

What Leaders Do

You can lead without a title.



by Linda Talley

WE CALL MANY PEOPLE *leaders*, but only 1 percent of them could be classified as *great leaders*. We throw around the title of *leader* because someone reaches a certain level, and so we think they are *leading* the team or organization. This may or may not be true. Simply giving people a title or position does not make them a leader.

Think of how many *servant leaders* we have who generate more respect, value, self-confidence than any titled leader. Those people, *with or without title*, wanting to be in the top 1 percent develop themselves as leaders. They don't wait for a title—they take charge of themselves now. Here's what they do.

1. *They develop themselves from the inside out.* They don't depend on external sources for a title or position to develop relationships with people. They move outside of the box, go the extra mile, and continuously innovate and create. They read the trade journals and best books. This keeps them fresh, informed, full of new ideas. Who wants a leader that has stopped learning or someone who is in a rut or become stale? Today's leader is always stepping outside the box and doing things differently.

2. *They differentiate themselves as leaders rather than commodities.* We see many *commodities* out there, but few authentic leaders. Leaders create a name for themselves in their niche. People know about them and call them. People like and trust those who differentiate themselves in their niche.

3. *They develop real skills over time instead of settling for short-term appearance of skill.* They become experts in their areas. Not only do they recognize their expertise, but others do too. They are called on for assistance in challenging situations and in growth phases.

4. *They think of their internal and external customers and do things for them at all times.* This doesn't mean doing the work for their internal customers or making decisions for external customers. They might walk around, talk to staff, and learn what motivates

them. Or they might learn critical information from their knowledge workers. Or they might cut out an article referring to a customer and send it to them.

5. *They make things happen—even if they have to do it themselves.* They're not afraid of getting their hands dirty. A credit card that was left, by mistake by a customer, was turned over to the owner of a restaurant. The next morning, the owner called the customer and told him that it was safe and in her possession. The card holder then said he'd come to pick it up. However, the restaurant owner said, "My courier service is already ready to deliver it to you. It's on its way." You could say, "Great customer service!" and you'd be right! It's also something that leaders *do* rather than *delegate* it to someone else. The restaurant owner connected with her patron on the emotional level—and probably has a customer for life.

6. *Leaders create!* Leaders create *visions* and *new standards* of relating with colleagues and customers. They train their service staff on customer services issues. Leaders model for employees the relationship that they want with their customers, strengthening the relationship the leader has with employees and customers! The size of the organization is no excuse for poor customer service! Leaders create new ways to communicate with staff and customers—ways that attract people to them so they can communicate with them regularly!

Create ways to stay in touch with your workers. Make it easy to talk to the boss and to management.

7. *Leaders take time to plan, think, and re-create.* In this hustle-bustle global market, if you're not taking time to plan, think, re-create, re-organize for customer service, efficiency and effectiveness, you're simply managing a process—not leading your people toward the future. Schedule and set aside time for re-creating. Take *one hour each week* to do this. True leaders are not afraid to be with themselves—to take long walks with recorder in hand, to create a quiet space, to set boundaries that enable this to happen.

By taking and mastering these steps, you move into your leadership role easily and effortlessly. And, amazingly, people around you will recognize you as a leader, even without the title! LE



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ACTION: Do the things that real leaders do.