

Leadership Skills

Everyone needs leadership skills, not just those designated by title or duties as a 'leader.' A high performing Team operates within the premise that there is shared ownership and responsibility for leading the work of implementing the plan. Here are 10 Leadership skills and tips for each.

1. Communication

Leaders need to be able to clearly and succinctly explain to colleagues and Team members everything from the Team's Vision and goals to specific tasks. Leaders must be skilled in all forms of communication, including individual, group, agency leadership, other local and regional colleagues, as well as communication via the phone, email, and social media.

A large part of communication involves active listening. Therefore, leaders should establish a steady flow of communication among team members, through regular meetings and communications. Leaders should be open to discussing issues and concerns. Leaders guide the Team in staying 'true' to the planning processes. Leaders are sounding boards for new ideas, issues related to the Team's plans, and any inter-personal issues the Team may be experiencing.

Other communication skills related to effective leadership:

- Paraphrasing
- Presenting to large groups
- Relaying stories to demonstrate the Team's impact
- Using nonverbal cues as an aid to clear communication
- Acknowledging effort
- Reading Body language
- Openness to various perspectives
- Coming to Consensus
- Facilitating Team problem solving and conflict resolution
- Communicating accurately verbally and in writing
- 2 – 2 – 1 Rule (Two ears, two eyes, one mouth - use in those proportions)

2. Motivation

Leaders need to inspire Team members to make a commitment to the work of implementing the plan. It's critical that each Team member sees themselves as having an important role in the work. Leaders recognize the efforts of each person and provide specific responsibilities to increase investment in the plan. Leaders must learn what motivators work best for various Team members to encourage productivity and passion.

Skills related to effective motivation include:

- Providing autonomy for Team members to carry out assigned actions
- Discerning the interests and priorities of each Team member
- Asking for input
- Mentoring Team Members
- Providing feedback and recognition
- Honoring Team members individual differences
- Involving all Team members
- Creating and fostering a sense of 'teamness'
- Encouraging honest, open and respectful dialogue when conflict arises

3. Delegating

Leaders who try to take on too many tasks by themselves will struggle to get anything done. Leaders might think that delegating tasks are a sign of weakness, when in fact it is a sign of a strong leader. A group of people becomes a 'Team' when everyone has separate and collective responsibilities within the plan.

Some skills that make a good delegator include:

- Encouraging feedback from Team members
- Setting clear guidelines and timelines
- Defining and modeling expectations
- Demonstrating trust
- Matching the action to the right Team member
- Guiding, but not directing, how an action should be completed
- Making suggestions rather than demands
- Putting aside personal ego

4. Positivity

A positive attitude can go a long way, especially when the work is difficult. Leaders should be able to laugh at themselves when something doesn't go quite as planned; this helps create a happy and healthy Team environment.

The Team benefits from taking time to get to know each other on a personal level. A positive leader can model that in Team meetings and other communication. As people, we are all social beings and feel more included as we discover commonalities with each other on a personal level – types of favored leisure activities, or vacation spots; common relatives or friends; favorite or disliked foods.

Modeling positivity, kindness, respect and a genuine personal interest in each individual contributes to the kind of positive atmosphere that engenders productivity and efficiency. In a less stressful environment, people are more likely to contribute and willing to commit to the hard work ahead.

Some skills that help make for a positive atmosphere include:

- Diplomacy
 - Conflict Management
 - Respect
 - Friendliness
 - Encouragement
 - Developing Rapport
 - Kindness
 - A Sense of Humor
 - Interpersonal Skills
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5. Trustworthiness

Leaders must establish back-and-forth communication that is comfortable, open and honest. It is important for leaders to demonstrate integrity – trust is developed through respect. Trustworthiness requires demonstrating follow through and follow-up. Complete tasks and requests thoroughly and on time. Get back with people to follow-up on details. Back up ideas and communication with facts and not opinions.

Some skills and qualities that convey a sense of trustworthiness as a leader:

- Ability to apologize honestly
 - Accountability
 - Confidentiality
 - Conscientiousness
 - Credibility
 - Empathy
 - Honesty
 - Reliability
 - Thoughtfulness
 - Ethical
 - Standing up for beliefs
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6. Creativity

Leaders may have to confront situations that do not always have clear answers. Leaders contribute to leading the Team to think outside of the box, to discern an effective path forward.

Learning to try nontraditional solutions, or approaching problems in nontraditional ways, will help the Team to address complex and enduring problems. Team members will be inspired to think in a like manner, not always choosing the safe, conventional path.

The same thinking that created the problem is less likely to solve the problem. Complex problems can be addressed through creative thinking that leads to taking measured risks.

Some skills related to creative thinking:

- Analytical thinking
- Identifying patterns
- Conceptualization
- Imaginative
- Curiosity
- Listening and considering all ideas
- Making abstract connections
- Problem Solving
- Synthesizing
- Observation
- Critical Thinking

7. Feedback

Leaders constantly look for opportunities to deliver useful information to Team members how the work is progressing. However, there is a fine line between offering ideas and assistance, and micromanaging. Model how to improve the way the Team works and makes decisions.

Provide feedback to each other in a clear, empathetic way, to ensure that it is heard. Feedback that sounds like criticism is likely to be rejected without due consideration.

Some skills for giving clear feedback include:

- Feedback loops are frequent and become routine Drawing out less vocal Team members' ideas and active participation
 - Coaching each other
 - Reacting positively to feedback
 - Keeping to clear expectations
 - Willingness to change
 - Asking questions to clarify understanding
 - Using 'yes...and' instead of the argumentative sounding 'yes...but'
 - Make it factual, not personal
 - Offer advice only when it is requested
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8. Responsibility

Leaders take responsibility for both the successes and failures of team. Success of the plan is everyone's success and vice versa. Finger pointing and blaming is nonproductive and divisive. Accept mistakes and failures, use them as learning experiences, and then devise clear solutions for improvement.

Some skills and qualities that help convey responsibility:

- Acknowledging mistakes
 - Forecasting
 - Considering feedback from participants in Team activities
 - Engage in a process to evaluate proposed solutions
 - Distributing the work over time
 - Learning from mistakes
 - Resolving problems as they occur
 - Using Baseline and Progress data for decisions
 - Troubleshooting
 - Reflectiveness
 - Project planning – think backwards to plan what needs to occur now
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9. Commitment

It is important for leaders to follow through with what they agree to do. Commitment means carving out the time to complete responsibilities or participate in Team meetings and activities. No one ever has adequate time to attend to everything that needs attention during a day. Commitment requires prioritizing the work of the Team, among all other responsibilities. Others will follow that example.

Some skills related to commitment include:

- Determination
- Embracing the Team's Vision
- Keeping promises
- Communication passion for the work
- Prioritization
- Team player – picking up the slack when needed
- Perseverance
- Follow through
- Work Ethic
- Be in it for the long haul
- Take initiative

10. Flexibility

Mishaps and last-minute changes always occur. Leaders need to be flexible, accepting whatever changes come their way. Accept changes in stride and creatively problem solve to prevent future similar glitches.

Similarly, leaders must be open to changing based on suggestions and feedback. If there is dissatisfaction with an aspect of the Team, it will fester if not attended to. Listen to concerns, take perspective and be open to making necessary changes.

Skills related to flexibility include:

- Willingness to learn to skills
- Responsiveness to issues or conflict
- Adaptability
- Improvising
- Negotiation skills
- Respecting each other's strengths and needs
- Trying out new technology and social media
- Embracing course corrections
- Letting go of old, inefficient practices and routines