

# Twelve precepts of leadership

Here are twelve precepts of leadership which we find are the most *useful*:

## Make the other person more important than you

One of our starting points in discussing leadership is *Serve to lead*, which is the motto of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. What this is saying is: "if you, Mr or Ms Trainee Officer, expect to lead that squad of soldiers, you had better be in service to them first".

This raises issues for many British people who equate service with servitude and servility. Yet it is something else completely. Being in service is an approach, it isn't a value judgement, and it's an approach which turns out to be very useful if you want to lead someone. Putting oneself in a position of servility is the thin end of a very nasty wedge whose thick end is a victim/abuser relationship.

*Serve to lead* is a good motto. Arguably it is a little too concise, though, and instead we use the precept *Make the other person more important than you* which we learnt from **Chuck Spezzano**. This precept is deceptively simple: it couldn't possibly have any real effect. But try it.

For 24 hours, make everyone you meet, not just the people at work, but everyone (and not just the ones you select, but *everyone*), more important than you. You do this by using this precept to continually inform the question "what is the most useful thing I can do [or say] now which makes them more important than me?" and you then do, or say, that thing.

## Deal with the world as it is, not as you would like it to be

This might be the ultimate precept in terms of its simplicity and obviousness, yet it can be the hardest to implement (but that's **Zen proverbs** for you). For our awareness and understanding of the world is entirely mediated by ourselves: our beliefs and thoughts, our emotions and feelings, our capacities to perceive and understand, our judgments, projections, and the rest.

Some people believe that the world is only what they can perceive. *eiw* draws away from this extreme view because it does not allow us (or anyone) to make any generalisations from what we perceive others' perceptions of the world to be. We assume there is a world out there which is neutral and unaffected by us.

If one has rigid views on how people should behave, how we should be treated and so on, we are bound to be disappointed. The world may not agree. It is as it is, and the most useful approach to it is to seek to understand it and act accordingly.

## Be the change you want to see in the world

This well known saying attributed to **Mahatma Gandhi** encapsulates one of the most important ways of being. We cannot expect others to do something, if we aren't prepared to do it ourselves. This applies as equally to the international renouncing of nuclear weapons as it does to our work relationships.

What we see is missing is what we are called to give.

If something needs to be done, it is useful—it improves the general good—if we take responsibility for doing it ourselves. We may not necessarily be able to carry out the action, in which case we need to find someone who can. This is a great principle for improving teamwork.

## Seek to understand the other person

Many people assume that other people think and feel just like they do—or more or less like they do—without stopping to consider that that might not be the case.

How we see another person is largely dependent on the intention we set for our relationship with them, and often this is done unconsciously. Try, instead, to set the intention consciously, since this is the level at which we can influence the relationship most easily. We can choose to see any relationship as a vehicle for learning, growth and mutual success. With this attitude, we will naturally want to understand the other person, being curious as to what there is for us to learn.

Set your intention not only to see the world from their shoes, but also to see it as they do from their shoes. Use models to develop your understanding of the differences between people, and between them and you. For example, Jung's Psychological Types describes different ways people process information.

Where there is misunderstanding there is distance. Without a true understanding of those around us and what is really going on for them, we are unable to change the situation we are in.

## Put your trust in the other person

Trust others with what is on your mind.

To communicate successfully and form strong working relationships, you must be willing to be completely honest with people and allow them to be honest with you.

If we withhold communicating our deepest thoughts about a person or situation, that can be experienced as a form of attack that doesn't allow for resolution.

In practice, this level of honesty may raise fears of offending people and damaging relationships, or of hearing less than complimentary views about ourselves. However, if our communication is sensitive, non-judgmental and aimed at genuinely helping the other person, it will always enhance the relationship.\*

## Give up all judgment

When we judge someone we apply a label to them that it is virtually impossible for them to remove. If we judge someone to be a poor manager then we will interpret everything they do in the light of that belief. Our judgments are often ill informed—or at least under-informed—and we naturally fill in the gaps in the data we have using our judgments and beliefs to guide us. Thus, in judgment, we do not allow people to grow and change.

Judgment keeps us separate from those we judge. In seeing them as wrong, we lose the learning opportunity and the creative opportunity that the relationship offers.

Judgment starts power struggles. If we were to be totally free of judgments then we would respond to those around us with compassion. We would see those behaviours or characteristics that can give rise to judgment simply as a call to help the other person. This would naturally lead to greater bonding and cohesiveness in our relationships.†

## Seek consensus

Consensus and compromise are not the same. In compromise, some people are always left feeling they have lost, however subconsciously. Each party gives up some of their position. In consensus all the elements are valued and the win/win is created. In consensus the answer may be entirely different to anyone's starting point or it may contain elements of them. In consensus, every one wins.

Keep communicating until there is resolution. This is achieved through continuing to communicate openly, honestly and without blame.

Of course, consensus can appear to be harder to reach than compromise, but that is always because some or all people are invested in their need to be right and find it difficult to let go of their positions. Consensus is often easy to define provided that people keep in mind what is in the best interests of the venture, of the team, of the other person.

## Let go of the need to be right

You don't have to be right—be open to the possibility that you have something to learn from others. This will make you more receptive to their communication.

Insisting on being right means we lose the opportunity for learning or change, and we risk alienating the people around us. We don't have to give in or give up, we just need to be willing to listen and learn from people around us.\*

It is an unfortunate aspect of our work culture that "being right" is seen as a good thing. It is worth fighting this attitude that sticking to your guns—despite all the evidence that a contrary position would be more helpful—is a sign of leadership when it is precisely the opposite. Of course, we are not advocating being wrong, we are simply suggesting that it will be helpful to you and your colleagues to let go of any *attachment* to being right, any *need* to be right.

## Choose without being attached to the outcome

When we have an attachment to a outcome, that attachment is communicated to others, however subconsciously. They feel let down—not included. We are not applying criteria to the choice which include the needs of others; instead we are making it about what we want.

In the same way that an attachment to being right makes it about ourselves – and in the same way that giving with an expectation that we will get something back makes it about ourselves – so, if we have an attachment to the outcome of a decision, we risk not making the decision that is in the best interests of the enterprise.

## Blame no one, not even yourself

Blame is a sure-fire way to end effective communication because it makes the other person feel they have failed. They will either fight back, withdraw from you, or become passively aggressive.

Always aim for no-fault communication, where everybody can feel that they have been included, listened to and acknowledged. Try not to sit in judgment. Realise we tend to blame others to take the heat off ourselves.\*

Blaming someone makes us want to be better than them and places us in judgment over them. This is unhelpful.

Of course people are responsible for their actions, and are accountable for them. Expressing things in terms of who is responsible, and how can they discharge that responsibility successfully, permits an adult to adult discussion to be had and this leads to progress.

## Feel the fear, and do it anyway

In this wellknown saying, **Susan Jeffers** observes that it is the fear of doing something that is the problem, not the doing of it. One of her main points is that the fear is largely a learnt behavioural response to the situation, not a psychological issue.

emotional intelligence at work suggests view the fear as being apprehension at moving out of our comfort zone. But outside our comfort zone is the 'stretch zone': a place where we can actively develop and mature as we tackle realistic challenges. This is not a place of stress, it is a place of adrenalin, maybe, and of some constructive tension, maybe. But it is a place where the more times we visit it, the more comfortable we are in it and, before we know it, our comfort zone has extended into that area, pushing the stretch zone further back.

Of course, once one has felt the fear and done it anyway, there is just something else we have to feel the fear of, in order to do that. And so on. *C'est la vie*.

## Be present

If we maintain a distance from others, any communication will feel to them as an attack, and they will respond as if they have been attacked. It is essential to close the distance between ourselves and others so our communication can be effective. Once we have had the courage to close the distance then we can say anything to the other person and they, not being in reaction, will typically respond in a more positive manner.

By "closing the distance" what is meant is to really engage with the other person as a human being, to focus on them with compassion and understanding, to be genuinely interested in them and how they are doing. †

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*Acknowledgments to Susan Jeffers. Acknowledgments to Chuck Spezzano and Psychology of Vision for teaching us many of the otherwise unacknowledged precepts.*