

Mastering Leadership: The importance of feedback.

Written by Emily Rogers Photography by William Baxter



Leadership: it's a topic that floats around in every organization. From the breakroom to the boardroom, leadership is a word that is frequently used but doesn't always have concrete meaning, even to those whose very role in the organization is to lead. As we navigate the ever-connected, increasingly complex world that defines how we interact in business and in our communities, the concept of leadership becomes critical not only to define, but to master. Mastering leadership means that we must lead with integrity, make creative and compassionate choices, and create lasting impact for our organizations and community.

But, how? How do we as leaders find it within ourselves to make the kinds of changes necessary to move forward, to initiate meaningful change, and motivate and encourage our teams to do the same? One of the most thought-provoking questions those in leadership positions can pose is: Who are you being as a leader?

Most leaders know what they have to do to be

successful. They know how to achieve goals as outlined. They know how to move organizations and communities forward. They tend to struggle, however, with the idea of who they need to be in the process of accomplishing these goals. Recently, I sat down with a group of Lakeland's leaders to shine a light on what it means to lead with excellence, and who we are being when we are leading at our highest and our best.

"Leadership isn't about this list of things you do to become a leader," Meg Bellamy, executive director of Catapult, Lakeland's business incubator, explains. "Leadership is about community. It's giving back to your community; it's investing in your community; it's community service. It's all of those things that create a leader."

Ana Wood, director of Waste & Recycling for the Polk County Board of County Commissioners, shares that leadership is not a position or a title. She emphasizes that, "The essence of leadership is purposefully accomplishing things through the people

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Great Leaders:

1
Relate to others in ways that bring out the best in people, groups, and organizations

2
Demonstrate self-awareness

3
Are authentic and courageous

4
Focus on whole system improvement, productivity, and community welfare

5
Focus on results that matter

The skills required to lead with excellence are often hard to measure on a daily basis, but their long-term effects are obvious and undeniable. Leadership is complex, and leaders have many traits, but there are five qualities that consistently identify great leaders.



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around us. Leadership is about how we authentically and consistently interact daily with everyone.”

“Today, if you’re going to have a successful business,” adds Paul Noris, chairman, CEO, and president of Bank of Central Florida, “you have to develop leadership at all levels in the organization. You can’t get it done by just powering through the same old way.” Leading with excellence requires that leadership is recognized and encouraged throughout the organization, not just at the top of the organizational chart.

Visionary leaders recognize that it is possible for every person at every level in the organization to develop these leadership qualities. Organizations must foster a culture that encourages and empowers team members to cultivate these skills. “Leadership happens every day at every level in society,” explains Wood, “and leadership at its best has meaning and purpose. In order for people to take initiative and lead, they need to understand the purpose and vision. Once they understand that, you unleash leadership in an organization at every level.”

The need for transformative leadership is an issue facing most organizations and arguably most

communities, but the availability of a pathway and a toolset that allows organizations to accomplish this goal are more elusive.

Noris expressed the leadership conundrum that faces Lakeland. There’s a great need for organizations to train and develop leaders here in Lakeland by “championing the leadership development continuum from a big picture perspective. Someone needs to look across the spectrum at all of the different roles that each of us can play and connect those dots.”

Local organizations like the Lakeland Economic Development Council (LEDC) have “plugged some holes in the leadership continuum – through the Summer Leadership Program, the College Leadership Program, and Y Lakeland, but no one has connected the programs and defined the way to become a leader in our community,” says Steve Scruggs, president of the Lakeland Economic Development Council.

The ability to initiate change within in an organization or a community is only as strong as the leader’s willingness to make necessary changes within themselves. Leadership is not about imparting

change on others, but about embodying that change in your own attitudes, behaviors, and actions.

McKinsey & Company research suggests that half of all efforts to transform organizational performance fail either because senior leaders don't act as role models for change or because people in the organization defend the status quo. In other words, despite the stated change goals, leaders tend to behave as they did before. Equally, the same McKinsey research indicates that if organizations can identify and address pervasive mindsets at the outset, they are four times more likely to succeed in organizational-change efforts than are companies that overlook this critical component of effective change management.

A best practice in leadership development is the use of 360-degree leadership assessment tools. The "360-degree" part of the assessment means that peers, superiors, and direct reports provide feedback to the leader. The information that is gathered then provides a comprehensive view of a leader's strengths and limitations. Through these tools and the perspectives they provide, leaders gain deeper insight into their behavior, what is driving it, and how it impacts their ability to lead effectively. The 360-degree assessments, like The Leadership Circle Profile™, are designed to improve leadership effectiveness by revealing the underlying assumptions that drive thoughts and behavior, creating opportunities for leaders to make more conscious choices about who they are being and what they are doing in their roles as leaders.

Executed thoughtfully, "360-degree feedback is powerful insight for leaders," agrees Wood, "but it takes courage to be open to feedback from peers and direct reports, not just your boss, as is common with a typical performance review." 360-degree feedback identifies the strengths a leader needs to build upon, indicates the impact of a leader's style on others, and highlights gaps in awareness.

Taking the time to participate in a 360-degree evaluation can seem daunting, as the world seems determined to fill the space in our day with tasks and



to-do's, but slowing down for the purposes of better understanding your leadership style and its impact can yield dramatic results. Bellamy, who recently participated in a 360-degree assessment with her LEDC colleagues, emphasizes that not making time for leadership evaluation can put your organization in a precarious situation. "The culture of your company is at stake. When you have areas of leadership weakness and are so caught up in the day to day of trying to get things done but don't stop to think about your impact on other people, your organization is at risk."

By pausing to assess how things are going, taking time to reflect upon how our words and actions affect others, and being observant of team dynamics, a leader can become more aware of the energy he or

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she is bringing into a space and the atmosphere, emotions, and motivation that are created. This “energetic wake” — the concept of what a team experiences through a leader’s energetic field — is as crucial to leadership as the act of leading.

When a leader has the opportunity to truly understand how others experience their leadership style, without defending or judging, they have the opportunity to make transformational shifts in their leadership approach, achieve more impactful results, and do so in a more sustainable fashion. This knowledge and understanding reduces the potential for derailment and accelerates the leadership development process.

Claudia Tritton, business development director for the LEDC, says leading with excellence is important for Lakeland because, “Everyone has to own it. There are many ways to lead and be present about the impact you’re having in our community. As leaders, we’re either making a deposit or a withdrawal.”

Accelerating leadership development will be crucial to the growth of our leadership base in Lakeland. “We are poised as a community to make some great strides,” says Noris. “With Florida Polytechnic, the hospital expansion, the Catapult 2.0



As a business consultant, executive coach and retreat leader, Emily strategically advises and supports businesses, organizations and individuals in growing and achieving their full potential in purposeful and balanced ways. She is an adjunct leadership development instructor at Polk State Corporate College and is certified to administer the Leadership Circle Profile.™ Prior to starting her business in 2013, she advised Fortune 100 brands, professional sports teams and global nonprofits as an executive leader and senior consultant with IEG (now ESP Properties), a WPP company.

business incubator, and many other initiatives, Lakeland is at a rare time in our history. However, we’re going through a transition in leadership as an entire generation of business and community leaders move on to the next phase of their life.”

Through well-developed and integrated leadership development programs and ongoing mentoring and coaching, organizations and communities have the ability to maximize the potential of their existing and future leaders. By ensuring they have the self-awareness and skills to leverage their strengths, recognize limiting patterns, leaders can transform into compassionate, courageous leaders who inspire change, impact our community, and leave a legacy of achievement and integrity.

When I pose a final question to this gathering of Lakeland’s leaders: “What is possible if we as Lakelanders get leadership development right?” Steve Scruggs sums it up perfectly. “Everything is possible,” he says. “Lakeland’s legacy has yet to be written.”

The time is now to identify and develop leaders who will seize the opportunity to continue to make Lakeland the place where everyone wants to be in business, work, raise families, and play. ☺

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