

Leading by example

As an executive, it's your responsibility to get the most out of your employees. Your leadership style will have a significant impact on their motivation to produce. Leading by example is one way to accomplish this, and it means more than simply walking the talk. It also includes such ideas as integrity, taking action, and following through. If, for example, you introduce a new set of workplace rules, not only do you need to follow them yourself, but also ensure that they are enforced. If not, you send a very clear message that you're not worth listening to.

Of course, you don't need to create a set of rigid rules to be an effective leader. In fact, the fewer you have, the more weight they will carry, and the more likely your employees will remember them. However, any type of rule, whether explicit or implied, can demonstrate your executive leadership style. Even a minor infraction on your part can lead your employees to seeking guidance elsewhere. In other words, as a leader, you need to be the best you can be at all times. When you do make a mistake, admit it rather than make excuses, and you will gain the trust and respect of your team.

Leadership involves much more than laying down the law and expecting people to follow. While this approach may have worked in the past, it is not the way of today's workforce, and should you choose this route, you will likely lose good people. How then, do you lead effectively and by example?

Take the time to listen to your employees and get to know them. If you want your employees to trust and respect you, then extend these courtesies to your staff. The added benefit is that, in an executive position, you simply cannot know everything that is going on throughout the company. Your employees, on the other hand, may have their fingers on the pulse of the business—or certain aspects of the business—that you should know about. Your staff will also (ideally) include a wide range of talents. This knowledge and talent combines to provide you with an effective business strategy if you let it. Listen to your employees, use their strengths, and observe the benefits.

Moreover, do ensure that you walk your talk. It sounds obvious, but too often executives forget to follow-through on this. It's easy to become caught up in deadlines and other urgent business, and it can be tempting to bend the rules for convenience; however, each time you do this, you give your staff another reason not to trust you as a leader, and this can quickly lead to company-wide division.

The benefits you will reap by acting in a manner you expect of your employees are well worth it. If you lead from on high, shut away in an office, or cut-off through your actions and attitude, you risk being viewed as someone cold and distant. This puts you, as an executive, at a distinct disadvantage, as potential problems will not

reach your ears. However, if you lead with an attitude and actions that you expect of your team, you foster a company culture of working together and reaching a common goal. If the executive can say hello to everyone, for example, so too can the rest of the staff.

Bear in mind that actions speak louder than words. You can develop a fabulous mis-

sion statement, but it means nothing if there are no actions to make it happen. Too often, executives or others in leadership fall into the trap of talking about great ideas, but without the follow-up, they're just empty words.

Effective leadership means learning how to prioritize and using people to set the right course of action. Throughout your executive

career, you've likely developed the ability to prioritize quite well; however, if you have not yet learned to delegate effectively, now is the time. As mentioned earlier, if you have a talented staff to choose from, you can easily choose the best people for the job and implement a variety of plans. Moving beyond the talk and into the action in this manner speaks louder than words ever could—it shows, in clear terms, the trust you place in your team.



Finally, approach your leadership style with a bit of common sense. Be courteous to everyone you encounter and in all situations, including those where you find yourself having to reprimand or discipline employees.

It's only natural that your staff will want to work hard for you if they respect you, but you have to give them a good reason.

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