



Leadership

By Chris Cruger

5 Traits

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Leaders
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Many of us think of leadership and management as being synonymous, but they really are not.

Moreover, leaders and managers potentially possess very different skill sets. While management and leadership often have overlapping functions, they should not be used interchangeably.

Peter Drucker said, “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” A very subtle, yet profound difference. The good news, bad news – You do not necessarily need management skills to lead, and vice versa, you do not need leadership skills to manage. What you do need is a clear direction and plan to execute on.

Management is the how and when, while leadership is the what and why. Now, the interesting thing about these two functions is that they play a role in every organization. Whether you are a team of two or have 200 employees in your organization, you need leadership, management, and proper execution to succeed in the funeral and cemetery profession today. The margin for error is getting smaller and smaller.

For many of you, you are required to wear the hat of leader and manager. The challenge is knowing which one to wear and when. In this day and age, we need leaders who can guide us through this post-pandemic world. The skills required by a leader today are different than they were 20 years ago, and even perhaps different than they were two years ago. Leadership requires us to be able to navigate through some very difficult challenges, such as conflicts and pandemics.

While certain traits can be developed, each person must develop their own style. By developing your own personal leadership style through consistent self-reflection, authentic communication and continuous feedback, you have the ability to chart the path of your organization. No one person is expected to have all the answers, but through preparation you can build the proper framework for success. The more traits and qualities you employ as a leader, the better your chance of success.

In your role as leader, there are a few areas of focus for immediate results:

1. Objectivity

In my opinion, one of the strongest traits you can develop as a leader is that of objectivity. If you are able to see a situation from all sides and remove as much emotion from the equation as possible, you will be operating from a position of power. We have become far too fueled by emotion and prone to react rather than respond. If you can harness your objectivity and emotion, you will be far ahead of the game.

Objectivity and balance are key to long-term success. As a leader, you are balancing a mountain of emotions each day – yours, your staff, and those of all the families you serve. In our profession, this is an area where we are particularly vulnerable. You need to have an extraordinary level of emotional intelligence to navigate funeral service. Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, understand and manage emotions.

2. Confidence

Confidence is the foundation of good leadership. You can teach a leader to: be a good problem solver; be more decisive; be a better communicator; how to run a service or an arrangement; and many other fundamentals of funeral service. Yet without first believing in yourself, true leadership will only exist in title or figurehead. The first person that needs to be convinced is you – meaning that if you do not have the self-confidence to succeed, we must start there.

People like to work with and admire leaders who are confident, yet humble. There is a natural tendency to trust people more when they appear confident. For most of us, dealing with confident people helps assure us that the person is also competent. So generally, when a leader exhibits confidence, it makes it easier to trust a leader, and people want to work with a leader they trust.

Leaders must display a strong awareness of themselves, their organizations and their mission. An easy way to build confidence is to know what is going on. Get involved and lead by example – know what is going on in your community, in the profession, and be willing to be objective. Knowing what is going on does not mean being a “know-it-all.” Humility in knowledge and awareness goes a very long way. A big part of leadership is just showing up.

3. Communication Skills

Let’s face it, communication skills are at the center of importance for most leaders. There are many things you can get away with, but poor communication is a sure recipe for disaster. Communication is critical because it is the bridge between the voice of the consumer and the way an organization meets

those needs. Whether it is through a team meeting, e-mail or a phone call, communication should never stop.

Here are a few short things to think about on communication:

Clear and direct communication is essential. Don't send instructions to your team in jargon or using unclear language. Be transparent and concise and make sure you are providing clear direction.

It saves time. Even if you only have a few minutes to elaborate on a point, that clarity and correction can be critical. If you communicate

too often, we assume that everybody is doing the things they do for the same reasons you are. The truth is, they are not. If you want people to do things a certain way, you need to communicate it.

Communicating empathetically affects engagement. Employees who feel empowered are typically employees who care. Employees who feel both valued and empowered to do their jobs well strengthens their emotional connection with the community, and your company.

Demonstrating transparency improves trust. Open, honest commu-

Remember how lost that made you feel? You need to be able to make those difficult decisions in any situation. It will help build rapport with your team and provide the guiding light that the organization needs. Without decisions being made, productivity stalls. When productivity stalls, so does morale.

If you struggle with decision making, ask for help. Ask an adviser or speak to your team. One way or the other, you must face the challenges (and opportunities) in front of you.

5. Positivity

What some might refer to as inspire, I suggest can be simplified into positivity. Be positive; look on the bright side; be "a glass is half-full kind of person;" be that person that looks for the solution rather than the problem. You must be the person that turns things around, finds the solution and sets the example for how things are done.

As a leader, the tone you set through your actions, words and the little things is what will radiate through the organization. We all know those people that are always negative, always complaining and nothing is ever right. We do not want to be around them because they bring everybody down. That is not the trait of a leader. Be positive and build your teams morale and help them prosper in their journey.

The important thing about leadership today is to know that you do not have to have all the answers. There are all sorts of resources out there to support your success. The important thing is that you need to be able to inspire for the future. You need to provide a goal and motivate others with that sense of purpose. You need empathy and creativity to inspire, support and encourage your team members. Equally important is the ability to make decisions and put your organization on the right path. •

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correctly the first time, you can save everybody a whole lot of time and frustration. This is one of my shortcomings that I work on constantly!

Send the right message. Taking the time to communicate the message to your team has a tremendous ability to motivate the troops. It can spark creativity and a connection that will foster organizational growth.

Leading means ensuring that your team knows what they are doing, how they are doing it and why. All

nication fosters a culture of inclusivity and teamwork. This strengthens the loyalty and satisfaction of the most important client you have, your staff.

4. Decision-Making Skills

The ability to make difficult decisions is critical. The ability to face a tough decision and tackle it head-on is a simple differentiator between success and failure. I am sure each one of us can remember those managers who just could not make a decision.