

How to Become a Great Leader

Some people might think that leaders are superhuman beings that don't get bogged down by everyday problems and stresses when in fact they often feel the weight of their responsibilities hugely. A leader's decisions, behaviours, and actions can all have an impact on an organisation and its people; for good or bad.

But how can you, as a leader manage stress, increase your awareness, boost your creativity and use your leadership skills to make a positive impact?

You can try becoming a mindful leader.

The habits of mindful leaders

They focus on one task at a time

Multitasking can mean that many jobs get started but not many get finished, and this can lead to overwhelm. Try focusing on one task at a time before moving onto something else. A good way to teach your mind to focus is to pay attention to your breathing when you feel your mind wandering. Do this for a minute, then go back to the task you were working on. Do this as often as you feel it's necessary, and this will help to increase your focus.

They work on becoming self-aware

To be a good leader, it's important to be aware of your emotions, and your strengths and weaknesses, as well as how other people respond in situations. Leaders who are self-aware are motivated by values and greater organisational goals rather than their own advancement. This can motivate others to work towards common goals.

They are optimistic

Good leaders are positive and optimistic, and will always focus on solutions, not problems. They don't focus on what could go wrong and avoid taking risks, they spot potential solutions and think about the possible rewards of taking a chance.

They pay attention when people talk to them

Mindful leaders are able to give their complete attention to whoever is talking to them instead of problem solving or thinking of a response while the other person is talking. If you don't pay attention, you can miss out on some great ideas and the chance to really connect with someone.

They make better decisions

Every decision you make will be informed by judgements and emotions formed out of your own experiences. But is a good decision made with the heart or the head? The answer is it should be made with both. When you take a step back and become aware that your decisions are based on assumptions or emotions, you have a better chance of making a good decision. Think about it; are you making the right decision are is your decision based on your emotional response to a situation? Being mindful can help you regulate your emotions and make decisions without judgement.

They empower employees

Mindful leaders give employees some autonomy to make decisions and they give them the chance to develop and shine. They reward good work and treat bad decisions or perceived failures as an opportunity to learn and grow. Good leaders know that when employees feel valued and trusted, they are far more motivated to do well.

They meditate regularly

Busy leaders often dismiss meditation and mindfulness because they believe that they don't have the time to make it a priority. But good leaders know that because they have more authority and responsibility, they are more vulnerable to stress, so they use meditation and mindfulness to maintain balance and become more effective.

Research has proven that just 20 minutes of meditation per day can have a considerable impact on the effectiveness of your leadership.

The Author, Maureen O'Callaghan, is an entrepreneur and Member of the Mindful Workplace Community and the Chartered Management Institute. She is currently undertaking a Ph.D. looking at the development of prosocial values and behaviours using a mindfulness-based strengths approach. If you are interested in learning more about Maureen's research, please email mOCallaghan@lincoln.ac.uk

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