



Looking to become a leader: develop these skills

3 November 2025

Do you want to become a leader in your organisation, or another organisation perhaps? Maybe you are someone who has been earmarked for leadership or you are someone who is even being coached in leadership skills, because that is where you ultimately want to be. Like most things, being a great leader does require some experience and practice, however you can up your chances of being selected as a leader, and being a great leader, if you focus on the points below.

1. **Emotional Intelligence.** As a leader most of your time is going to be dealing with people. Not all of them will report to you. Some will be stakeholders and even external to the organisation. Some of them may be customers. Some of them could be community leaders and even politicians or other influential people. And your technical competence is not going to help you in these relationships. You need to know how to deal with people. As part of developing your emotional intelligence you need to be able to read people, understand where they are coming from, understand their concerns, be a good listener, and also understand and manage your own emotions. These you will develop from growing in emotional intelligence.
2. **Communication skills.** In general, in surveys, leaders do not get good ratings for their communication skills. Generally, we never communicate enough. Because we have thought through a matter many times, we tend to assume other people must know the matter well. They don't. You need to communicate a lot. You need to communicate in ways the audience will understand. Your message needs to resonate with your audience and be relevant. So many problems stem from miscommunication that later on takes up a lot of time to resolve. Get really good at communicating.
3. **Work on yourself.** You need to be confident, assertive, and be good at managing boundaries if you want to lead. If you are not assertive, then other stakeholders can walk all over you. You may end up wanting to keep everyone happy, and doing harm to your organisation. So be respectful and polite to others, but stand your ground and know what is the right thing for your organisation.
4. **Sharpen your decision-making skills.** The more decisions you make, the better you become at decision making. The more bad decisions you make and learn from, the better you get at decision making. But only if you reflect on and understand why you made a bad decision. If you lack the ability for self-insight and don't reflect on your actions and what worked and what did not work, you are definitely not cut out for leadership.

5. **Think globally and big picture.** Leaders need to understand how the whole organisation works. Staying knowledgeable about your functional area only doesn't work. You need to know the big picture. You need to know how each part of the organisation works together and why it is important it all works together, and what the impact is if one part fails.
6. **Take accountability.** Be known as someone who will take accountability. Do what you say you will do. If something goes wrong own it and fix it. Companies are not looking for perfect people to be leaders. There are no perfect people. They are looking for people who will do what they say they will do, and will be accountable for their actions and fix mistakes rather than try and find someone else to blame.
7. **Be open to and seek feedback.** People who are not open to feedback usually go nowhere fast in their career. People who actively seek out feedback, and then apply what they have learned from others, usually go places quite quickly. Unless you have been in the same job for years and you are not trying to do new things or things differently, you will not get everything you attempt right the first time. You do need feedback from others to learn. Especially if you want to learn quickly.

Leadership is about dealing with people mostly. Others usually are doing the technical tasks. You will lead people, you will manage people, you will need to engage with stakeholders, you will need to impress customers, you will need to keep the community happy, you will need to work with labour bodies, you will have suppliers you want to keep on board. In short, as one leader said to me a few years ago, you will spend your days dealing with people. Get very good at this. We have spoken about emotional intelligence and communication, but this is more than that. Get really, really good at dealing with people. It improves your capacity to implement a vision, get the performance results you want, and influence as you need to.

So how do you go about developing these skills? There are many ways. Typically people choose to go on training courses to develop these skills. You can certainly do that. But then you must put into practice what you have learned. Most people who attend a training course don't fully implement the learnings and so the course does not yield the value it could. You can find yourself a mentor who is a leader you admire. That way you can learn from someone who is already good at leadership and who can help you with the practical challenges that come along with leadership. This is leadership development from another angle to attending courses or classes, but it is a good one that helps you learn to deal with the stuff that occurs, that often trips up leaders, and doesn't get taught in courses.

You can also learn by doing. This means you volunteer for projects or positions where you do have to exercise leadership. The advantage of this is that often people are picked to be leaders in a company once the company can already see some leadership displayed. If you find work for yourself that requires you to be a leader and get some leadership experience, and if you do courses and get a great leader to mentor you, then you are well on your way to being able to make a success of a leadership role.