

What Great Leaders Do

Know how they do it

By Robert Pater

Thank you to Taylor Mali for the inspiration for this article (See his TED Conference short presentation, “*What Teachers Make?*”)

Great leaders are special people. Almost magically, they change the world for the better. These results emanate from their design and actions, not luck or happenstance. Here’s how they do this:

They have a personal code they work and live by (more than just lip service.)

They turn small things into big things. They plant seeds and nurture growth.

They lead from the front while having others’ backs. They exemplify in their actions what they’re wishing to see in others. They look at their part first, rather than making excuses. They go out of their way to take responsibility for their own actions.

They invite, rather than try to force change. And continue to invite in even those who previously opted out.

They involve and engage everyone in some way. They work with and through others, rather than above them or alone.

They give hope when all seems dim. They remind people they’re better than just allowing themselves to collapse into a black hole of fear.

They help others find best ways out when they feel utterly trapped between a rock and vise-squeezing wall.

They inspire people to go beyond their own self-imposed ceilings.

They help people attain much more from themselves than they previously thought possible.

They ignite the passion that exists, sometimes well-hidden, in all people. They harness others’ personal interests towards common themes that bring them together to accomplish major results.

They communicate high expectations of improvement for everyone, beginning with themselves.

They scope small indicators at an early level so are rarely taken off guard.

They befriend changes they can’t control, even unexpected or unwanted change, turning these into best possible outcomes. They accept that change is always occurring and welcome this.

They are enthusiastic and excited about helping others learn and improve.

They help people work together, even those who tend by nature to be lone wolves.

They publicly spread credit to others for actions and ideas – even when the leader originally proposed these.

They thank people for their efforts and help them feel appreciated and significant.

They show sincere concern for the well-being and safety of others.

They are continually working on getting better, not basking in others’ praise.

They prepare and practice, prepare and practice, putting the odds in their favor of attaining desired results.

They persuade strongly, appealing to others personal interests, not taking a quick “no” too easily.

They make things happen, even when others are bogged down in complaining or blaming.

They can work effectively even with those who are very different

than them.

They look for and see connections between communications and actions.

They understand that what they don’t do and don’t say can transmit even stronger messages than what they do.

They hold up an honestly reflective mirror to help people look at and then throw out their weak same-old patterns, while maintaining their dignity and self-respect.

They make it OK, even desirable, to creatively disagree and to challenge ideas and suggestions without personally devaluing others. They spur people to think critically and for themselves.

They see the handwriting on the wall as well as potential branching routes down the main road.

They encourage courage and appropriate risk-taking to slough off ineffective always-been-done-that-way practices.

They culture by creating a surround system that supports change and high performance.

They balance protecting strong current practices with calling for going beyond the status quo.

They identify and root out mixed messages that paralyze or immobilize people into spending an inordinate amount of time covering their rears (rather than accomplishing breakthroughs.)

They help others learn to be *internally* motivated and self-directed, reducing dependency on external approval or intimidation.

They work with others’ strengths, to put their best foot forward and not expecting them to immediately be different than who they are. At the same time, they help others work on their own weaknesses, to reduce these as limitations.

They help people believe in themselves and in their innate power to improve, to overcome “insurmountable” obstacles.

They cultivate leadership skills in everyone and help them think of themselves as leaders, while understanding there are many types of leaders and different ways to lead.

They prefer to excite and entice rather than reflexively reproach and reject. But they also know when to detach from those that have consistently resisted self-honesty.

They don’t support dig-in-the-heels procrastination or excuses while, at the same time, they are patient with sincere learning efforts to improve.

They make a real difference in the lives of others and in the fate and fortunes of organizations.

They change the future for the better.

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