

The Other Half

Leadership: Everything *else* you need to know

Education and professional experience are only half of what we need to know to be truly successful, and leadership principles make up the other half.

People often refer to leadership skills as soft skills, meaning they are not fundamental to building a successful career. But leadership skills are as fundamental to true success as breathing is to life. After all, the fallen business executives of our world have proven time and again that it takes more than intelligence and a fancy title to be an exemplary leader.

Leadership is largely about people. Studies show that the average executive spends three-fourths of his or her working time dealing with people. The largest single cost in most businesses is people, and the largest, most valuable asset any company has is its people. All executive plans are carried out, or fail to be carried out, by people. And the skills necessary to deal with people effectively and get the most out of them do not come naturally. We have to develop this skill as we would any other skill.

Unfortunately, companies don't spend nearly enough time or money on the development of their people, in part because they believe that leadership development is only for the people at the top of the corporate ladder, the people in the corner offices. Being a leader, however, has nothing to do with professional stature. We can be leaders in our families, among our friends, at college, on sports teams. We can be leaders in any environment, but only if we actually take the time to learn to lead.

Many people doubt the power of applying leadership principles, but the success of applying leadership principles is based solidly in decades of research. History and countless leaders have proven that this leadership stuff works and that all of it matters to the success of any organization or individual.

Leadership, however, is not something that can be developed by attending a three-day class, or even a week-long leadership boot camp, as some people would have us believe. Leadership development is an ongoing, lifelong process, and unfortunately most people don't even think about it, much less read books about it or make any kind of discernable effort to learn about it. We, as a society, fail to recognize the importance of leadership development in our personal and professional lives.

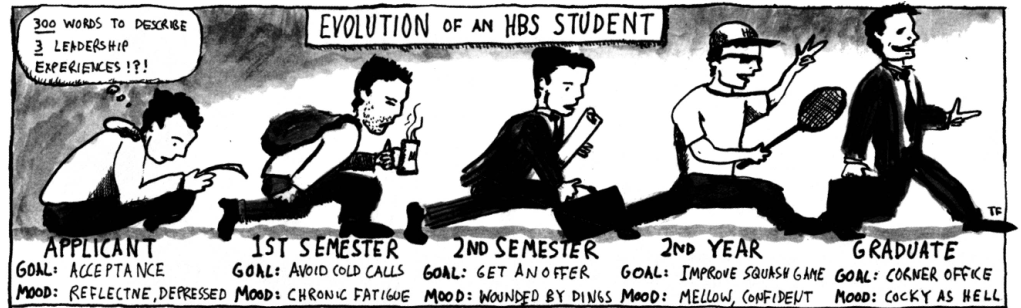
Why is it that in college we receive training in every area except in how to deal with people? For instance, people studying to be doctors work with other physicians for at least two years before they're unleashed onto patients. Likewise, those studying to be engineers don't just get to design a building their first day on the job. They must demonstrate that they actually know what they are doing first. And thank goodness for that.

In business, however, a primary activity that we do **every day** is deal with people, and yet we receive little or no training on

how to do that effectively. In our society interpersonal skills are largely taken for granted? I mean, we *are* people, so we *must* have people skills, right? That would be like saying that just because a person is a mother or a father, that person must be good at it. But unfortunately we all know that's not true. Another reason the ability to deal with people is taken for granted is because we do it every day, so we *must* know how to do it. But that's also a flawed assumption. Some baseball teams, for instance, play baseball every day and yet virtually every day they do it badly. Plenty of proof exists that people can do something every day and still do it badly. Practice doesn't make perfect when we are practicing the wrong techniques. So, just because a person has been "leading" for thirty years doesn't mean that he or she is good at it.

Leadership and the ability to work with people are skills which need to be learned, and it is our responsibility as individuals to take the initiative to learn them, because contrary to popular belief we will not learn this stuff on the job or in college. When colleges actually do offer leadership development classes, most people don't even sign up for them because the so-called *leaders* of our society do such a poor job of conveying what leadership really is and how important it is.

The study of leadership is for anyone who wants to make a difference. Leadership development is for everyone who wants to be more effective in every aspect of their daily lives. So,



regardless of your position in life, it is your responsibility to learn to lead for many reasons, not the least of which is that your leadership skills not only determine the level of your success, but also the success of those who work around you. Ninety-nine percent of people want to do a good job, but low people perform, all too often, is simply a reflection of the one for whom they work. Another way to put this is that if our leadership skills only reach the level of 6 on a 10-scale, the 8s, 9s and 10s are not going to hang around us. People naturally follow people stronger than themselves.

Exemplary leadership ability is not an inherent byproduct of professional experience. So, learn to lead—for everyone's sake! Read good leadership books, listen to tapes and attend leadership seminars every chance you get. If you do, you will without a doubt be able to make extraordinary things happen in your life and in the lives of others.

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