

6 team leadership strategies that work

WORKPLACE

LEADERSHIP

01 Feb 2020



Just how much has the role of the traditional team leader changed? Not as much as you might think...



By GLENN CULLEN

No leader is perfect, and being able to consider your own shortcomings will help you perform better in managing your team.

In an era of [open-plan offices](#), flat organisational structures and hack days for staff to explore new ways of doing business, just how much has the role of the traditional team leader changed?

Not as much as you might think, says leading executive coach Stacey Ashley FCPA.

"The attributes that make a leader great haven't changed, but the conversation has," she says. "Vulnerability, heart-centred leadership and using your intuition are still key. Maybe in years gone by, in the 'command and control' era, they may not have been talked about."

Ashley and leadership trainer Corrinne Armour agree leaders should give more weight to listening and understanding the motivations of others. Here are six more of their tips for leaders wanting to get the most out of their team.

1. Know your purpose, know your people

Have clearly defined goals that your team can buy into. Then, take some time to get to know your team members.

Armour has had many conversations with managers who have told her they've spent six months trying to work people out.

They may have entered the role thinking people are all the same, or that there is just no time to have a coffee or lunch with someone.

Get to know the people in your team first and find out what motivates them. Then you will all work more effectively.

CPA Library resource: [Leaders who ask – building fearless cultures by telling less and asking more.](#) (eBook). [Request now.](#)

2. I do have enough time

Too busy? Not enough strategic thinking time? Armour sees this as an excuse, saying it comes from poor decision-making, and being reactive rather than proactive.

You might be doing too much. She suggests narrowing your focus on where you can make the most impact in your "zone of genius", and working with your team so they can do the same. Make clear decisions about what is important and act on them.

A [Harvard Business Review](#) study of 27 top CEOs found that the more time they spent on their agendas, the more comfortable they felt with the management of their time.

3. Be self-aware

You should be able to analyse yourself thoroughly before turning the spotlight onto others. The first thing you have to do is lead yourself before you can contemplate leading anyone else, Ashley says.

What motivates you? What are your goals? What are your values? Can you pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses?

No leader is perfect, but being able to pinpoint your shortcomings can actually help you and, ultimately, your team.

"Have the awareness to know if there is a gap in your capabilities and how you want to fill that," Armour says. "Ask yourself, is it something you want to develop yourself, or can you bring in someone to complement you?"

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4. Ask questions – including the hard ones

Contemporary leaders need to understand that they aren't the ones with all the answers, but they're the ones with all the questions, says Armour, whose most recent book, *Leaders Who Ask – Building Fearless Cultures by Telling Less and Asking More*, tackles that very subject.

Employees may do what they are told to, but when they devise their own answers to a problem, this takes their engagement to a new level.

“Teach your employees about the mistakes you made and give them those leadership skills. Some people will feel threatened by that, but real leaders won't.” Stacey Ashley FCPA

“When I answer a question with insight, different parts of my brain are involved,” Armour says. “If I have resolved something myself, I am emotionally attached to it and much more committed to remember it and apply it in future. Why tell people when you can ask? It leads to accountability and enthusiasm.”

That questioning extends to harder ones about expectations and issues such as non-performance in a team. Armour says real leaders must be courageous and not innately fear conflict. Conversations can lead to discovery and pathways forward.

5. Continue learning and pass on skills

Always learn, so you have more to offer, says Ashley. How are the people around you going to learn and develop otherwise? Also, grow your future leaders. Do yourself out of a job if need be, and do something else yourself.

“Teach your employees about the mistakes you made, and give them those leadership skills. Some people will feel threatened by that, but real leaders won't; they'll be able to let that go,” she says.

6. Bad examples can be good

Good leaders can leave an indelible mark on the teams they manage; unfortunately, so can bad ones. After analysing data from 25,000 employees across the world in 2018, employee engagement analytics firm **TINYpulse** found that 40 per cent of employees who don't rate their supervisor's performance highly had interviewed for a new job in the three months before that.

Armour says it can be useful to draw on negative experiences to consider specific behaviours worth avoiding when in a management role.

“I can think of one leader I worked closely with, who I thought was a poor leader and wasn't equipped to be in the role that person was in,” she says.

“I learned a lot from that – what I'm not going to do when I am at that level: not listening, interrupting or talking over people, not respecting the expertise of others in significant roles and belittling people – perhaps not deliberately, but through their own lack of confidence.”

The net result of such sustained behaviour results in unengaged employees, those thinking about leaving, or people who simply move on.

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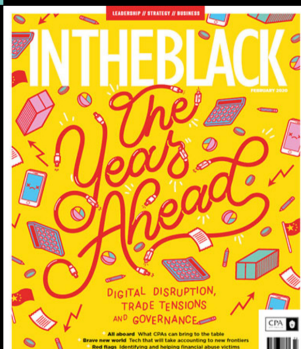


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