

Leadership is a journey, not a destination. We don't just wake up one day with a certificate that tells us we are now a qualified and competent leader.

In the words of author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek, being a great leader is like being a parent: 'You never know if you are good until much, much later.'

Great leaders treat their teams in the same way that parents treat their children. Great leaders:

- work to make themselves redundant
- generously share their knowledge and expertise to benefit the team
- know how to make the tough decisions
- accept that they will not always be liked
- accept and encourage failure to facilitate learning.

There are many models of leadership but they all share universal principles. In this module, we will examine some of them.

1. Leading a virtual team is the same as leading a team in the real world, just harder.

All the principles we will share below are as valid in the real world as they are in the virtual world. However, in the virtual we do not have all the other visual, subliminal or environmental cues that we have in the real world. When managing in the virtual world we, as leaders, need to pay more attention and be more present to be effective.

2. Maintain a clear definition and vision of your leadership principles.

You are already ahead of the pack as you have already defined your leadership principles in Module 3. You know the importance of defining the type of leader you want to be, as well as the behaviours that represent your principles.

It is important to continuously review and assess your values and principles – what worked then may not necessarily always work.

3. Leadership is a journey, not a destination.

Allow the time to develop your skills. It is not just about external learning but also internal learning. Constantly assess and reflect on your meetings and interactions with colleagues and team members. What went well? What would you change? Ask for constant feedback, but remember that feedback is a gift that sometimes must be re-gifted.

Leadership is also different for each individual. You can't be a great leader for everyone. You have to be a great leader for you while learning to adjust your style to motivate many. Great leadership is about finding, developing and then being consistent with your approach. Accept that you will never be the perfect leader and that it is critical to continue to hone your craft.

4. Always remember the five love languages of acknowledgement.

It is important to take the time to get to know your team, and to acknowledge them in the ways they need to be acknowledged. The concept of the five love languages is a simple but highly effective tool to help foster greater connections and relationships with team members.

In simple terms, this model suggests that we give and accept appreciation and acknowledgement in one of the following five ways.

- Gifts – bonuses/awards
- Acts of service – helping out, clearing obstacles
- Quality time – socialising with your team
- Touch – in a work context this could mean a smile, a look or a nod of encouragement in a meeting
- Kind words – acknowledging people and their contributions, whether spoken or written



5. Trust and be trustworthy.

Leaders need to trust their teams, and this is of even greater importance in the virtual world. They need to believe that their team can do the job and make good decisions. Good leaders also support their team members' decisions even if they are not exactly the ones they would make. It is important to let your team members fail at times, as this is an important part of how we all learn. Remember to use the Strategy, Talent, Effort model of accountability.

While leaders need to trust, team members need to be trustworthy. This means doing what you say you will do and being reliable. This does not mean that you always have to be right or perfect, but you do have to try.

6. Delegate and empower.

The ability to effectively delegate and empower comes from trust. Many leaders, especially those new to positions of authority, find it hard to delegate. It can often seem easier to do the work yourself than to take the time to teach someone else a new skill. But this is not good leadership. Lack of delegation and empowerment can result in demotivating and stifling your team. Ask yourself the question: would you like to work for you?

Additionally, new leaders often find it more comfortable to focus on the tasks that they are competent at and comfortable with. It is easier to devote your attention to areas of expertise, rather than focus on developing skills in your new role, where you are still on training wheels. You will never grow and develop as a leader if you stay where you are safe.

7. Set and keep a daily agenda.

While life and work can be chaotic and unpredictable, it is critical to spend some time prioritising to ensure that you focus on the most important tasks.

Daily rituals need to include:

- setting an agenda for yourself and making sure you have a regular routine that you follow
- allowing time to regularly check in with your team members either individually or as a collective
- creating a delineation between work and play – great leaders have a balanced life and allow themselves time to recharge.

8. Invest in your team.

Support your team members to develop and grow themselves. Encourage them to take some time to focus on their own needs. This might involve allowing time or a small amount of money for them to attend seminars or webinars, connecting them with an internal mentor, or providing external support such as a coach. Push them into special projects or challenge them to develop beyond where they are today. Investment does not always have to be monetary. Encourage them to work on themselves.

9. Be flexible

2020 has shown us that we can be adaptable and flexible when required. Literally overnight millions of employees managed to move from office buildings to home offices – who would have thought that change on this scale was possible? As we move beyond 2020, continue to think flexibly and adapt to the needs of the business, the industry and your team. The words 'that is not how we do it' should never be heard again!

10. Take the time to innovate, and constantly assess your performance.

Great leaders are constantly reviewing and assessing systems, processes, structures and people, looking for new ways of operating. Make time to review and reflect, make tough decisions, research other industries and organisations to understand what makes them successful, trust your team, simplify processes and get rid of any meetings that aren't necessary.

Encourage your team members to also suggest new ways of working. You might be surprised how many good ideas they have.