

Six steps you can take today to work toward a leadership role tomorrow

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OPINION

If you aspire to be a manager or supervisor, your success will depend significantly on making a critical mental shift from task management to people leadership. Let's be clear – the two are not the same. In fact, the skills that lead to accomplishment as a “doer” of tasks are the very ones that will cause you to fail as a “leader” of people. Because as a leader, your success no longer rests on just you; your success now depends on how well you can get things done through others.

While still delivering results as an individual contributor, there are things you can do today to position yourself as a future leader, in the eyes of those who can help get you there.

PUT YOUR HAND UP

Show initiative. A leader's job is

to get things done, but very rarely are you told how. Instead, the expectation is that you'll assess the situation strategically, then evaluate and act. So demonstrate early that you are capable and willing to step up and take charge. Look for opportunities for improvement in your job or work area.

Don't just identify problems, recommend solutions.

Offer to spearhead a project or facilitate a group assignment. When you put your hand up and then deliver, you'll establish that you can plan, direct, communicate, build consensus and follow through; all key skills for anyone in a leadership position.

BE OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

The most effective leaders listen to their critics because they are a valuable source of intelligence, both in terms of what works and what doesn't.

So don't just be open to feedback, seek it.

This will serve you well in two ways: First, it will give you access to information, some of which will increase your knowledge, which in turn makes for better decision-making. Second, it will help build better relationships with those you work with, which will further position you as a potential leader.

A leader needs to maintain a 360-degree view of the organization.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Speaking of building relationships, realize that astute leaders tune in to others' feelings and predispositions, and acknowledge different opinions from a variety of sources. Now (when you may not necessarily need it) is the time to seek out and establish a professional support system so that it is there when you really do

require it. No matter what your career aspirations, there is someone out there who's “been there and done that,” which means that you can learn from their successes and mistakes.

SHOW THAT YOU CARE

The best leaders are genuinely empathetic and compassionate. So take the time to get to know the people you work with. Not just professionally, but at a personal level. Learn about their families, their hobbies, their pets, their challenges. Because when you sincerely ask people about who they are, it shows that you care about them as human beings. If you're prone to absent-mindedness, there is nothing wrong in jotting down a few notes to jog your memory later.

SEE THE BIG PICTURE

A leader needs to maintain a 360-degree view of the organization. So deliberately stand back and take a helicopter view. Step away

from the needs of an individual department and try to look at things from the perspective of the entire company. When you appreciate that other departments all contribute to the company's overall success, you're showing your boss (and his boss) that you are interested in more than just your own responsibilities.

BECOME SOMEONE WORTHY OF BEING A ROLE MODEL

Good leaders are role models for others. If you see yourself in a position of formal leadership in the future, then start behaving in a way that makes others want to emulate you now. Be passionate about your work. Make thoughtful decisions that demonstrate that you are fair and considerate. Conduct yourself professionally and speak up when you see inappropriate behaviour, particularly if it is demeaning or harassing to others. Act ethically. Show compassion and kindness.

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