufficient to create an organized movement or a significant change in a product, let alone in an organization. A person with no constituents is not a leader, and people will not follow until they accept a vision as their own. Leaders cannot command commitment; they can only inspire it. What may begin as "my" vision emerges as "our" vision.

To enlist people in a vision, leaders must get to know their constituents and learn to speak their language. Other people must believe that leaders understand their needs and have their interests at heart if they are to sign up for journeys into the future. Leaders forge a unity of purpose by showing constituents how the dream is for the common good. Leaders breathe life into visions—through vivid language and an expressive style. Their own enthusiasm and excitement are contagious and spread from the leader to constituents. Their belief in and enthusiasm for the vision are the sparks that ignite the flame of inspiration. Leaders uplift people's spirits with an ennobling perspective about why they should strive to be better than they are today.

Challenge the Process



Leaders venture out. Those who lead others to greatness seek and accept challenge. Every single personal-best leadership case we collected involved some kind of challenge. Not one person said he or she achieved a personal best by keeping things the same.

Student leaders Challenge the Process by searching for opportunities and by experimenting, taking risks, and learning from mistakes.

Leaders are pioneers—they are willing to step out into the unknown. The work of leaders is change, and the status quo is unacceptable to them. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve. But leaders need not always be the creators or originators. In fact, it's just as likely that they're not. Sometimes a dramatic external event thrusts an organization into a radically new condition. Therefore, leaders must remain open to receiving ideas from anyone and anywhere. The leader's primary contribution is in recognizing and supporting good ideas and in being willing to challenge the system to get new products, processes, services, and systems adopted.

"No one was willing to take the time to try and make our idea work," Patricia Hua explained, "because everyone thought that the chances for success were too slim and hence not worth the time. Through my willingness and persistence to challenge the process and do something that had never been thought of or done before, we were able to put on an unforgettable prom. . . . I also needed to make certain that everyone on the committee had this same attitude, and that together, one hurdle at a time, we could make anything happen."

Leaders are early supporters and adopters of innovation. Leaders know well that innovation and challenge involve experimentation, risk, and even failure. Experiments don't always work out as planned. People often make mistakes when they try something new. Instead of trying to fix blame for mistakes, leaders learn from them and encourage others to do the same. Leaders understand that the key that unlocks the door to opportunity is learning, especially in the face of obstacles. As weather shapes mountains, problems shape leaders. Leaders are learners.

Change can be stressful, so leaders must also create a climate in which people are psychologically hardy—in which they feel in charge of change. Part of creating a psychologically hardy team is making sure that the magnitude of change isn't overwhelming. Leaders provide energy and generally approach change through incremental steps and small wins. Little victories, when piled on top of each other, build confidence that even the greatest challenges can be met. In so doing they strengthen commitment to the long-term future. Extraordinary things don't get done in huge leaps forward. They get done one step at a time.

Enable Others to Act



Leaders know they can't do it alone. Leadership is a team effort.

Student leaders Enable Others to Act by fostering collaboration and strengthening others.

In the cases we analyzed, student leaders proudly explained how teamwork, trust, and empowerment were essential to strengthening everyone's capacity to deliver on promises. Collaboration is the master skill that enables teams, partnerships, and other alliances to function effectively. So leaders engage all those who must make the project work and, in some way, all those who must live with the results. Cooperation can't be restricted to a small group of loyalists. Leaders make it possible for everyone to do extraordinary work.

"Being a camp counselor for a group of sixth-graders," Will Cahill explained, "taught me that a good leader is a team player; and to become a team player, one must offer encouragement and be willing to listen to others' ideas. Working with others and getting everyone to participate actively requires trust and expanding capabilities. For example, we gave each kid the chance to lead the group to meals and during nature hikes, and also listen to each boy's ideas. Decisions were made as a group. Another key to success is that in order to gain respect you must also show respect for others."

At the very heart of cooperation is trust. Leaders help create a trusting climate. They understand that mutual respect is what sustains extraordinary efforts. When leadership is understood as a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks; make changes; and keep programs, organizations, and movements alive. Without trust and confidence, people do not take risks. Without risks, there is no change.

Creating a climate in which people are involved and feel important is at the heart of strengthening others. It's essentially the process of turning constituents into leaders themselves—making people capable of acting on their own initiative. Leaders know that people do their best when they feel a sense of personal power and ownership. Commitment-and-support structures have replaced command-and-control structures.

The work of leaders is making people feel strong, capable, informed, and connected. Exemplary leaders use their power in service of others; they enable others to act, not by hoarding the power they have, but by giving it away. When people have more discretion, more authority, and more information, they're much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results that serve everyone's best interests.

Encourage the Heart



The climb to the top is arduous and long; people can become exhausted, frustrated, and disenchanting. They're often tempted to give up. Genuine acts of caring uplift the spirits and draw people forward.

Student leaders Encourage the Heart by recognizing contributions and celebrating values and victories.

Exemplary leaders set high standards and have high expectations of their organizations. Leaders also expect the best of people and create self-fulfilling prophecies about how ordinary people can produce extraordinary results.

By paying attention, offering encouragement, personalizing appreciation, and maintaining a positive outlook, student leaders stimulate, rekindle, and focus people's energies.

"I felt that many of my coworkers probably felt as underappreciated and poorly respected as I did," Ken Campos told us, but he explained that, as a shift supervisor, he could help to turn around this attitude. "I would constantly extol and commend them for their actions, and more important, I tried to make it clear that we were making a difference as a team. I looked for ways to make our work fun, and whenever anyone did something special, we all stopped to give that person a high-five or a chorus of 'way-to-go' chants."

Part of the leader's job is to show appreciation for people's contributions and to create a climate of celebration. Encouragement can come from dramatic gestures or simple actions. In the cases we collected, there were thousands of examples of individual recognition and group celebration—including marching bands, ringing bells, T-shirts, note cards, and personal thank-you's. Leaders know that, in a winning team, the members need to share in the rewards of their efforts. Public celebrations let everyone know that "We're all in this together."

Yet recognition and celebration aren't simply about fun and games. Neither are they about pretentious ceremonies designed to create some phony sense of camaraderie. Encouragement is a curiously serious business. By celebrating people's accomplishments visibly and in group settings, leaders create and sustain team spirit; by basing celebrations on the accomplishment of key values and milestones, they sustain people's focus. Encouraging the Heart is how leaders visibly and behaviorally link rewards with performance and behavior with cherished values. Leaders know that celebrations and rituals, when done with authenticity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through turbulent and difficult times. Caring is at the heart of leadership.

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