

# How to Be an Effective Leader

By Chris Palmer and Matthew Lucas

Showing leadership is a critical component of being successful. But what is leadership? Effective leadership involves many skills, and they are all learnable. For example:

*Leaders take action:* Effective leaders relentlessly take new action and instigate fresh initiatives. They don't sit around languidly. They constantly ask themselves, "What is the best use of my time right now and what do I need to focus on?" Then they discipline themselves to focus on taking action in the area defined by the answer to that question.

*Leaders are willing say "no":* Effective leaders are not afraid to say "no" and decline requests that don't advance the agendas of the teams they lead. Leaders don't allow their time to be whittled and eaten away by unimportant or tangential issues. They focus their energy on the things that really matter.

The corollary of this tactic is that effective leaders are extraordinarily reliable. They follow through on those requests to which they *do* agree. A big reason to say "no" from time to time is to enable you to say "yes" on things that matter. We all know folks who agree to do something, but end up dropping the ball. We've all done that at some point—everyone's human. But a characteristic of effective leaders is this: if they say they're going to do something, they *do it*. If they make a promise, they *keep it*. Reliability and trustworthiness are key traits of successful leaders.

*Leaders plan:* Effective leaders think big and boldly. That requires planning. Meticulously review your goals and mission to make sure you're ready to tackle them. Make a plan that is more forward-thinking than just the day in front of you. Your important strategic goals can quickly get pushed out of the way by the daily grind of meetings, e-mails, and phone calls. Don't let that happen. Remember, people are relying on you. Plan for your week instead of your day. It will be easier to commit to the bigger challenges if you block out the time they require. Put your big commitments on your calendar before it gets filled up with the trifles of other people's agendas.

*Leaders listen:* Effective leaders make a distinction between *hearing* and *listening*. It's easy to hear what someone says and generate a reply. But listening so that you deeply understand another person's frame of reference requires a profound empathy, and empathy is something effective leaders have. You don't have to agree with what people are saying, but you'll be a better leader if you make every effort to deeply comprehend a person's words and body language. When you satisfy another person's need to be understood, the effort is more likely to be reciprocated. Clear, pellucid communication is essential to your own success and to the success of those you lead.

Effective leaders are dedicated to self-improvement and lifelong learning. They constantly grow professionally and personally. They eschew stagnancy and lethargy. And they're not afraid to reach out to friends and colleagues to request feedback and coaching.

Being an effective leader is not a solitary business. Jack Welch, former CEO of GE said, “Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”

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