

Seven Suggestions for Developing your leadership

Leadership is a process of engaging other people to join together towards a shared purpose. There are as many definitions of leadership as there are writers, psychologists and consultants. The unhelpful view that only a few can lead is fast becoming obsolete as there is growing recognition that leadership can come from many places and not just from the top. If you need to bring others with you to achieve something, then you need to develop leadership.

1 Be yourself

Forget the idea of 'playing' a leadership 'role'. Nothing alienates people more quickly. There are things that you will need to do as a leader that you would not usually choose to do, but you can still stay true to yourself while you do them. Say when you don't know the answer, admit when you feel uncomfortable and share your own aspirations and values with others. Everyone likes working with a leader who is consistent, honest and open. You can only be these things by being yourself.

2 Inspire rather than motivate

Traditional concepts of motivation involving carrots and sticks have limited usefulness in academia. Essentially you need people to be inspired to achieve their best in teaching and research. The truth is that inspiration comes more often from within than from another person. So your role in this is not to give inspirational speeches but to support others to access their own inspiration. Help people to find where their natural energy, curiosity and passion lie and work together to align this with projects that will be productive and fulfilling for everyone concerned. Ask questions like "*what ideas are you finding particularly energising now?*" and be open to what comes.

3 Lead and Follow

Effective leadership requires that you respond to each unique situation that presents itself. Sometimes you will lead the dance, being clear and confident about the direction and which moves to make. At other times, when someone else is fired with inspiration, have the courage to follow. Allow the brilliance of others to shine, and support them to lead. True creativity moves in cycles and no one person can be inspired all the time. Dance the dance of leadership.

4 Keep learning

Your curiosity and powers of enquiry have made you a successful academic. To be a successful leader requires you to become a subject for your own study! Developing greater self awareness will illuminate how others see and respond to you. Tools like the [MBTI](#), a questionnaire that you complete to indicate your personality preferences, and [360° feedback](#), a questionnaire that your colleagues complete to indicate your strengths and weaknesses, can provide insight for your reflection. So can asking others for their feedback and ideas. Treat your leadership role as a work-in-progress and stay open to learning from people, books, [TED videos](#) and yourself. Contact Staff Development if you are interested in either of the tools mentioned.

5 Be available

Some people will advise you to leave your door open all the time, others will counsel you to shut it. Do whatever works for you and allows you to genuinely engage with and listen to people. Learn not to frown when you are concentrating on what someone is saying to you. Set aside time to talk to people and make sure everyone knows that you are available when problems come up. Avoid the temptation to become 'presidential' in your leadership style – elevating yourself beyond the 'trifles' of everyday life and disconnecting from what is really going on. Stay present.

6 Build a team around you

Great leaders focus on doing what they are good at and gather people around them who can excel at the other things. You may not have the resources for a conventional support team, so think about building a virtual team that draws on the professional services of [Research and Enterprise Development](#), the [Education Support Unit](#), your [Human Resources Manager](#) and your [Finance Team](#). Build relationships with individuals so that they can understand how best to support you. Get to know what your colleagues enjoy doing – it's amazing how other people love the jobs we loathe!

7 Don't get ground down

You will be a source of energy for others and hopefully you will be energised by working with colleagues when they are inspired and creative. But there will always be periods of drudgery, of form-filling, trouble-shooting and rumbling problems. At these times make time for the things that give you energy. These include sleep and good food and whatever brings joy into your life, whether it's family, friends, the outdoors, baking, cricket or books. There needs to be a flow of energy coming in as well as going out. Ditch any guilt you have about putting your needs first. You can't help anyone else if you are depleted and depressed.

"A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves." Lao Tzu