

The Most Successful Leaders Do 15 Things Automatically, Every Day

Leadership is learned behavior that becomes unconscious and automatic over time. For example, leaders can make several important decisions about an issue in the time it takes others to understand the question. Many people wonder how leaders know how to make the best decisions, often under immense pressure. The process of making these decisions comes from an accumulation of experiences and encounters with a multitude of different circumstances, personality types and unforeseen failures. More so, the decision making process is an acute understanding of being familiar with the cause and effect of behavioral and circumstantial patterns; knowing the intelligence and interconnection points of the variables involved in these patterns allows a leader to confidently make decisions and project the probability of their desired outcomes. The most successful leaders are instinctual decision makers. Having done it so many times throughout their careers, they become immune to the pressure associated with decision making and extremely intuitive about the process of making the most strategic and best decisions. This is why most senior executives will tell you they depend strongly upon their “gut-feel” when making difficult decisions at a moment’s notice.

Beyond decision making, successful leadership across all areas becomes learned and instinctual over a period of time. Successful leaders have learned the mastery of anticipating business patterns, finding opportunities in pressure situations, serving the people they lead and overcoming hardships. No wonder the best CEOs are paid so much money. In 2011, salaries for the 200 top-paid CEOs rose 5 percent to a median \$14.5 million per year, according to a study by compensation-data company Equilar for The New York Times.

If you are looking to advance your career into a leadership capacity and / or already assume leadership responsibilities – here are 15 things you must do automatically, every day, to be a successful leader in the workplace:

1. Make Others Feel Safe to Speak-Up

Many times leaders intimidate their colleagues with their title and power when they walk into a room. Successful leaders deflect attention away from themselves and encourage others to voice their opinions. They are experts at making others feel safe to speak-up and confidently share their perspectives and points of view. They use their executive presence to create an approachable environment.

2. Make Decisions

Successful leaders are expert decision makers. They either facilitate the dialogue to empower their colleagues to reach a strategic conclusion or they do it themselves. They focus on “making things happen” at all times – decision making activities that sustain progress. Successful leaders have mastered the art of politicking and thus don’t waste their time on issues that disrupt momentum. They know how to make 30 decisions in 30 minutes.

3. Communicate Expectations

Successful leaders are great communicators, and this is especially true when it comes to “performance expectations.” In doing so, they remind their colleagues of the organization’s core values and mission statement – ensuring that their vision is properly translated and actionable objectives are properly executed.

I had a boss that managed the team by reminding us of the expectations that she had of the group. She made it easy for the team to stay focused and on track. The protocol she implemented – by clearly communicating expectations – increased performance and helped to identify those on the team that could not keep up with the standards she expected from us.

4. Challenge People to Think

The most successful leaders understand their colleagues’ mindsets, capabilities and areas for improvement. They use this knowledge/insight to challenge their teams to think and stretch them to reach for more. These types of leaders excel in keeping their people on their toes, never allowing them to get comfortable and enabling them with the tools to grow.

If you are not thinking, you’re not learning new things. If you’re not learning, you’re not growing – and over time becoming irrelevant in your work.

5. Be Accountable to Others

Successful leaders allow their colleagues to manage them. This doesn’t mean they are allowing others to control them – but rather becoming accountable to assure they are being proactive to their colleagues needs.

Beyond just mentoring and sponsoring selected employees, being accountable to others is a sign that your leader is focused more on your success than just their own.

6. Lead by Example

Leading by example sounds easy, but few leaders are consistent with this one. Successful leaders practice what they preach and are mindful of their actions. They know everyone is watching them and therefore are incredibly intuitive about detecting those who are observing their every move, waiting to detect a performance shortfall.

7. Measure & Reward Performance

Great leaders always have a strong “pulse” on business performance and those people who are the performance champions. Not only do they review the numbers and measure performance ROI, they are active in acknowledging hard work and efforts (no matter the result). Successful leaders never take consistent performers for granted and are mindful of rewarding them.

8. Provide Continuous Feedback

Employees want their leaders to know that they are paying attention to them and they appreciate any insights along the way. Successful leaders always provide feedback and they welcome reciprocal feedback by creating trustworthy relationships with their colleagues.. They understand the power of perspective and have learned the importance of feedback early on in their career as it has served them to enable workplace advancement.

9. Properly Allocate and Deploy Talent

Successful leaders know their talent pool and how to use it. They are experts at activating the capabilities of their colleagues and knowing when to deploy their unique skill sets given the circumstances at hand.

10. Ask Questions, Seek Counsel

Successful leaders ask questions and seek counsel all the time. From the outside, they appear to know-it-all – yet on the inside, they have a deep thirst for knowledge and constantly are on the look-out to learn new things because of their commitment to making themselves better through the wisdom of others.

11. Problem Solve; Avoid Procrastination

Successful leaders tackle issues head-on and know how to discover the heart of the matter at hand. They don't procrastinate and thus become incredibly proficient at problem solving; they learn from and don't avoid uncomfortable circumstances (they welcome them).

Getting ahead in life is about doing the things that most people don't like doing.

12. Positive Energy & Attitude

Successful leaders create a positive and inspiring workplace culture. They know how to set the tone and bring an attitude that motivates their colleagues to take action. As such, they are likeable, respected and strong willed. They don't allow failures to disrupt momentum.

13. Be a Great Teacher

Many employees in the workplace will tell you that their leaders have stopped being teachers. Successful leaders never stop teaching because they are so self-motivated to learn themselves. They use teaching to keep their colleagues well-informed and knowledgeable through statistics, trends, and other newsworthy items.

Successful leaders take the time to mentor their colleagues and make the investment to sponsor those who have proven they are able and eager to advance.

14. Invest in Relationships

Successful leaders don't focus on protecting their domain – instead they expand it by investing in mutually beneficial relationships. Successful leaders associate themselves with “lifters and other leaders” – the types of people that can broaden their sphere of influence. Not only for their own advancement, but that of others.

Leaders share the harvest of their success to help build momentum for those around them.

15. Genuinely Enjoy Responsibilities

Successful leaders love being leaders – not for the sake of power but for the meaningful and purposeful impact they can create. When you have reached a senior level of leadership – it's about your ability to serve others and this can't be accomplished unless you genuinely enjoy what you do.

In the end, successful leaders are able to sustain their success because these 15 things ultimately allow them to increase the value of their organization's brand – while at the same time minimize the operating risk profile. They serve as the enablers of talent, culture and results.

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