

Five Practical Ideas for those who Aspire to Lead

By Frenetta Tate

Throughout history, there have been many rules, pointers, styles and tenets written to educate and inspire leaders; but there are certain leadership ideas that are timeless, challenging, empowering and can set you apart from other leaders, if embraced and applied.

1. Leaders come in different flavors.

There are two different types of leaders and you will probably encounter more than one type in your lifetime. Formal leaders are those we elect into public positions or offices such as the senators, congressmen, and presidents of the local clubs. Informal leaders are those we look up to by virtue of their wisdom and experience such as in the case of the elders of a tribe, or our grandparents; or by virtue of their expertise and contribution in a given field. Formal and informal leaders practice a combination of leadership styles introduced by such thought leaders as Kurt Lewin, Rensis Likert and Daniel Goleman – from Authoritative and Directional styles to Participatory and Coaching styles; each style has its own benefits.

2. Leadership doesn't just happen; it is a process of becoming.

Although certain people seem to be born with innate leadership qualities, without the right environment and exposure, they may fail to develop their full potential. So like learning how to ride a bicycle, you can also learn how to become a leader and hone your leadership abilities.

Knowledge on leadership theories and skills may be formally gained by enrolling in leadership seminars, workshops, and conferences. Daily interactions with people provide the opportunity to observe and practice leadership theories. Together, formal and informal learning will help you gain leadership attitudes, gain leadership insights, and further the cycle of learning.

To commit to leadership is also committing to being a life-long learner because each day brings new experiences that put your knowledge, skills, and attitude to a test.

3. Leadership starts with you.

Life application is a key to leadership success. The best way to develop leadership qualities is to apply it to your own life. Because leaders are always in the spotlight, it is important to keep in mind that your credibility as a leader depends much on your actions; from your interaction with your family, friends, and co-workers to the way you manage your personal and organizational responsibilities. Repeated actions become habits. Habits in turn form a person's character. The depth of your character holds the seed of your leadership and will leave a lasting impression on others.

4. Leadership is shared.

Leadership is not the sole responsibility of one person, but rather a shared responsibility among members of a team. It is a false narrative that leadership is a one-person venture. Leaders create other leaders. A leader belongs to a group. Each member has responsibilities to fulfill. Formal leadership positions are merely added responsibilities aside from their responsibilities as members of the team.

Effective leadership requires members to do their share of work. In this light of this, it is important to understand how social interaction plays a major role in leadership. To learn how to work together requires a great deal of trust between and among leaders and members of a team. Trust is built upon actions and not merely on words. When mutual respect exists, trust is fostered and confidence is built.

5. Leadership styles depend on the situation.

Aside from culture, beliefs, values, and form of government, the current situation of a nation also affects the leadership styles used by its formal leaders. There is no rule that only one style can be used when leading. To operate from this premise would not be wise. An effective leader aligns his or her leadership style with the current needs. Therefore, leaders often employ a combination of leadership styles depending on the situation.

For example, when leading an organization and staff is highly motivated and competent; a combination of leadership styles; from delegative to highly participatory are most appropriate. But if the staff has low competence and low commitment; a combination of high coaching, high supporting, and high directing behavior from organizational leaders is required.

No matter where you find yourself on the leadership ladder; this insightful advice will help you soar to newer heights as you continue to develop and grow as a leader.

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