Happy Strategy

Improving Your Ability to Lead

GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICES

> Your first step to empowering your team to do their best work

Leadership 101

Leading a team is hard, and very few people are officially trained in how to do it. It's difficult to prioritize the health of your team when you have your own work to do. You may have spent years completing your own tasks well to find yourself suddenly in charge of developing and directing the work of an entire team—and you still have your own tasks to accomplish!

Start with these best practices to develop your personal leadership skills and enable your team to do their best work. They may even help you to feel more focused and balanced throughout the day.

1 **Make sure you are communicating clearly.**
Make your expectations clear, particularly if something is an action item. For example, often leaders will make offhand comments that can be interpreted as to-do's. If you are just thinking out loud, say so, and tell your team to not take a next step at this time.

2 **Be aware of your own cognitive biases.**
Cognitive biases are errors and shortcuts in thinking that affect our decision-making. We all have them. For example, confirmation bias is where we favor information that conforms to our preexisting beliefs. Be transparent about the reasoning that goes into your decision-making processes, and back it up with research as much as possible.

3 **Commit to regular one-on-one meetings and coaching sessions with each team member.**
Learn the difference and importance of both meetings on the next page.

4 **Model healthy work behavior.**
Take breaks, don't send emails in the middle of the night or while on vacation, seek help when you feel overwhelmed, and be aware of how your emotions and attitude can affect your team.

5 **Carefully consider your team members' time when scheduling meetings.**
Ask yourself: Does everyone need to be there? Can you share information in a more efficient way?

6 **Model constructive feedback and ask your team to provide it to you as well.**
Constructive feedback is information-specific, issue-focused, and based on observations, not interpretations. Observations are what you see occur and are based on facts; interpretations are your analysis or opinion of what you see occur and can come off as judgemental. Always give the feedback face-to-face or by phone when you physically can't be together, not through email or Slack.

7 **Build reflection into everything you do.**
Carving out time to reflect on completed projects—identifying what went well and what didn't—can help instill a communal practice of continuous learning to improve future projects.

Two Fundamentals: Growth Mindset and Emotional Intelligence

Commit to a Growth Mindset

According to psychologist Carol Dweck, a growth mindset is when "people believe their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point." Often leaders fail because they are stuck in a **fixed mindset: they simply don't believe their employees can change**. Adopting a growth mindset and dedication to helping your team learn and grow increases motivation and productivity.

Focus on Emotional Intelligence

Psychologist Daniel Goleman originally defined emotional intelligence as a combination of **self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills**. Effective leaders hone these skills. Your team will respond to your emotions involuntarily on a physiological level. For example, if you display extreme negative emotions and stress, your team will absorb your stress and it will impact their work or overall mindset.

Effective leaders commit to two types of meetings with their team members:

1 **ONE-ON-ONES**

Regular one-on-ones are conversations with each of your team members that are focused on their **workload, plans, responsibilities, concerns, and achievements** and can help build trust and streamline workflow. These meetings can be as simple as a casual conversation at your team member's desk, where you ask them, "What do you need from me right now?" Make these sessions frequent and informal.

> ✳ *If you don't have time to have regular conversations with each person on your team, then you are in charge of too many people.*

2 **COACHING SESSIONS**

Coaching sessions are different from one-on-ones in that they focus specifically on your team member's **growth and development**. Is there a specific skill they want to improve? A strategy for interacting with a particular colleague or tackling a new assignment? A long-term goal for their career trajectory? All of these are things to tackle in a coaching session, which should ideally happen monthly.

Michael Bungay Stanier, Author of *The Coaching Habit*, offers these tips to make the most out of your coaching session:

- Start by asking, "What's on your mind?"
- Ask only one question at a time.
- Ask the question without a lot of preamble. (To soften questions, you can use phrases like: "Out of curiosity, just so I understand," etc.)
- Stick to questions that start with "what".
- Learn to be comfortable with silence.

- Indicate you are listening to the person by acknowledging what they are saying.
- Refrain from giving advice in the form of a question ("Have you thought of doing x?"). Listen, let the person come to their own conclusions. Then, offer suggestions in the form of suggestions.
- End each conversation with a quick reflection and share back what was most useful for you as well.

See more coaching resources at boxofcrayons.com.
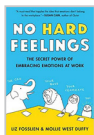
Our Favorite Leadership Resources

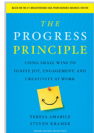**Beyond Measure: The Big Impact of Small Changes**

The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More, and Change the Way You Lead Forever

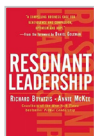**Mindset: The New Psychology of Success**

No Hard Feelings: The Secret Power of Embracing Emotions at Work

The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work

Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence

Resonant Leadership: Renewing Yourself and Connecting with Others Through Mindfulness, Hope, and Compassion

Strengths Based Leadership

Happy Strategy is a creative culture agency based in Philadelphia. We help companies more thoughtfully design their workplace culture and processes to be more human, more supportive of individual team members, and more successful in the long run because of it.

To learn more about us or to schedule a introductory conversation, email julia@thehappystrategy.com.