



The ABCs of Great Leadership: Adapt, Build, Coach



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We all want to have great leaders. Not to follow them, but to benefit from their experience, encouragement, and even their high expectations.

I must admit that I've been a mediocre leader at times in my career. Yet in more recent times, I've received glowing praise from team members I've led.

Leadership isn't about knowing it all, in my view. It's about continuing to learn — about yourself and the people you lead.

Great leadership qualities begin with knowing each person on your team beyond the surface-level experience and skills. So let's delve into those ABCs.

Adapt to Your Team Members

When you hire someone, you ask questions during the interview process to dig into their experience, decision-making capabilities, and problem-solving skills. But sometimes you move into a leadership position and your team is already hired. Asking questions about their motivations and experiences will give you the details you need to understand each person's talents, what shuts them down, and what energizes them.

Find a way to get them to tell stories about their likes and dislikes. Personal experiences in the past naturally are going to color the way we view our professional interactions going forward.

I've had team members who didn't want to talk about anything personal. When they needed time off for a parent's medical procedure, they didn't want to go into any details about how the parent was doing or how my team member felt about it. So I followed their lead.

I've also had team members who wanted to commiserate or laugh or brag about pets and children at the beginning of every meeting. That really helped me understand their joys and fears.

When you know a bit about what delights and disappoints an individual on your team, you can tailor your communication in a way that resonates with them personally.

Build Up Their Confidence and Skills

When you know more about the person you're working with, you can begin to build trust. You can do that by acknowledging the contributions they're making. Be specific and timely. Even if you feel their effort is less than ideal, you can influence them to try harder with some words of encouragement.

"Roy, I see you're already working on this, and I'd like to see more. Here's an example of where you can take it to the next level...."

You can ask them to think about strategies that will get them farther on that path, and then you can set the expectation for follow-up discussions in your next meeting. "Let me know how this new approach works on this next stage of the project, and we can discuss and adjust again as needed."

Coaching for Collaborative Growth

When you've built a foundation for communicating with trust, you'll find more openness to coaching. A great leader doesn't bully. A great leader challenges their team members while steadfastly offering support.

For example, one team member is adept at using your current content management system, and now you need to switch to a new one. You might say, "Chris, you really mastered our CMS and showed your colleagues how to use it during onboarding. I really appreciate that. And now we need to learn this new one together. Jasmine has experience with this tool and is going to be our point person as we go through training. Given your expertise with our current CMS, I'm confident you can help us figure out how to adapt and optimize our processes."

Coaching relationships work best when they're multidirectional. Make sure your team members have opportunities to guide and advise one another... and you. A colleague and I recently gave a presentation on peer coaching, and we used a LinkedIn Learning course as a reference. You can use a variety of stellar coaching resources (people and education) to support your team's growth.

We've heard the saying, "Each one, teach one." Teaching includes up, down, and all around. Ask your talented team members to teach you something new. This approach helps enhance competence and confidence throughout your organization.

Great Learning Fosters Great Leaders

Whether or not you have leadership in your official job description, I hope you recognize the qualities of a great leader in yourself and your colleagues.

The perfect leader doesn't exist. But if you have a learning mind-set, you'll keep growing on your journey as a great leader.

Now, please excuse me while I go reflect on some of my own recent lessons learned. I hope you'll share some of yours. Wishing you all a great week!

