

LEADING LEADERS

Membership in Toastmasters has many benefits, one of them being learning leadership skills in a hands-on laboratory setting. What better way to learn leadership than to lead in a warm and supportive club environment?

As soon as we grow beyond the club level we are faced with a new challenge... leading leaders. It doesn't usually take us long to figure out that leading at an advanced level requires a new set of skills.

FOLLOWERSHIP BY CHOICE

Leaders will follow you because they choose to, not because they're told to. Leaders will follow you because they feel it's in their best interest to do so. Leaders will follow you because they trust you, and trust comes from developing a relationship with people. The best way to build these strong relationships is by having, and using, effective communication skills. Take an interest in your people and connect with them on a personal level and engage them on a leadership level.

LEADERS LISTEN

To engage your team in your vision or to get them to accept your ideas is not a matter of having eloquent speaking skills. Rather it will call on every ounce of talent you can muster to be a great listener. To feel important or to feel respected, one must feel listened to. We've heard many times the saying, "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This is all about listening, with your ears, your eyes and your heart. When leading leaders, you must listen first, and listen often.

INTEREST-BASED CONVERSATIONS

Leaders will lead their teams in ways that achieve the results of best interest. In other words, people will do what they believe is in their own best interest, in the team's best interest, and in the association's best interest. Getting these leaders to buy in to your vision and your plans means you need to have conversations that link what you want to what they want. Where possible, involve your leaders in generating options. If it's not possible to involve them at the strategic level, know that you must involve them at the tactical level. How they implement your vision will be entirely up to them once they're back on their own turf. Your job is to make them feel as though they control their own tactics and you'll face less resistance.

SAND AND STONE

When we share decisions and plans with non-leaders, we're used to answering questions based on a desire to understand. When we lead leaders, those questions often go beyond understanding, and are frequently intended to influence and challenge. At this stage of the game we must be aware that some of our decisions are set in stone, but others are written in sand. Be flexible when you lead leaders. Be willing to listen to others and be open to adjusting your plans based on the collective wisdom of the group. But know what's negotiable and what's not.

LEADERS WANT TO BE LED

No matter how high we go in any organization, someone leads us all. Good leaders are great followers, and they know what they expect from a leader worth following. As much as a collaborative leadership style has its benefits, followers at all levels want to be given direction. Sometimes, however, we have to convince our team to follow direction. Sometimes that means we have to share more of the rationale behind our decisions and show we put thought into how we came to our conclusions. People often refrain from doing this step because they don't feel they need to justify their decisions. That may be true, but if you want buy-in, you do have to explain it to them.

FAN THE FLAMES

In many volunteer, member-driven associations, a leadership role requires a great deal of time, energy and sometimes money. As senior leaders we must be skilled at keeping the flames of passion for the cause burning bright. People excel in leadership roles in our organization for intrinsic reasons and we must recognize, respect and reward those needs. Hope is a powerful intrinsic motivator and your job is to help them believe that the future is bright. That being said, people want to feel appreciated for their contributions. Keep in mind that people have different preferences for how that appreciation should be shown. Rest assured, everyone wants his or her efforts and hard work to be noticed.

CALM DURING THE STORM

Things will go wrong. People will fight. Mistakes will be made. Actions will backfire. When conflict arises among a group of leaders, follow Dr. Stephen Covey's advice to seek first to understand. Don't allow yourself to get sucked in to choosing sides. Remain calm. Keep the lines of communication open. Ask lots of questions. Remember that none of the stories are the whole truth, but they do represent the truth to that person. In times of conflict, people want to be heard and feel understood. Understanding is not the same as agreeing, and the best strategy to help people resolve issues is to have them clearly articulate the other person's position. Only when people fully understand each other are they capable of moving to the most effective resolution.

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