

The 8 behaviors effective leaders demonstrate

Marie works as a manager at a logistics company. She spends much of her time directly overseeing others and paying attention to detail. Such actions keep operations running smoothly in her fast-paced, deadline-oriented environment. Employees know exactly what they should be doing at any given time, and Marie frequently reminds them of the importance of their individual efforts.

Linda is the CEO of a small public relations firm. Her staff consists of a diverse group of passionate people. Linda creates a respectful workplace where all can share ideas. Most team members have been in the industry for quite some time. She allows them a great deal of control over their everyday tasks. This frees Linda to devote more time to growing the business.

As these two women show, leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Factors such as industry, staff composition, and individual personality play a role in the behavior a manager exhibits.

Yet while styles and circumstances may differ, good leaders tend to display many common core behaviors. As you read the following list, think about which leadership behaviors are among your strengths and which might need to develop into a greater part of your leadership arsenal.

1. Knowing your leadership style

Effective leaders possess self-awareness. They evaluate their strengths and weaknesses – with an eye on maximizing the former and improving the latter. Identifying one's primary leadership style is a good place to start.

Leadership styles are classifications of how a person behaves while leading a group. Consensus does not exist on exact categories. And, as one might expect, managers often exhibit more than one style or vary it according to the situation. The following are three of the most commonly recognized leadership styles:

Autocratic

This very direct form of leadership presents team members with clearly defined roles and tasks. The manager lays out what people are expected to do. Employees follow directions. Worker input tends to be minimal. This sets the stage for quick decision-making by leaders since soliciting agreement is not a concern.

Democratic

This style focuses on collaboration among managers and their team. A variety of ideas circulate before a plan of action is decided upon, which may result in better or more novel approaches. Because of their involvement, employees often develop a greater connection to the company under a democratic manager. However, conflicting viewpoints can cause staff tension. Likewise, the potential exists for hurt feelings when an individual's suggestion is not taken.

Laissez-faire

Employees operating under this type of management experience a great deal of autonomy. They receive little supervision and are expected to generally solve problems and make decisions on their own. Many workers welcome this extension of trust, but some feel uneasy about a lack of direction.

Marie, the manager described earlier, tends toward autocratic leadership. Linda displays behavior more in line with democratic and laissez-faire styles. Both women might consider adopting elements of other methods in certain situations. Marie, for instance, might benefit from asking frontline workers to weigh in on creating a safer warehouse. Checking in with staff a bit more often might guide individuals on Linda's team to produce outcomes more in line with her intentions.

2. Staying on top of things

Effective leaders know what is going on in their department. They possess a firm grasp of priorities, deadlines, and the efforts necessary to fulfill company objectives. They use devices such as project management systems and shared calendars to stay on track. Such attention helps to keep things from slipping through the cracks and limits errors.

The benefits of having an organized manager trickle down to the staff. Team members can do their best work when a leader consistently provides correct, timely information and instructions. Being part of a work environment where activities feel under control rather than chaotic cuts down on everyone's stress.

Staying on top of things applies to more than just tasks, however. Great leaders keep tabs on the pulse of the office. They monitor morale, look out for signs of discord or politics, and gauge stress levels. Early detection of any problems allows time for action rather than suddenly facing a conundrum such as low employee retention rates.



3. Communicating effectively

Few will argue that the ability to communicate is one of the most important leadership skills. Regardless of one's individual leadership style, certain information must be conveyed in order for direct reports to do their jobs well. Such things reduce misunderstandings and mistakes. These basics include:

- What is the company's mission?
- What are departmental priorities vs. what can wait?
- What are the critical things to know about a given project? Common possibilities include short-term and long-term deadlines, specific instructions, client demands, budget, and the responsibilities of each team member.
- What communication "rules" exist? For instance, what is the acceptable time frame for responding to emails? What is the standard procedure for ensuring remote employees stay in the loop?
- How should a worker respond to a problem or emergency situation? Who should he contact for assistance, by what method, and how quickly?

Holding check-ins and offering constructive feedback also are important to team performance. Some managers are surrounded by veteran employees who require little guidance on projects. Other leaders sense the need for more hand-holding or checking in to ensure things are progressing in the intended manner. Part of being an effective manager is adjusting based on circumstances.

The best leaders realize that communication skills involve more than just what they say or write to others. They watch body language, listen carefully, and read thoughtfully. Such attention provides valuable information. Does the other person truly comprehend? How does the individual feel about what is being discussed?

4. Empowering others

Successful leaders know that direct reports thrive when they truly feel their contributions make a difference. Thus, it pays for managers of all leadership styles to spend time showing employees how what they do as individuals makes a positive impact on your company.

Beyond fostering this connection, strong leadership behavior involves creating an environment where those under you can grow. For starters, this means establishing psychological safety. All employees need a work environment where they feel valued, free to be their true selves, and comfortable expressing ideas and opinions. Without this basic level of respect from their managers and colleagues, team members will hesitate to spread their wings.

Other leadership behaviors that promote employee empowerment include:

Delegating appropriately

Building trust is a crucial part of great leadership. Delegating shows staff members that you trust their abilities and work ethic. Give people ownership over specific tasks based on their competencies. Let them perform these responsibilities without constantly breathing down their necks.

Holding others accountable

Swooping in to save the day may seem like effective leadership behavior. However, better leaders know the danger of sending the message that you will pick up the pieces or cover for mistakes. Encourage team members to seek assistance as needed, but give them the space for problem-solving and decision-making on their own, too.

Creating stretch goals

Boost engagement and self-confidence by working with individuals on formulating goals just beyond their reach. This process demonstrates your faith in the person's ability and hard work, and every "win" encourages upping the game a bit more.

Valuing education

Support employees who want to learn new things. Carve out time and money for professional development (including your own, as great leaders never stop learning).

5. Making decisions

Effective managers know they are hired to lead, and sometimes being the one in charge is difficult. It means asking the hard questions and addressing issues rather than shunning them.

Being a leader involves making timely, thoughtful decisions and carrying them out. Wishy-washy managers not only lose respect, they make it harder for others to do their jobs. Direct reports depend on them to chart a clear course. Outcomes may not always end up perfectly desirable, but strong leaders know they need the self-confidence to make educated decisions in order for the company to operate and grow.

6. Taking risks

Managers differ quite significantly in this behavior depending on their own personality and style. Self-awareness of where you fall on the risk spectrum can help pinpoint if you may need to make some adjustments.

Taking risks might be scary in business, but being too afraid to fail means potentially missing out on opportunities as well. Good leaders thoughtfully evaluate circumstances. They identify situations in which failure would be tolerable vs. when it would be devastating. They look at the possible reward and weigh it against possible negative consequences. Ultimately, they decide which risks are worth taking and which are not.

Effective leaders examine the successful and unsuccessful outcomes of their risk-taking endeavors. They treat both as learning opportunities. Companies depend on such leadership development to create business visionaries capable of moving the organization forward.

7. Developing creative solutions

Managers often are very good at what they do and rely on tried-and-true methods. A core arsenal of leadership traits and behaviors bolsters self-confidence and can keep operations running like a well-oiled machine much of the time. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated, the world is not always orderly or predictable.

Leaders stuck in their ways may have trouble dealing with new problems as they arise. Strong leadership involves the ability to think outside the box and come up with creative solutions to problems.

Finding new and better ways to do things oftentimes results from seeking input from various sources. Effective leaders check their ego at the door. They keep an open mind about what others suggest. They push to hear from everyone, not just the same voices over and over. Unexpected and original solutions are welcomed, not ridiculed, because these ideas are a key to innovation.

8. Motivating appropriately

Finally, all true leaders realize the link between motivation and performance. They understand how crucial recognition is to morale, achievement, and company culture.

However, good leaders know motivation is not a one-size-fits all concept. Some employees love to hear their manager publicly sing their praises, but others cringe. Some workers genuinely value a hand-written note from a leader. Other colleagues prefer bonuses, gifts, or opportunities to work on “pet” projects. Effective managers take the time to figure out what works best for each team member.

Successful leaders also boost motivation through fairness. Direct reports know hard work yields promotions or choice assignments, not favoritism.

And regardless of individual leadership style, effective leaders convey their love of teamwork. They know sharing credit does not dim one’s own light. Rather, it leads the whole group to shine.