



Lynn White's *Leading Ideas* on

What Leaders Do: Five Actions That Make a Difference

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Leadership is not something done one person to another. It is a process, not an entitlement. Leadership is about getting results through others, managing change, and having a clear vision from which you develop strategies.

- Provide clear vision and direction

Clarity inspires confidence. People expect leaders to have a forward-looking sense of vision and a concern for the future of the school. The vocabulary may change – “dream,” “forward agenda” or “future” – but the message is the same: leaders must know where they are going. For any school, the leader’s vision is magnetic North, the place from which other positive and beneficial directions for the school can be set.

Achieving a vision implies change. Leaders must understand the nuances and best practices of the change process. They must know how to build consensus. After all, people don’t mind change so much; they mind *being* changed.

- Set and celebrate goals

Goals should make people stretch, but they must also be achievable. Identify several key objectives and “make wallpaper out of them” — so all understand what your priorities are and where you’ll be concentrating your time and efforts. And when the goal is reached, celebrate!

Show your determination and perseverance. Monitor and adjust if necessary. Your enthusiasm and excitement signal your personal conviction. Display true passion for a goal, and it will become infectious.

- Openly identify problems

Anticipate and acknowledge issues and then effectively deal with needed change. Leaders need to articulate challenges, both positive and negative, and then do what they say they will do. They build trust by openly admitting mistakes rather than assigning blame.

In this process, bad news isn't avoided. It's not denied, diminished, or dismissed. Challenges are identified, openly discussed, and eventually resolved. Cooperation and respect are hallmarks in dealing with any conflict, and help lead to new understandings before decisions are made. Meetings will be longer, but you will progress toward change and implementation will be smoother.

*“I skate to where I think the puck will be.”
— Wayne Gretsky*

*“Becoming a change-master and developing an ability to predict, embrace and better manage change are absolutely imperative.”
— Web source*

*"If you find a turtle
on a fencepost, it
didn't get there by
accident."
— Calvin Coolidge*

Model leaders give the credit to other people when things go well, and they take the heat when things fall to pieces. Effective leaders know that leadership is about cultivating followers as much as it is about leadership ability. By recognizing problems, you're already closer to solving them and bringing improvement to your school.

- Support initiative-taking and leadership at all levels in the school

Cultivate leadership by empowering others. If you pick the right team, you don't need to tell them what to do. Build self-directed teams of responsive and thoughtful colleagues. Be willing to accept the decisions of competent people who are closest to the issues at hand. Distribute and share leadership itself. Allow others to get on with it. Maximize their talent and creativity.

Your job is to set clear goals, share expectations of desired behavior, and inspire others to competency. Be a mentor; create new opportunities for others to mentor, as well. Be an advocate for others' professional development and career growth: give them time, attention, and funding.

Be honest and generous when paying compliments and keep potentially negative feedback timely, brief and to the point. Give credit where credit is due, helping others to celebrate their successes.

- Increase communication and encourage others to do likewise

All day, every day. People hardly ever complain of "over-communication." Clear, effective communication is the glue that helps progress stick. See things from others' points of view and say so. Speak to be understood, yes. But also speak so you are *not misunderstood*. Listen. Wait. Listen. Question for clarity and understanding.

Expect all members of a group to fully participate in a discussion. This will include voicing concerns and bring up dissenting views. Make sure you model how welcome these are to your decision-making processes.

*"We have two ears and
one voice, and should
use them in that
proportion."
— Unknown*

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