

Effective Leadership Primer



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Styles, Communication Skills, and Successful Behaviors

Simply being in a management position doesn't make someone an effective leader. We've all seen managers and leaders who, while well-intentioned, weren't effective communicators, perhaps had poor organizational skills, or were too focused on results and not the team. Leaders shape the culture, practices, and communication styles of the organizations and teams they lead. It takes more than just good intentions to be an effective leader, it takes the right skills.

In this special report, we've collected the best of Business Management Daily's advice on leadership styles and communication skills. Whether you're a small business, Fortune 500 company, in-person, remote, or hybrid — we've got the insight you need.

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9 communication skills leaders can't succeed without

Communication skills are the most important soft skills for many professions. Having great communication skills can help you get ahead regardless of where you fall in the business hierarchy. However, they are especially important for leaders.

Effective leadership communication can make or break a business. Business leaders play an important role in representing the company to investors, customers, partners, employees, and media outlets. Poor communication from a leader can lead to a lack of trust, low employee engagement, and missed business opportunities.

In addition to being an important business tool, a leader's communication style can also become a part of the company or leader's brand. Leaders are the face of their companies. Even if you're not doing giant product unveilings ala Steve Jobs, the way that you as a business owner or leader communicate when networking with clients, sitting on a panel during an industry conference, or posting on LinkedIn or Twitter will become a part of how people remember your company.

Here are 10 of the most important communication skills leaders need to have.

Public speaking

This one seems a bit obvious, but it is a skill that many professionals struggle with. If you were the kid in school that hated giving presentations, it might be time to consider taking a public speaking class. Leaders often have to address large numbers of team members, stakeholders, customers, or even event attendees. It is not uncommon for higher-level leaders to speak at conferences or lead a product launch event. If the idea of getting up in front of a room full of people to speak sounds intimidating, you may want to start practicing now.

This is a skill that emerging leaders often need to build up. If you've been promoted recently or accepted a new role, you may not have as much public speaking experience. Middle managers often don't do a ton of public speaking, but once you reach higher levels it becomes quite common. It's a good idea to get as much practice in as possible before you have to deliver an important speech to clients or investors. Public speaking classes, groups like Toastmasters, or even just internal meetings in supportive work environments can be great opportunities to break out of your shell and get some practice in.

Clarity

One of the most important communication skills for leaders is clarity. Good leaders need to be able to deliver messages clearly regardless of whether they're communicating over email, in-person, Zoom, Slack, or even social media.

This is especially important in more technical fields. Leaders in complex and technical industries sometimes have difficulty properly packaging their messages for non-technical audiences. For example, if you are the founder of a tech start-up, you need to be able to clearly explain your product to highly knowledgeable people as well as the everyday end-user or non-technical employee.

One way to work on clarity is to ensure that others within your team know that they can ask for clarification whenever they need it. Creating an open culture where people aren't afraid to ask questions can help you understand where people are having trouble unpacking your instructions or communications. It also gives you practice in rephrasing your communications for increased clarity and prevents miscommunications.

It's also worth noting that clear messages aren't necessarily always concise, but you should be able to write clear and concise messages when needed. Long-winded messaging works well for more visible business leaders that speak at conferences, host webinars, or appear on podcasts. You have a good amount of time to fill and may want to go more in-depth on topics to provide greater value to viewers or listeners. However, you should also be able to explain your product,

mission, and company initiatives in a paragraph or even a 240-character tweet. This is another area to practice if you're still building your communication skills as part of your overall leadership development.

Storytelling

Storytelling isn't just a skill for novelists, it's actually a key component of effective communication for leaders. Effective leaders need to be able to tell the story of their company in a manner that others can connect to. Investors, employees, customers, and the media want to hear a compelling story about your company's trajectory; where it's been and where it's going. If that story is told in a bland or jumbled manner, you won't get buy-in from any of the aforementioned parties.

Realistically, almost every business has competitors. While your business might have a unique spin on a value or service or an added value proposition, you are likely not the only company operating in your niche. This isn't a bad thing, competition is expected. However, it does drive the need to stand out with your story.

Think about the contestants on Shark Tank, the investors and the viewers tend to support business owners that have a great story and tell it well. Leaders should practice how to tell their business' story in a way that gives people something to grasp. Think about why you started the business and how to create an interesting and accurate narrative around how you founded it. Then, practice telling that story in both long and short-form versions while speaking aloud.

Motivational speaking

Motivational speaking sounds a bit cheesy — but it doesn't have to be. The goal is to communicate with others, especially your employees, in a way that gets people excited about what the company is doing and motivates them to be a part of it. When speaking or writing a message to employees you may highlight company growth and opportunities for them to earn more and advance in the company as the company continues to expand. With investors, you are motivating them to

invest to be part of a company that is achieving great results or positioned to disrupt an industry with an innovative idea.

Business leaders also need to be able to communicate the company's mission and values in an inspirational and motivational manner. Engaging your employee base through a shared sense of purpose will improve employee engagement and teamwork. It also helps everyone keep pushing forward during tough times such as busy seasons or when the company is experiencing a major change or setback.

Non-verbal communication skills

Everyone needs to be cognizant of how they communicate nonverbally, but leaders need to be especially diligent. Non-verbal communication makes up a large portion of our communication — while the exact percentage is often debated most researchers do seem to agree that more than half of communication is nonverbal. Some even report that [93% of communication](#) comes from nonverbal cues such as body language, tone, and facial expressions.

One thing that leaders need to be considerate of is the fact that employees may feel nervous speaking directly to them. Using more open body language can help put them at ease and make high-level leaders appear more approachable. Closed-off body language such as crossed arms can have the opposite effect. The right mix of open body language, good posture, and a confident tone of voice will help leaders appear approachable while still appearing professional and self-assured.

Making and maintaining eye contact is another important form of nonverbal communication. Eye contact demonstrates focus and shows that you are truly engaged and listening. It also helps build trust and shows respect to clients, employees, and others that you may be interacting with. Avoiding eye contact is common if you are nervous, and natural for some neurodivergent people, but many people do view this as a sign that a business leader lacks confidence or is being dishonest.

Efficient relationship-building

One unique challenge that leaders face is that they not only need to be skilled relationship builders, but also efficient ones. Most executives or business owners have fairly packed schedules. You often need to make a meaningful connection and strong first impression during a 30-minute or 1-hour meeting window. It can get even more hectic at industry events when you may meet someone at a booth, networking event, or group business dinner.

One trait of an effective communicator is knowing how to make people feel comfortable and get them talking. If you only have a short meeting or business dinner to make a connection with someone, you don't want to waste a lot of time with awkward small talk or short yes or no answers. Asking open-ended questions can be a great way to encourage others to open up about themselves, their company, or their business needs.

Once you get them talking, utilize active listening to show that you are engaged with what they are saying. Try to take a mental note (or an actual note) of a few key things about the other person. Try to note a mix of personal and professional things that they shared. This allows you to send a better follow-up message after meeting them and will help make the relationship feel stronger.

Adaptability

A skilled leader should be able to match their communication style to the person or group that they are interacting with. The exact same communications approach may not work for internal staff meetings, formal board meetings, investor meetings, and keynotes. Leaders should be able to adapt their tones, body language, and speech based on the audience as well as the message that they want to convey.

This is particularly true for start-ups or small businesses. Within start-up culture, leaders tend to be more informal and higher energy when interacting with staff members during meetings or stand-ups. By using more casual communication, you

can better connect with your employees and build trust. A more formal tone or body language can make high-level leaders appear intimidating to employees and discourage them from speaking up. You want people to feel comfortable bringing up ideas, questions, or concerns during internal meetings. However, you may want to take a more formal tone during board meetings.

It's also important to adapt to the company culture. If you are the founder of the business, the culture will likely already be partially shaped around your own communication and leadership style. However, it's not uncommon for executives or department directors to switch between companies with quite different cultures. For example, many people start in large corporations and move to small or medium-sized businesses for an opportunity to obtain a higher-level leadership role and title (c-suite, VP, department head). They need to spend time learning the culture and communication patterns of the new business to properly assimilate and adapt their communication strategy rather than forcing their old employer's approach on the new team.

Emotional intelligence and empathy

Great leaders have high emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is a person's ability to recognize and control their emotions as well as perceive and understand others' emotions. The key elements of emotional intelligence are:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social skills

Now it's probably not surprising to see motivation on that list since most business owners or executives are highly motivated people with strong social skills.

Empathy, on the other hand, is a largely overlooked leadership communication skill.

There is often a strong perceived divide between leaders and lower-level employees. In many cases, that divide isn't just perceived, but it is very real. However, a leader exercising empathetic communication can help bridge the gap. Leaders need to be empathetic to the day-to-day struggles of their employees. Listen to employees, or better yet, ask them if the workload is getting too high and creating burnout. Try to understand any external pressures they might be experiencing such as childcare issues, and try to find solutions such as flexible work schedules.

Leaders, especially executives, tend to get a bad reputation for being out of touch. The reality is that if you aren't actively soliciting feedback, listening to employees' concerns, and responding with empathy, then you probably are out of touch with your employee base. The challenge of being a leader is that unless it's an incredibly small business, you won't be able to see or remain involved in all of the day-to-day operations of your business and staff. Creating a culture of open communication and empathy can help improve employee engagement, morale, and retention. It also gives you a clearer picture of what is going on at all levels of the business.

Understanding communication channels

It's also important to not only know how to adapt your message itself, but also how to deliver it properly. Choosing the wrong communication channel for an important message can result in a major public relations faux pas. For example, several companies have recently come under fire for choosing to announce layoffs through impersonal communication channels or with less than empathetic messaging.

Now it is true that there will be times when your preferred communication channel is not an option. With distributed teams, sometimes you will have to opt for video conferencing tools like Zoom rather than an in-person conversation. However, it is still important to know when to send an email, instant message, or hold a face-to-face video meeting.

In-person (or at least face-to-face via Zoom) is typically a better communication channel for major company updates that are likely to generate discussion. It's best to provide employees with the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns immediately, publicly, and directly. If you sent an email with a major update, you'd be fielding individual messages all afternoon and there is likely to be some confusion or anxiety from employees while they await clarification. That being said, nobody likes to attend a meeting that could have easily been an email. This feels like a waste of employees' time and can be frustrating if they have a lot on their plate and could have used that time handling urgent tasks. Good leaders need to carefully consider the appropriate channel for each communication.

Keep building your skills

Keep in mind that leadership communication skills need to be continuously practiced and updated. You may be feeling a bit rusty on some of the skills included on this list if your company hasn't returned to the office or you've yet to return to your normal networking and conference event attendance. That's perfectly okay. Just working to improve your communication skills and many of these things will start to become a habit.

These 9 leadership communication skills are all important building blocks of strong communication and can be adapted to fit changing communication channels. Many leaders have had to adapt their communication approach to better fit remote communication channels such as Zoom, Microsoft Team, or Slack. You may even be wading into communicating over short-form video content with the rise of TikTok or Instagram Reels. The core skills largely remain the same but leaders do need to stay adaptable and be willing to practice communicating over new channels or company cultures.

6 leadership styles and the impact they have on your team

Interested in improving your team? Self-awareness of the type of leader you are can be a great place to start. One's leadership style — the behaviors and actions used to motivate and direct others — influences outcomes such as morale, productivity, and engagement. Many effective leadership styles exist, and each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. For that reason, managers may benefit from adopting elements from different leadership styles based on the individuals involved and the outcomes desired.

“In order to foster relationships with others, a leader must be aware of how they present themselves as a leader AND how others prefer to be approached,” says Terry Traut, CEO of [Entelechy](#). “All too often, leaders can become entrenched in one particular way of conducting themselves and managing their team. Over time, this can manifest itself in an unhealthy relationship where the leader firmly believes their way of doing things is ‘right’ and any employee who doesn’t fall in line is ‘wrong.’”

Traut notes that such a mentality is particularly dangerous at the present time as organizations emerge from the COVID-19 global health crisis and face The Great Resignation. People are seeking employment opportunities that better align with their personal values and interests, and they want to feel fulfilled, respected, and included. Meeting the needs of workers can be the difference between a thriving staff and a retention problem.

Learning about common leadership styles does two things. First, it helps you identify what type of leader you are so that you better understand how you generally act and how employees respond to this type of behavior. Second, it offers food for thought on how adopting elements of other styles might assist in meeting the needs of your direct charges and obtaining better outcomes.

6 common leadership styles

Leadership studies conducted by social psychologist Kurt Lewin and colleagues in the 1930s identified the first three leadership styles described below (autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire). Since then, other experts have presented a variety of other leadership theories. Which is most effective? No single definition of a great leader exists. The best leadership style is the one that works for you given your personality, company, industry, staff, and different situations encountered.

Autocratic leadership

When people think of a traditional boss-employee arrangement, autocratic leadership tends to come to mind. Also known as authoritarian leadership, this very hands-on style involves managers laying out what they expect their direct charges to do and employees following these directions. Communication and decisions come from the top-down, with minimal input from workers.

People who like clearly defined roles and tasks often thrive under an autocratic leader. Knowing exactly what management expects reduces the uncomfortableness of ambiguity. Likewise, employees do not bear the burden of figuring out priorities and making individual decisions. The resulting orderly, efficient work environment frequently operates like a well-oiled machine.

Inexperienced or new workers can especially benefit from an autocratic leader's vigilant supervision and consistent communication. Many specific industries also lend themselves to this style of leadership, such as healthcare, law enforcement, the military, and manufacturing. These fields rely on following set procedures for the sake of compliance and safety. Surgeons, for example, want each member of their staff to know exactly what role they individually play during an operation. Autocratic leadership can cut through potential chaos to get to what needs to be done and how.

Employees who prefer more of a voice in company matters and greater flexibility in how they do their own job may feel stifled under autocratic leadership. They

may resent micromanagement, and an “us” vs. “them” division can occur between workers and management. Low morale and high turnover can result if team members do not feel a personal connection to the organization, its mission, and its decision-making process.

An autocratic leadership style requires a great deal of self-reliance, as it is up to the manager to come up with ideas and make decisions that affect others. Such responsibility can be stressful. It also can be detrimental to creative problem-solving and innovation. Left to their own devices, authoritarian leaders may miss out on hearing novel, out-of-the-box solutions that could truly benefit the company.

Democratic leadership

Limited input is definitely not a problem for democratic leaders. Rather, managers with a democratic leadership style encourage employees to share ideas and opinions. For this reason, “participative leadership” is another name for this type of leadership.

Working in a collaborative, participative environment can be good for employee engagement and job satisfaction. Employees often develop a strong connection to the company because they feel valued and important. The arrangement promotes genuine thought about the organization and its objectives, not just following directions.

Democratic leaders benefit from the wide variety of thoughts presented rather than relying solely on their own. Diverse perspectives promote innovation and creative problem-solving. However, seeking and evaluating input does take time. Businesses facing time constraints or industries requiring quick decision-making may find the democratic leadership approach too long.

Managers with a participative style of leadership may find themselves in tricky situations from time to time. Conflicting viewpoints can cause tension among team members, and an effective leader needs to mediate. Similarly, a worker may

get upset when a final decision runs counter to his suggestion, and that can affect morale.

Also, the personalities and competencies of team members can influence the effectiveness of democratic leadership. Some employees do not particularly enjoy partaking in group discussions. They may feel uncomfortable and hold back. Others may lack sufficient experience or knowledge to offer viable suggestions, and this can waste time.

Laissez-faire leadership

The French term “laissez-faire” translates as “allow to do.” Managers using a laissez-faire leadership style delegate work to qualified team members and allow them to handle it as they see fit. The company still bears responsibility for providing the resources necessary to carry out assignments, but employees exercise a great deal of control over the what, where, when, and how.

Workers operating under a laissez-faire leader (also sometimes known as a delegative leader) experience a great deal of autonomy. They receive little supervision, and managers expect them to generally solve problems and make decisions on their own.

Many workers welcome this hands-off approach. They see it as an extension of trust and are motivated to do a good job. Seasoned and highly skilled employees may especially enjoy the chance to use their own resourcefulness and creativity. And, by empowering others, managers free up more of their own time for growing the business.

However, not all types of employees thrive under delegative leadership. Some lack the confidence or skill to handle things on their own, and they prefer greater direction. As might be expected, new hires sometimes feel uneasy with a laissez-faire style until they get up-to-speed in their new work environment.

Delegative managers also may not always be pleased with productivity or results. Some staff members need more of a watchful eye to stay on task and produce up

to par work. Likewise, the boss may receive an assignment that is not in line with his preferences. Depending on deadlines, changes may or may not be able to be made. And, even if corrections are possible, doing so at an earlier stage would have wasted less time.

For some managers, being a laissez-faire leader feels uncomfortable. Giving others freedom and keeping one's hands off of delegated tasks can be scary when you ultimately are responsible for team performance. Offering periodic constructive feedback and a bit more guidance helps with uneasiness, especially until individuals have consistently proven their ability to go it alone.

Transformational leadership

The word “transformational” means to produce big changes or improvements. Managers with a transformational leadership style focus on the company's mission and growth. Because of this orientation, transformational leaders often get called visionary leaders.

Transformational leaders see the full potential ahead and inspire followers. Usually passionate and possessing emotional intelligence, they are good at motivating others to perform well to reach goals and move the company forward. Team members buy into the visionary's outlook and trust the manager to guide the organization forward. This commitment may prove especially valuable to small businesses hoping to expand and to larger companies undergoing changes or restructuring.

Since transformational leaders often spend a great deal of time thinking about the next level of success, they delegate many short-term tasks. Some employees relish this opportunity to take on responsibilities without micromanagement.

Too strong of a “big picture” mindset, however, poses some potential pitfalls. Day-to-day details essential for current operations may fall through the cracks. And while building excitement for a bright future can increase morale, it also can damage it if team members get frustrated by not being given proper support in

the here and now. Transformational leaders too invested in their visions run the risk of failing to listen to real concerns expressed by others. Similarly, team members may feel a need to buy into what their leader envisions rather than express personal qualms.

Transactional leadership

Managers utilizing a transactional leadership style view their relationship with workers as two sides involved in an exchange. The employer wants specific levels of output and offers a predetermined reward for accomplishment or penalty for failure. Because transactional leaders focus on managing the performance of the individual through incentives and discipline, another name for this style is managerial leadership.

As opposed to transformational leadership and its emphasis on the long-term, transactional leadership concentrates on results here and now. Employees are told what they need to do, how to do it, and what will happen when they achieve or fail. The organization clearly defines expectations in terms of quotas and other productivity benchmarks. Some workers like this practical, structured approach where everyone knows without ambiguity what “success” looks like.

Stable organizations looking for continued results under current conditions often use transactional leadership. Incentives, usually monetary in nature, keep workers striving for given benchmarks. The whole arrangement takes on a very practical feel and can be particularly effective for workplaces requiring repetitive tasks.

A lack of other forms of motivation, however, can make transactional leadership undesirable to workers whose job-related well-being depends on more than money. Employee creativity, innovation, input, and connection do not typically thrive in this hierarchical, performance-focused atmosphere.

Likewise, those enjoying teamwork may dislike the emphasis on individual results. In fact, the nature of the rewards system may actually pit colleagues against one

another as each tries to gain a sufficient amount of leads, sales, or the like to claim their prize.

Coaching leadership

As the name suggests, this style requires taking on a leadership role that is part instructor and part cheerleader to develop workers who know what to do and possess the motivation to do it. Coaching leaders boost the skill sets and morale of the talent under them for better performance both now and in the future.

A coaching leadership style is sometimes compared to being a mentor. The manager offers guidance, support, and constructive feedback with the aim of helping a person or team reach their full potential. Such a leader balances imparting knowledge with letting charges discover things themselves to grow and gain confidence.

The success of coaching leadership often rests in developing trust. Managers must gain respect in order for workers to listen to their advice and take it seriously. The ability to communicate clearly also must be a top leadership skill. Employees need to understand what you are teaching and how they can implement your instruction.

A chief drawback of a coaching leadership style is its time-intensive nature. It can be challenging to regularly devote attention to evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, and motivators of individuals and teams while keeping up with routine office operations. Also, not every employee wants a coach. Some prefer a more straightforward style with tasks laid out and managers stepping in during trying times rather than offering learning opportunities.

Don't overlook the value of positivity as a leadership skill

A positive mindset is typically seen as a desirable trait in the workforce across all professionals and job levels, but it's often overlooked as a leadership skill.

Positivity can help leaders create a better work environment, build stronger business relationships, and navigate the often tumultuous business landscape with an optimistic outlook. A positive outlook can also have internal benefits for leaders such as managing stress and avoiding burnout.

Here's what you should know about positivity as a leadership skill and how you can implement it as part of your own leadership style.

Components of positive leadership

Modeling positive attitudes

One important component of leadership is acting as a positive example to those that you lead. Positive leaders create positive employees. Even more importantly, they create positive middle managers.

Transformational leadership is a popular theory of leadership in which the goal is to inspire positive change and motivation among employees. A transformational leader is meant to evoke a sense of purpose in employees in relation to their work. In theory, this will empower them to take initiative, work harder, and achieve their full potential. In order to evoke that positivity and motivation in others, you need to find it within yourself as well.

By modeling positive attitudes in your daily work life, you can demonstrate to others how to approach challenges, interactions, and everyday business activities in a positive way. Ultimately, this benefits everyone's professional development and well-being and allows the organization to cultivate a stronger culture.

Using positive language

Positivity is not only a great leadership skill in general, but also an important communication skill for leaders. How you deliver a message plays a big part in how it will be received. Leaders need to be able to evoke excitement when delivering news on new products, strategic shifts, and more. They also need to be able to uplift their teams during hard times in order to keep the business moving forward.

A large component of using positive language is understanding how to communicate feedback effectively. Feedback should be used to empower employees by highlighting their strengths while also providing tools and actionable examples of how to improve their performance. Feedback delivered using overly negative language can be discouraging, but when it is framed more positively it can help them feel acknowledged and supported.

Many great leaders use the compliment sandwich technique to deliver feedback. This involves leading with something that the employee is doing well, then segueing into an opportunity for improvement, and then circling back to something positive. This allows the leader to provide some critique, while ensuring that the employee leaves the interaction feeling largely positive about the conversation.

Emotional intelligence

In order to be a positive and effective leader, you need to possess a high degree of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has five key components.

- **Self-awareness.** The ability to understand your own emotions and how your emotions can impact others.
- **Self-regulation.** The ability to regulate your own emotions. In leadership, this helps leaders avoid acting on impulse, directing anger or frustration toward staff, and maintaining a positive and professional attitude even under stress.

- **Motivation.** The ability to keep yourself motivated and maintain a high quality of work.
- **Empathy.** The ability to see things from someone else's perspective and share their feelings
- **Social skills.** The ability to communicate well with others, manage conflict, and thrive in different social situations.

Emotional intelligence in itself is a great leadership skill, but it is also a great tool for leveraging positivity as a leadership trait. When you are aware of and know how to manage your own emotions, you can act as a better example to your staff and communicate more effectively.

Benefits of positive leadership

When most people think of the benefits of positivity, the internal benefits typically come to mind. Most people practice positivity in order to feel better. Leaders will also likely experience this, but there are also a lot of business benefits as well.

Improved employee engagement and morale

Leaders set the tone for their workplace. A leader that is negative or harsh with their words or actions will create a work environment that is stressful or discouraging.

The power of positive leadership is that you can use it to help employees feel more connected with the company's purpose, mission, values, and overall culture. Employees today want to feel a sense of belonging. They want to know that the company and leaders that they work for share their values. These are the things that make the latest generation of employees excited to go to work. When you leverage positivity in your leadership style, you can keep morale high by instilling that sense of purpose, representing your organization's values well, and making employees feel valued.

One thing that can be helpful for leaders to do is to share positive outcomes transparently with their staff. These aren't always going to be sales numbers. Often they may be customer reviews sharing how much the product or service has helped them. They may be the results of a charitable initiative that the company undertook. It could be highlighting sustainability or accessibility practices or features. These are great ways to spread positive messaging and help employees feel good about the work that they're doing.

Better change management

For high-level leadership roles such as executive positions, the way that you announce or communicate major changes or events will largely determine how your employees react to the news. Positive leaders who communicate with employees in a positive, uplifting manner when announcing and communicating change will produce better results.

Change often creates feelings of anxiety and uncertainty within workplaces, but using positive language and highlighting the benefits of the change will help ease these fears and keep morale strong. If change is handled poorly, it can lead to employee disengagement, turnover, and lowered productivity or job performance.

More effective problem-solving

Many people get overwhelmed or catastrophize when they run into a large problem. Leaders have a great responsibility when it comes to approaching and solving problems on behalf of their teams and the company. However, maintaining a positive attitude can help leaders better approach a problem. If you see a problem as an opportunity or a temporary setback that your team will be able to overcome, then you'll go into the problem-solving process with a clearer head.

Meaningful relationship building

Most leadership roles require some level of networking or relationship-building. Positivity can help with this in a few ways.

The first is that positivity is typically associated with improved confidence. If you believe that someone is going to like you or be excited to hear about what you have to say, going up to them to start a conversation won't be as intimidating. Building confidence as a leader will help you network, speak to clients, and handle press engagements if needed.

Another benefit is that being positive can help you leave a good impression on others. If you are at a trade show with tens of thousands of other people, it can be hard to stand out. However, if you are the person who had a great attitude or made a boring activity fun, people will probably remember you — and they'll want to do business with you.

You'll also build better relationships within the company. Approaching issues with a positive and kind perspective helps managers and leaders build trust with their employees. Employees are more likely to come to you with concerns or when they need help if they know that you'll react in a supportive non-judgemental manner. This open communication is really important, as it provides leaders with better insight into what is going on within the organization or their teams and provides them the opportunity to problem-solve with employees before the issues get bigger.

When you shouldn't stay positive

Maintaining a positive outlook and using positive language as a leader is great. However, there are a few caveats to keep in mind.

Toxic positivity

Positivity is great, but you do need to make sure that you don't cross over into toxic positivity. Toxic positivity occurs when you take your positive mindset too far by demanding positivity in all situations and refusing to allow or experience negative emotions. The problem with this is that it isn't healthy for the leader or for their teams.

From a leadership perspective, toxic positivity can make leaders less open to feedback or concerns as they may be perceived as negative. For employees, working in an environment filled with toxic positivity can make it hard to speak up when issues need to be addressed. There needs to be space for team members to also share negative emotions. Expressing negative emotions in the workplace can help businesses in a variety of ways including:

- Identifying pain points in products or processes for employees or customers.
- Addressing issues in your company's culture. If a certain person or group is feeling underappreciated or disrespected, they should be allowed to feel frustrated or angry. Speaking up on harassment or discrimination can be a tough and emotional process and it would be unfair to expect victims to smile and put a positive spin on their experiences.
- Working through periods of internal or external change. Leaders will sometimes need to address sensitive subjects whether they be large-scale layoffs or outside issues like the coronavirus pandemic. It's good to approach these with positivity and optimism, but you should also acknowledge the fear, sadness, and uncertainty that others may be feeling and provide them with space to work through those emotions.

It's also worth noting that while positive emotions are great, it has been shown that people who feel a wider range of emotions tend to actually be happier on average. UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center reports that emotional diversity, or emo-diversity, may lead to higher levels of overall happiness than purely experiencing positive emotions throughout your day.

This doesn't mean that leaders or employees should be exuding negativity, and there's still a way to address negative experiences or issues in a positive manner. However, it does mean that you should work to avoid falling into the trap of toxic positivity.

Seeing things through rose-colored glasses

When it comes to leadership, positivity should guide how to approach situations and communicate with others. What it shouldn't do is cloud your judgment.

Try not to sacrifice practicality for positivity. Practicing positive leadership to highlight the business' and your employees' achievements and approach challenges with a positive outlook is great. However, there are times when you do need to acknowledge more serious issues and take action that may not be perceived as positive or optimistic.

Positive leaders should still be willing to make tough and potentially unpopular decisions such as firing or laying off people, changing policies to ensure the success of the business, rejecting ideas or ending projects that are not working, and taking disciplinary action as needed. Overly positive leaders sometimes have difficulty admitting that a business strategy, initiative, partnership, or employee is not working out and needs to be cut. However, effective leadership sometimes requires making difficult decisions if they are in the best interest of the business.

The 8 behaviors effective leaders demonstrate

Marie works as a manager at a logistics company. She spends much of her time directly overseeing others and paying attention to detail. Such actions keep operations running smoothly in her fast-paced, deadline-oriented environment. Employees know exactly what they should be doing at any given time, and Marie frequently reminds them of the importance of their individual efforts.

Linda is the CEO of a small public relations firm. Her staff consists of a diverse group of passionate people. Linda creates a respectful workplace where all can share ideas. Most team members have been in the industry for quite some time. She allows them a great deal of control over their everyday tasks. This frees Linda to devote more time to growing the business.

As these two women show, leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Factors such as industry, staff composition, and individual personality play a role in the behavior a manager exhibits.

Yet while styles and circumstances may differ, good leaders tend to display many common core behaviors. As you read the following list, think about which leadership behaviors are among your strengths and which might need to develop into a greater part of your leadership arsenal.

1. Knowing your leadership style

Effective leaders possess self-awareness. They evaluate their strengths and weaknesses – with an eye on maximizing the former and improving the latter. Identifying one's primary leadership style is a good place to start.

Leadership styles are classifications of how a person behaves while leading a group. Consensus does not exist on exact categories. And, as one might expect, managers often exhibit more than one style or vary it according to the situation. The following are three of the most commonly recognized leadership styles:

Autocratic

This very direct form of leadership presents team members with clearly defined roles and tasks. The manager lays out what people are expected to do. Employees follow directions. Worker input tends to be minimal. This sets the stage for quick decision-making by leaders since soliciting agreement is not a concern.

Democratic

This style focuses on collaboration among managers and their teams. A variety of ideas circulate before a plan of action is decided upon, which may result in better or more novel approaches. Because of their involvement, employees often develop a greater connection to the company under a democratic manager. However, conflicting viewpoints can cause staff tension. Likewise, the potential exists for hurt feelings when an individual's suggestion is not taken.

Laissez-faire

Employees operating under this type of management experience a great deal of autonomy. They receive little supervision and are expected to generally solve problems and make decisions on their own. Many workers welcome this extension of trust, but some feel uneasy about a lack of direction.

Marie, the manager described earlier, tends toward autocratic leadership. Linda displays behavior more in line with democratic and laissez-faire styles. Both women might consider adopting elements of other methods in certain situations. Marie, for instance, might benefit from asking frontline workers to weigh in on creating a safer warehouse. Checking in with staff a bit more often might guide individuals on Linda's team to produce outcomes more in line with her intentions.

2. Staying on top of things

Effective leaders know what is going on in their department. They possess a firm grasp of priorities, deadlines, and the efforts necessary to fulfill company objectives. They use devices such as project management systems and shared calendars to stay on track. Such attention helps to keep things from slipping through the cracks and limits errors.

The benefits of having an organized manager trickle down to the staff. Team members can do their best work when a leader consistently provides correct, timely information and instructions. Being part of a work environment where activities feel under control rather than chaotic cuts down on everyone's stress.

Staying on top of things applies to more than just tasks, however. Great leaders keep tabs on the pulse of the office. They monitor morale, look out for signs of discord or politics, and gauge stress levels. Early detection of any problems allows time for action rather than suddenly facing a conundrum such as low employee retention rates.

3. Communicating effectively

Few will argue that the ability to communicate is one of the most important leadership skills. Regardless of one's individual leadership style, certain information must be conveyed in order for direct reports to do their jobs well. Such things reduce misunderstandings and mistakes. These basics include:

- What is the company's mission?
- What are departmental priorities vs. what can wait?
- What are the critical things to know about a given project? Common possibilities include short-term and long-term deadlines, specific instructions, client demands, budget, and the responsibilities of each team member.
- What communication "rules" exist? For instance, what is the acceptable time frame for responding to emails? What is the standard procedure for ensuring remote employees stay in the loop?
- How should a worker respond to a problem or emergency situation? Who should he contact for assistance, by what method, and how quickly?

Holding check-ins and offering constructive feedback also are important to team performance. Some managers are surrounded by veteran employees who require little guidance on projects. Other leaders sense the need for more hand-holding or checking in to ensure things are progressing in the intended manner. Part of being an effective manager is adjusting based on circumstances.

The best leaders realize that communication skills involve more than just what they say or write to others. They watch body language, listen carefully, and read thoughtfully. Such attention provides valuable information. Does the other person truly comprehend? How does the individual feel about what is being discussed?

4. Empowering others

Successful leaders know that direct reports thrive when they truly feel their contributions make a difference. Thus, it pays for managers of all leadership styles to spend time showing employees how what they do as individuals makes a positive impact on your company.

Beyond fostering this connection, strong leadership behavior involves creating an environment where those under you can grow. For starters, this means establishing psychological safety. All employees need a work environment where they feel valued, free to be their true selves, and comfortable expressing ideas and opinions. Without this basic level of respect from their managers and colleagues, team members will hesitate to spread their wings.

Other leadership behaviors that promote employee empowerment include:

Delegating appropriately

Building trust is a crucial part of great leadership. Delegating shows staff members that you trust their abilities and work ethic. Give people ownership over specific tasks based on their competencies. Let them perform these responsibilities without constantly breathing down their necks.

Holding others accountable

Swooping in to save the day may seem like effective leadership behavior. However, better leaders know the danger of sending the message that you will pick up the pieces or cover for mistakes. Encourage team members to seek assistance as needed, but give them the space for problem-solving and decision-making on their own, too.

Creating stretch goals

Boost engagement and self-confidence by working with individuals on formulating goals just beyond their reach. This process demonstrates your faith in the person's ability and hard work, and every "win" encourages upping the game a bit more.

Valuing education

Support employees who want to learn new things. Carve out time and money for professional development (including your own, as great leaders never stop learning).

5. Making decisions

Effective managers know they are hired to lead, and sometimes being the one in charge is difficult. It means asking the hard questions and addressing issues rather than shunning them.

Being a leader involves making timely, thoughtful decisions and carrying them out. Wishy-washy managers not only lose respect, they make it harder for others to do their jobs. Direct reports depend on them to chart a clear course. Outcomes may not always end up perfectly desirable, but strong leaders know they need the self-confidence to make educated decisions in order for the company to operate and grow.

6. Taking risks

Managers differ quite significantly in this behavior depending on their own personality and style. Self-awareness of where you fall on the risk spectrum can help pinpoint if you may need to make some adjustments.

Taking risks might be scary in business, but being too afraid to fail means potentially missing out on opportunities as well. Good leaders thoughtfully evaluate circumstances. They identify situations in which failure would be tolerable vs. when it would be devastating. They look at the possible reward and weigh it against possible negative consequences. Ultimately, they decide which risks are worth taking and which are not.

Effective leaders examine the successful and unsuccessful outcomes of their risk-taking endeavors. They treat both as learning opportunities. Companies depend on such leadership development to create business visionaries capable of moving the organization forward.

7. Developing creative solutions

Managers often are very good at what they do and rely on tried-and-true methods. A core arsenal of leadership traits and behaviors bolsters self-confidence and can keep operations running like a well-oiled machine much of the time. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated, the world is not always orderly or predictable.

Leaders stuck in their ways may have trouble dealing with new problems as they arise. Strong leadership involves the ability to think outside the box and come up with creative solutions to problems.

Finding new and better ways to do things oftentimes results from seeking input from various sources. Effective leaders check their egos at the door. They keep an open mind about what others suggest. They push to hear from everyone, not just the same voices over and over. Unexpected and original solutions are welcomed, not ridiculed, because these ideas are a key to innovation.

8. Motivating appropriately

Finally, all true leaders realize the link between motivation and performance. They understand how crucial recognition is to morale, achievement, and company culture.

However, good leaders know motivation is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Some employees love to hear their manager publicly sing their praises, but others cringe. Some workers genuinely value a handwritten note from a leader. Other colleagues prefer bonuses, gifts, or opportunities to work on “pet” projects. Effective managers take the time to figure out what works best for each team member.

Successful leaders also boost motivation through fairness. Direct reports know hard work yields promotions or choice assignments, not favoritism.

And regardless of individual leadership style, effective leaders convey their love of teamwork. They know sharing credit does not dim one's own light. Rather, it leads the whole group to shine.