



LEADERSHIP

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

officevibe

Being responsible for the well-being and success of many employees is a big burden to take on.

Managing your own work, managing employees, and making sure the team is working cohesively can easily get overwhelming.

Even if you [read tons of leadership articles](#), it can still feel like a colossal task.

We understand.

So we put together this step-by-step guide to teach you exactly what to do to **become a leader that employees love working with.**

What Is Leadership?

A leader is someone who establishes a clear vision, and then guides their team toward that vision by empowering them and coaching them to greatness.

A leader is someone that stays calm during a crisis, and stays laser-focused on their goal.

The skills that it takes to be a good leader is great communication, respect, passion, quick on their feet, and coach.

Leadership is something that is continuously developed over time, through mentoring and staying curious. The best leaders are always learning and are hungry to be the best they can be for their employees.

They realize that they have many people relying on them, and they need to be there

them.

It's a tough job that requires balancing the personality styles, conflicts, and interests everyone they work with.

Introduction To Leadership

Being a good leader is the most important part of having an engaged and productive team.

According to research from Gallup¹, managers account for up to 70% of the variance engagement. With less than one-third of Americans engaged in their job, you can start to see how big of a deal this is.

Then if you start to think about the [ROI of employee engagement](#) and how big of a role managers play, the financial effects of bad managers are scary.

When you look at the engagement data from research firms like Gallup, you can see clearly that managers aren't enabling their employees to do great work.

For a multitude of reasons, managers are creating environments where employees are uncomfortable and aren't using all of their strengths.

This is a huge opportunity being missed in thousands of companies all over the world. There is so much potential productivity being wasted right now by managers that make a few core mistakes.

As a manager, your responsibility is to make

your team the best it can be.

One of the best pieces of advice for managers is to shift your focus away from yourself and redirect it towards your team.

There's a concept called "servant leadership", originally coined in a 1970 essay called The Servant as Leader. In the essay, servant leadership is described as

The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first...

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test and difficult to administer, is:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?

The best leaders understand that it's their team that will drive their success. It's your job to do everything you can to make sure your employees are successful.

Free Bonus: [Download everything you need to know](#) about the difference between a boss and a leader.

Why Employees Quit Their Jobs

A 2015 survey² from Gallup found that about 50% of the 7,200 adults surveyed left a job “to get away from their manager.”

Even more interesting, was that more than half of the people surveyed who agreed with the statement “I feel I can approach my manager with any type of question” were considered actively engaged in their work, showing that there might be a link between a manager being open and employee engagement.

In almost all cases, the employee is quitting because he feels he is not important... If you do not deal with the situation right at the first mention, you'll confirm his feelings and the outcome is inevitable.

Andy Grove

If one of your employees is likely to quit, you need to do something about it right away.

In the book [High Output Management](#), Andy Grove outlines five steps to saving a disengaged employee:

1. Meet with them ASAP and ask why they're quitting.
2. Listen to what they have to say, and ask follow up questions.
3. Find clear ways to help change things for them to make things better.
4. Follow up and implement the changes you said you would do quickly.
5. Even if you will lose them to another department, you should be trying to keep them in the company.

Are Managers Even Necessary?

Google famously got rid of all of their managers in what they called Project Oxygen³, only to bring them back after realizing how valuable they truly are.

Their original hypotheses, was that especially for engineers, managers are unnecessary. They thought that they only added layers of bureaucracy and took away from “real work.”

After all of their research, which measured key management behaviors and their impact using data from surveys and performance reviews, they found that good managers matter.

Their teams have lower turnover and score higher on metrics [measuring employee happiness](#).

At the end of the day, managers are incredibly important, but bad managers can destroy your company.

How To Be A Good Leader

Becoming a leader doesn't happen overnight, and is one of the hardest things to get right. It's something you need to continuously work at.

Let's go through [what makes a good leader](#), and then look at some helpful ways you can build up your leadership skills.

Qualities Of A Good Leader

As mentioned previously, managers matter. They have a huge impact on the bottom line and employee engagement.

One of the biggest problems that companies face is who they make manager. Gallup has found that companies fail to choose the candidate with the right talent for the job staggering 82% of the time⁴.

Most of the time, when someone gets promoted, it's because they've been at the job the longest, instead of being about actual talent.

Here's something they'll probably never teach you in business school: The single biggest decision you make in your job – bigger than all of the rest – is who you name manager. When you name the wrong person manager, nothing fixes that bad decision. Not compensation, not benefits – nothing.

Gallup CEO Jim Clifton

Great leaders often have similar characteristics that make them so likeable.

Luckily, most of these qualities can be learned and developed over time with practice. What it takes more than anything is a genuine commitment to actually wanting to be a good leader.

Once you have that goal in mind, you can work consciously on building up these skills.

Gallup's research found that great leaders have these five qualities:

1. They motivate employees with a compelling mission and vision.

2. They have the assertiveness to drive outcomes.
3. They create a culture of clear accountability.
4. They build relationships that create trust, open dialogue, and full transparency.
5. They make decisions based on productivity, not politics.

In Google's Project Oxygen, they found that great leaders had these eight qualities:

1. They're a good coach
2. They empower their team and don't micromanage
3. They express interest in their team members' success and personal well-being
4. They're productive and results-oriented
5. They're a good communicator
6. They help with career development
7. They have a clear vision and strategy for the team
8. They have key technical skills that help them advise the team

Both Gallup and Google found these traits by doing interviews and pouring through tons of internal data like [employee surveys](#).

You can use your own surveys and collect employee feedback to understand what qualities your employees value in their managers.

Many of these are soft-skills that can be learned and developed. Managers should start to learn much more about emotional intelligence.

Working on improving your emotional intelligence could be the key to creating those meaningful relationships with employees.

The Employee-Manager Relationship

It's key to build a good relationship with your employees and show them that you genuinely care for them as people.

As you continue to build trust and become closer with your employees, they'll start to respect you more and push themselves harder for your success.

Like building any relationship, the foundations come down to trust and respect.

You should focus on three elements when looking at where the relationship is now and how to make it better: manager knowledge, communication frequency, and relationship quality.

Manager Knowledge

How well do the employees know you? Both personally and professionally? Do they know any of your hobbies? Do you know any of theirs?

Part of building a relationship is getting to know each other. While not being too intrusive, it's a good idea to get to know your employees. It will show them that you care enough about them to ask.

Communication Frequency

How often are you communicating with your employees? It's important to be

communicating with them very frequently.

Give them feedback in real-time, meet with them for monthly one-on-ones and make sure you're offering yourself up for questions and help any time.

Relationship Quality

Even more important than how often you communicate is the quality of those interactions. Do employees always feel good after they spend time talking with you?

Are you conscious of how each interaction with your employees is affecting them?

As a leader, you want to focus on having high quality, frequent interactions with your employees to build a strong relationship over time.

A lot of this comes down to emotional intelligence and how mindful you are around your employees.

Evaluating those three key aspects of your relation with employees can obviously be hard without proper [employee engagement and leadership tools](#) like Officevibe. Keeping an eye on those elements and tracking their improvement over time is instrumental for any leader who want to improve.

Emotional Intelligence In Leadership

Simon Sinek, who became famous for his book Start With Why and his TED talk called How Great Leaders Inspire Action, wrote another book in 2014 called [Leaders Eat Last](#)

The reason it's called Leaders Eat Last comes from a time Sinek spent with the Marine Corps, studying what makes them so tight with each other that they are willing to tr

each with their lives.

Sinek believed that if he could figure out what it was that made them so close, those lessons could be transferred to other leaders, outside of the military.

Lt. Gen. George Flynn told Sinek to go into any Marine Corps mess hall and watch how the marines line up to get their food.

The most junior eat first, followed in rank order, with the leaders eating last. This isn't a rule, they simply do this because in the Marines, they believe that the responsibility of a leader is to put others' needs above their own.

Having happy, engaged employees mostly comes down to treating them with respect.

In order to be able to treat your employees with respect, you need to be able to understand them, what they're going through, and what's really on their minds.

[The best leaders](#) not only care for their employees professionally, but personally as well. It's also been proven to be good for business.

A study conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership⁵ found that empathy is positively related to job performance.

The study found that managers who show more empathy toward employees are viewed as better performers.

The good news is that research shows⁶ that empathy can be learned.

So how do we build empathy?

We build it as a habit and get better at it over time. Here are a few things you can do to be more empathetic.

Listen Carefully

In any conversation that you're in, force yourself to slow down and take the time to listen.

Why are they choosing those words? Is there anything noticeable about their tone or of voice?

Look into their eyes and pay attention to what they're saying. Instead of firing back a response, you can either pause to let them continue, or ask a follow up question to get more out of them.

Read Literature

A 2013 study⁷ in the journal *Science* found that reading literature improves a skill called “theory of mind”, which is the ability to know what others think, intend, believe, or want.

Watch Others

The next time you're stuck in traffic or waiting for the bus, look at the people around you and imagine what they're going through. Over time, this will help you build up your empathy.

Work On Non-Verbal Cues

When someone is talking to you, try to notice how you're reacting.

Are you sitting there emotionless? Are you moving your eyes a lot? Are you fidgeting? Look out for these things more and more, and practice how you interact with others.

Being a more [empathetic leader](#) and being more emotionally aware in general will make the interactions between you and your employees easier.

As you build up your relationship with employees, things like performance management and feedback start to become better.

Improving Your Communication Skills

The key to communication is trust.

You need to build trust with your employees, and you need to be open, honest, and straightforward with them.

There are two important aspects to improving your communication skills

- Words/tone
- Body language

Words/Tone

What words you use and the tone in your speech can have a huge effect on how the message is received by your employees.

Picture this – one employee walks into a room and in an upbeat tone of voice you say “thanks for joining us.” Another employee walks into the room 20 minutes late and you say in a regular tone “thanks for joining us.”

Same words, different tone, totally different meaning.

You want to be calm and confident, you want to speak slowly and clearly, and you want to be careful about which words you choose to use or exclude.

Body Language

In Amy Cuddy’s powerful Ted talk called [Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are](#) she talks about how body language affects how you’re perceived.

She says:

Social scientists have spent a lot of time looking at the effects of our body language, or other people’s body language, on judgments.

And we make sweeping judgments and inferences from body language. And those judgments can predict really meaningful life outcomes like who we hire or promote, who we ask out on a date.

For example, Nalini Ambady, a researcher at Tufts University, shows that when people watch 30-second soundless clips of real physician-patient interactions, their judgments of the physician’s niceness predict whether or not that physician will be sued. So it doesn’t have to do so much with whether or not that physician was incompetent, but do we like that person and how they

interacted?

Even more dramatic, Alex Todorov at Princeton has shown us that judgments of political candidates' faces in just one second predict 70 percent of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial race outcomes, and even, let's go digital, emoticons used well in online negotiations can lead to you claim more value from that negotiation.

When giving feedback to employees, you want to appear like you care and that you're really listening to them.

Here are some things to keep in mind.

- Make and keep eye contact
- Lean in slightly (leaning away signals hostility)
- Don't cross your arms. Instead, bring your hands together towards your chest and touch your fingers together, or put your hands on your lap
- Talk with your hands – it can make you appear more credible
- Take notes – it will show others that you value what they're saying

How Great Leaders Give Feedback

Giving feedback to your employees, whether through formal performance reviews or informal chats, is the key to helping employees develop professionally.

Feedback is a hard thing to get right though, because of how sensitive we can be.

The truth is, [employees crave feedback](#), but not when it's delivered in a negative or hurtful way.

Let's go through some of the key points to remember when [giving feedback to employees](#), and then look at some sample questions you can ask to collect better feedback.

Don't Make It Personal

It's incredible how much psychology is involved in giving employee feedback. Employees can be very sensitive, so it's important to be compassionate when giving feedback.

When you give feedback, don't make it a personal attack. Focus on the behavior itself instead of the person.

For example, instead of saying "your work is no good" (personal attack), you can say "the presentation would probably have more of an effect if you used bolder font."

Be Specific

For feedback to have the biggest effect, make it as specific as possible. You don't want to be vague, because it will make it less likely that the behavior will change.

It also helps if you have specific recommendations on how to improve.

Don't Use The Feedback Sandwich

The “feedback sandwich” is the idea of sandwiching constructive feedback between two positives to make the constructive feedback less hurtful.

The only problem is, this doesn’t work.

The reason is because often the negative feedback is vague, and so deeply buried between the two positives that it goes unnoticed.

A much smarter idea is to be honest and straightforward.

Change Your Mindset

It’s important to approach feedback from a mindset of helping and coaching, rather than scolding.

If you change your mindset, it will help how you approach your delivery, and the feedback and followup will be much better.

And here are a few sample questions you can ask employees. The key is to discover how you can help them be better, and how you can make yourself more helpful to them.

1. How can I be a better leader?
2. What’s your biggest challenge right now?
3. What can we do to make you more successful?
4. Are there any projects you’d really like to work on if you were given the

opportunity?

5. Is there anything blocking you from getting your work done?
 6. What could we change about our team meetings to make them more effective?
 7. Is there any part of your job that you want more help or coaching?
 8. Are you happy working here?
 9. How do you feel your work/life balance is right now?
 10. What do you think we could do to improve your happiness (either at work or home)?
 11. How do you think the relationships between you and your co-workers could be improved?
 12. What is your favorite thing about working here?
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Most of these questions are about improving the day-to-day life of an employee and showing employees that you care about them and want them to be successful.

Leadership Styles

There are a few different leadership styles that you should be aware of. Your leadership style is how you're being perceived, and since perception is often reality, it's something you want to be mindful of.

The most common leadership styles are:

- Authoritarian
- Transactional
- Democratic
- Laissez-faire

Authoritarian

This is your typical top-down organization where decisions are made exclusively by those at the top. Their decisions shouldn't be questioned.

The biggest problem with this leadership style is that it creates a culture of fear, where employees are scared to voice their opinion or give feedback.

Transactional

This leadership style can be best described with the carrot-and-stick approach to leading employees.

This leader looks at the actions of employees as transactions. If you do X well, you'll get Y reward. There isn't much emotion involved in this leadership style, it's very transactional.

Democratic

Like any democracy, this leadership style shares the decision-making with employees and tries to bring as much equality to the workplace as possible.

Because of its inclusiveness, employees are generally more productive and happier at

work when leaders practice this.

The potential downsides are in situations where a clear decision needs to be made or an employee takes advantage of the kind nature of the leader. This is why hiring the right people is so important.

Laissez-faire

This is the most relaxed leadership style of them all, and gives complete control to employees over their decisions and what they work on.

This is the leadership style you'll find in organizational structures like [holacracy or self-managing teams](#). The secret to making this work is having an unusual amount of trust in your employees.

More and more, we're seeing leaders take on more emotional leadership styles, including employees in decision making and trying their hardest to be an "equal" to their employees.

Companies are realizing that an authoritative style, where the power remains at the top, simply doesn't work anymore.

Employees are smarter and more educated in today's world, and are looking for more of a "laissez-faire" style in a leader.

They want to be included and feel like they're part of the decision-making process. They need to feel like they belong and are respected if you want them to be fully engaged.

Leadership Mistakes To Look Out For

In Google's Project Oxygen referenced above, they also found three traits of lower performing managers. These are the things that Google now works with those managers to improve on and avoid in the future.

A Tough Or Sudden Transition

This happens when someone is promoted too quickly or without proper training

Shifting from employee to manager can often be hard and is one of the biggest challenges that a new manager will face.

How To Fix This

Take your time to adjust to this new role. Learn from others, and read as much as you can. Just being mindful that this is a big transition is important in overcoming it.

Lacking A Consistent Approach To Performance Management

There's a reason why [performance reviews have a bad reputation](#).

What happens often, likely due to a lack of time (or perceived lack of time) is managers will focus their attention on low performers.

Instead, managers should be giving attention to all of their employees and helping each one of them with career development.

How To Fix This

Consistent, frequent meetings like monthly one-on-ones are a great way to make sure you're giving enough attention to everyone. It might seem like a lot of time spent, but employee development is your most important job.

Not Enough Communication

Managers need to understand that employees look to them for guidance and support. A lack of communication only leads to confusion and time-wasted by employees.

How To Fix This

There is no such thing as too much communication. Take the extra time required to prepare summaries, presentations, well-crafted emails, etc.

Key Things To Focus On As A Leader

As a manager, it's tough to know where to focus your attention to get the best results.

There are [many challenges that you'll face as a manager](#), but if you have to pick only

four, you should really focus on the following elements.

Collect Feedback From Your Team

The idea is to constantly be communicating with the team and inviting their feedback, both on what you could be doing better and what the company could be doing better.

Find a way to both collect and act (quickly) on feedback. There are many employee feedback tools you can use to make the process easier for you and your employees.

The act of simply asking for their feedback is a sign that you care about them and value their opinion. Sometimes that alone is enough to [boost employee satisfaction](#).

The most important part of this is to remove any of the fear that employees might have and encourage them to speak up openly and honestly.

Have Regular One-On-Ones

One-on-one meetings with your team let you create that connection and build a stronger relationship with your team.

There's no better tool in your leadership toolbox than the one-on-one.

It lets you connect with each employee to ensure that everything is going okay and that issues are dealt with before they become too big.

Once a month, meet with each member of your team for a relatively informal discussion.

This is NOT a progress update. There are many other ways to keep up with the progress of team members, this is really just a discussion to make sure your employees are happy.

Set Clear Goals

Having clear goals that everyone can align themselves around is one of the most important aspects of employee satisfaction.

Lack of clarity, around job descriptions or goals is one of the biggest reasons for employees to be unhappy or even quit.

One of the more popular goal-setting frameworks is called Objectives and Key Results (OKR), because of how simple and measurable it is.

Using the OKR system, you set one high-level, vague objective like “be the thought leader in employee engagement” with two or three key results to help you hit the objective, like “speak at three conferences” and “publish four blog posts”.

This is a simple example, but shows how measurable the goals are. It’s very easy to tell if you hit your mark or not.

Learn A Lot

As a manager, you need to be constantly learning new things to help your team.

You should be learning things about emotional intelligence, how to deal with employees and their issues, all the way to technical knowledge to help answer questions your team might have.

Block off a decent amount of time on your calendar for some reading and learning to help you become a smarter, more well-rounded leader.

If you're looking for inspiration, you should start with these [10 books every leader should read](#).

Get A Mentor

There is so much untapped knowledge inside companies that needs to be better utilized.

Companies should set up mentor programs to pair up more senior employees with newer employees or top performing managers with lower performing managers.

Mentors can help mold you into a great leader.

If you can make these four things your main areas of focus you'll be a much better leader, your employees will respect and work harder for you.

Key Takeaways

Being a good leader takes time and patience, but if you work hard at it, you can have employees that are happy, healthy, and productive.

They'll enjoy coming to work and you'll create a culture that attracts and retains the

best talent.

Here are a few key takeaways for you to remember:

- Good leaders are incredibly important for employee engagement
 - Leadership skills can be learned
 - Set clear goals aligned with your company mission
 - Create an environment of honest and transparent communication
 - Give employees an anonymous voice and act on their concerns
 - Show your employees that you care for them
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