



Six Actions Every New Leader Should Take

Description

What skills do you feel new leaders need? That was a question I received in a conversation with master's degree in healthcare administration students from Queens University of Charlotte in Charlotte, NC. I have always been very involved with students in healthcare administration and I love having the opportunity to answer questions like these.

I served for years on the board of the Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA). It works to improve the delivery of health services through the education of healthcare administrators. Since leaving the board, I have stayed close to them. Executive Director Dan Gentry and I go way back. Via this relationship, I have offered to spend time with classes each year.

I am so grateful to be present virtually at a college and/or university each week. The faculty survey the students on what they would like to leave with at the end of the class and what questions they would like to have answered. The question regarding advice for someone new in leadership is an example. Here are some of my suggestions.

1. Start by surveying your team. Explain that you would appreciate feedback on the following questions: *What do you feel the department or unit does well? What are some areas that could be improved? What questions do you have? If you were me, what would you focus on these next several weeks and months?* This demonstrates the desire for input and creates the agenda to follow moving forward.

2. Every leader, new and experienced, must master benchmarking. A great way to be better is to get intentional about learning from others. I have found many leaders struggle in this area. It could be due to a lack of time, a lack of knowing who is getting better results, or maybe a fear of people learning that a leader does not know certain things. At my first teaching job, I had my classroom near Dan Madden, who was one of the best teachers ever. And you know what I did? Nothing. I never asked him for advice. I know he would have helped me. It was my own insecurity.

I have attended many organizations' leadership development sessions and cannot recall seeing much on how to benchmark others. It is important for organizations to create new leaders' groups. Not only does this help them not feel so alone, it provides regular opportunities for them to learn from each other. These are similar to the Accelerate Roundtables that Studer Community Institute holds in Pensacola, designed to give leaders a safe space to share their experiences and brainstorm solutions.

3. Reach out to your supervisor often. Bosses are busy. Do not take it personally if your boss is not having regular development sessions with you. Let your boss know you are committed to your own development. Ask them what you are doing well, what you can do better, and what suggestions for your development they have.

4. Assess yourself. At the Studer Community Institute, a skill assessment worksheet was developed. It provides a person the opportunity to assess themselves on a 1-10 scale on some fundamental skills leaders need. These range from hiring to process improvement. It also includes a section for rating how important each is. Sharing this with your supervisor leads to the development of a collaborative development plan.

5. Learn to manage up your team. Managing up means positioning those in your department in a positive light. One way to do this is to give your supervisor the names of people you want to recognize along with specific details on what they have done. It is a good way to let the boss know what is going on and provides an opportunity for them to recognize people. The employees will be appreciative.

6. Be forgiving and kind to yourself. Every leader will at times deal with customer issues and with staff who are not meeting expectations. There will be times when the external environment keeps tossing challenges at you. Leaders tend to filter out the positives and let in negatives. You are a human being, doing your best, learning along the way. Listen to the advice you give others. Be kind to yourself.

Being in leadership is rewarding, but it is tough. One could even wonder why someone puts themselves in such a position. Being a leader means more hours, more responsibility, more learning, more pressure, and at times taking some very difficult and painful actions.

So why do people take or seek leadership positions? My experience is that these people have in their DNA a desire to make life better for others and to help organizations and communities be better. Leadership provides that opportunity. Leaders need to feel good about their passion to be helpful and useful.

One final note: Whether you're a new leader, a more seasoned leader, or an employee at any level, take time this week to send a thank-you note to someone in leadership. Trust me, their mailbox is not overflowing with appreciation. It will mean a lot to them to know someone is grateful for the important work they do.

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