

The 10 Commitments of Leadership

Leadership doesn't just happen. As individuals who choose to undertake leadership position, we are being given a great responsibility to our organizations or teams, but more so, to the people we will lead. As leaders, we must continually renew our commitment to leadership, maintaining an attitude of renewal and positive motivations. Here are some examples of the kinds of commitments that we can make as leaders, that will help us continue our own positive leadership journey.

The first commitment that we can make to ourselves, as leaders, is to clarify our personal values. When I work with teams or organizations I always lead an exercise that asks the participants what they value. Some of the things that we hear are family, friends, and faith. Then I ask the group to take that exercise one step further, and pick one day out of the week. For that day, they have to write down everything they do, eat, sleep, go to work, watch tv, talk on the phone, whatever. Then I ask them to compare what they are doing with what they say they value. Many times they are surprised to see that they aren't living what they say that they value. This helps them clarify their values by thinking to themselves, "maybe I should turn off the TV and actually spend some time with my family". Or "maybe since I value my job, I should be more present at the office, focus more on doing a great job instead of just getting things done". As leaders when we clarify our personal values it becomes easy to see how important it is to walk the walk when you talk the talk.

Speaking of walking the walk, the second leadership commitment we can make is to set the example by aligning our actions with the values we share as a team. One of the questions that I always ask whatever group I'm working with is "what does this team value?" Sometimes, teams can very quickly tell me all about what they value. However, sometimes, teams are more hesitant to speak up because this is something that they haven't ever discussed. It's difficult to come together as a group and really articulate what it is you value as a group. However, the commitment that we make, is to not only figure out what we value as individuals, but to take it a step further and apply that to our team; and then take that one more step and make sure that the way that we act and how we spend our time together, reflects what we value as a group. As leaders, it's especially important for us to set the example, and take the lead in making sure that we are role modeling the behaviors we want to see in others.

One of the most important commitments we can make as leaders, is to talk about the future in terms of the optimistic possibilities. I once worked with a very small group on campus. They were a great group of young people; dedicated, committed, hard working, and enthusiastic. They had big future plans, and a lot of enthusiasm, but sometimes it was hard to think optimistically about fund raising drives or community service projects, because there were so few of them and man power was limited. Many times I found myself wanting to squelch their ideas because I realize that the human resources were so limited. But their big plans were a road map of where they wanted their organization to go. By thinking of the possibilities, we create a positive vision for the future of our groups and our futures as well. We provide goals to work towards, moving our organizations forward, and that is a powerful thing.

Harnessing our team's enthusiasm and turning it towards creating common goals that everyone can believe in is another commitment we must make as leader. How do we do this? The key is in the discussions that we have with our groups. It's in the brainstorming and sharing of ideas, it's in the giving and taking and compromising that we go through to build consensus. Most importantly we do this by creating an environment that allows all people to fully engage and participate in the process. If everyone can contribute to the process and the product of our teams, we have a greater opportunity for buy-in, and thusly a much higher likelihood of success.

How many times have we found ourselves saying, if it ain't broke, don't fix it? Or, we've always done things this way, so why make a change? In being the leaders of our group we make a commitment to seek innovative ways to change, grow, and improve what we're doing. Not change for change sake, that's not the point. But change for the sake of growth and improving what we do. A group that I worked with was having trouble getting staff to come and stay for weekly meetings. It was the simplest of things, but I encouraged them to switch around the furniture in the room where they had their meetings. In doing so, it gathered everyone in a more central way. No one could hide in the back anymore. It changed the organization, it improved what they were doing, and it wasn't drastic, but it certainly made a difference. As leaders, we must continually search out those opportunities.

Learning from mistakes... sometimes that is a hard thing to do. But in terms of leadership it is essential. A group on campus decided that they wanted to sell t-shirts as a fund raiser. They worked hard coming up with a great design and super price. When it came time to place the order, they had secured 100 individuals committed to purchasing a shirt. However this group knew that in order to get an even better price from the shirt company, they had to order 250. All of their enthusiasm was on high alert! After a discussion, all the pros and cons, they decided to order the 250. This was in the fall of 2005. They are still selling those shirts, only now, to get rid of them, they are selling them at a reduced rate. What's the lesson? They didn't really analyze their market. No one took the time to figure out what t-shirts sales were like at the university. They made some money, but by needing to sell the last of the shirts at cost, they are limiting their overall profit. When the new fundraising chair brought a list of ideas to a recent meeting, the group all remembered the t-shirts and selling and more importantly the LACK of selling, and vetoed the idea of more shirts.

In leading groups, so many times we come across little mini groups within the larger groups. As a leader, it is our commitment to foster collaboration and build trust among the people with whom we work. We do that by creating an environment where all people feel valued and safe to share a part of themselves. I work with an organization each year during their annual leadership retreat. This group of leaders goes out to this very remote facility where there is nothing, no cell phones, no tvs, no radios, just the members of the organization and the facilitators that they have hired. They work on team building, goal setting, visioning, and management skills. In that weekend, the togetherness, the learning and the environment of safety, brings the group together. They realize that not only do they HAVE to work together, they can, and they can enjoy it, and be successful at it.

Are you one of those people who will always volunteer for things even when you know your plate is full? A commitment that we make as we lead, is to share power with our team members. In delegating to our followers we empower them to become full, participatory members of our team. We let them know that we value their efforts and that their work product is important. One of the best parts of delegating is that you never know when a simple task may energize a team member and bring out their best! You may have a team member discover a hidden talent even they didn't know existed!

Our final two leadership commitments, really go hand in hand. As leaders, the saying holds true, when we work hard, we should play hard too. And for us, that means first, taking the time to celebrate our victories and second, to recognize the contributions of our team. So many times we get caught up in getting our tasks accomplished and we forget that an important part of the task should always be to say "we have created something great" and then to our team members, "you've done a great job".

No one said leadership is easy, but the rewards are great! In making the commitment to be a role model for our groups, to look positively at the future, to encourage our members to be the best that they can be and then thank them for their efforts, we are fostering not only their development as leaders but our own, moving our organizations forward, positively into the future.