If you look up the definition of leader or leadership in several dictionaries, you will find a similar overall description of someone who leads, commands, or moves a group toward a goal. The newer, softer definitions include terms such as guide, influence, or inspire. Yet, although it is easy to find the “what” of leaders and leadership, it is difficult to find the “how” of leaders and leadership. How implies action, doing, effort, a process, a set of skills, a series of attributes. The good news is that the actions, skills, and attributes of effective leaders can be learned. The bad news is that the internal and external challenges that leaders face today may not be the ones to be faced in the future. So, will the actions, skills, and attributes of leaders be enough for tomorrow? In this Q&A, 4 experts with diverse backgrounds and leadership roles discuss leadership styles, leadership effectiveness, and mistakes leaders make. These individuals also provide advice for first-time leaders.

What is the most important skill that tomorrow’s leaders will need?

Angie Morgan: Tomorrow’s leader will need an open mind. Despite our country’s current need for innovation, many individuals are resistant to change. I hear too often that when new ideas are presented, they are met with responses as to why those ideas won’t work. After all, legacy is powerful: “The way we have always done things” has an amazing draw. I understand why this is. When I hear a seemingly off-the-wall idea, instinctually my response is to write it off or reject it. But more often than not, when I challenge myself to really listen and consider, I discover brilliance in new approaches.

As one example, one of my clients used to rely heavily on call centers, historically believing that to run an efficient, effective call center needed a heavy-handed supervisor who kept a watchful eye over employees. The recent recession forced the company to look at costs and make major changes with its approach to work. One initiative, which was met with deep hesitation and done out of pure necessity, was to have call center employees work from their office at home, thereby reducing office rent costs. Any guesses as to what happened? You got it: Efficiency and effectiveness soared, and customer satisfaction increased. Senior leadership was shocked that this new approach—one that clearly no one would have predicted—worked so well.

James Hernandez: Because of rapid and relentless change, leaders must be resilient. A leader must adapt to and lead changes. Resilience encompasses grit—dogged determination in the face of obstacles and an ability to remain unflappable under pressure.

Ian Wright: The attribute that will help tomorrow’s leaders will be the ability to lead their colleagues and employees through change and uncertainty. To do so will require clear communication of vision and goals, and a clear description of a road map to success and what success will look like. Leaders will
need to outline their expectations, follow up on agreed milestones, and be clear on risks that must be managed along the way. Leaders will have to seek feedback, listen, assimilate facts and data, solve problems, and make clear decisions that are consistent and true to their stated goals.

**Ora Pescovitz:** I firmly believe that there are 7 fundamental attributes (the 7 Cs) that distinguish extraordinary leaders of the past, present, and future:

- **Moral Compass:** Knowing right vs wrong, who you are and where you are going. It’s what grounds you, gives you direction, and tells you that you are on the right track.
- **Compassion:** The idea that you can put yourself in another person’s shoes and feel empathy.
- **Contribution:** You have to want to make a difference in the world.
- **Commitment:** The time, energy, and brute force you dedicate to achieving goals.
- **Communication:** If you can’t articulate and share your ideas with others, you most likely won’t be able to execute your vision.
- **Collaboration:** Great ideas are made greater when influenced by other perspectives.
- **Creativity:** If you really want to make a difference in the way you approach your work, look at the world in a novel way—see something unique. Creativity is essential to problem solving.

**What is the biggest mistake a leader can make?**

**Ian Wright:** Leaders who lose the trust of their organization have an uphill struggle. When leaders commit to something, they need to deliver on it. There will be adjustments made along the way, but these adjustments also need to be clearly communicated as openly as possible. When full disclosure is not possible, good leaders acknowledge this situation and talk about when and how that transparency can be achieved.

**Ora Pescovitz:** The biggest mistake a leader can make is to view mistakes as failures. Every mistake we make as professionals and as people provides a unique and important opportunity to learn and grow. Another mistake is to think that you are in it alone. Make a point of inviting diverse viewpoints into all decision-making processes and discussions to ensure that you are looking at a challenge from various perspectives. Collaboration leads to more thoughtful and deliberate decisions and, typically, better results.

**James Hernandez:** Leaders can mistake leadership with management or being the boss. Leaders are not bosses. Bosses command, leaders inspire. Leaders are not managers. As John P. Kotter stated in *What Leaders Really Do*, “Management is about coping with complexity. . . . Leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change.” In contrast to leadership, one can be an excellent manager without motivating or inspiring others because “control is central to management.” A leader establishes direction, strategies, and priorities; models behavior and mentors others; and inspires trust.

**Angie Morgan:** When individuals get promoted into leadership and managerial roles, they often assume that they now have a team that works for them. This is a huge mistake. The reverse is actually true. Your team doesn’t work for you; you work for your team. Many individuals get caught up in the trappings of their new role: their new authority, office space, perks, etc., etc. They don’t think about the real responsibility that they have: to lead their team effectively.

There is a difference between management and leadership. Admiral Grace Hopper says it best: “You manage things. You lead people.” Managers can do themselves a tremendous service by studying what true leadership is. At Lead Star, we define a leader as “someone who influences outcomes and inspires others.” It’s important for every manager to study and examine what behaviors build influence and what behaviors also inspire others.

I served as a captain in the Marine Corps. Even in this command-and-control environment, I learned that leaders convince; they don’t command. The day you have to rely upon your title to be effective is the day that you have lost your influence. Certainly, people will still do what they are told—but you will never, ever inspire and motivate them to go above and beyond.

**How important is it to develop a personal leadership brand?**

**Angie Morgan:** Branding has become very popular in this day and age. My concern with branding is that it leads people to act in ways very inconsistent with their true personality. When you act, you’re not able to be authentic. And acting takes up a lot of time and energy that can be better spent developing your leadership abilities.

My guidance for individuals is to work to understand your strengths (and build upon them) and understand your weaknesses (and minimize them/
improve upon them). If you are looking to build trust, you have to be authentic. Those looking to you for leadership will want to know that you are consistent with your leadership style.

**Ian Wright:** Authenticity is essential for any aspiring leader. It is futile to try to develop a “leadership personality.” Being true to your own personality is essential, but you can help by developing and exercising skills of listening, engaging, and communicating, and by being able to use data-driven, analytical problem-solving skills. Some great leaders seem to do this so effortlessly that they appear to “shoot from the hip,” but there is really a lot being processed inside their heads. Demonstrating genuine interest in the activities and the people in your organization will mean a huge amount to everyone and is extremely motivating.

**James Hernandez:** In my opinion, there is only one leadership “brand,” and that is being authentic in all situations. I have seen newly minted leaders try to adapt leadership approaches that are inappropriate or out of character for them. This can cause considerable stress for both the leader and the team. Followers are extremely keen in detecting nonverbal language that betrays a false leader’s real intent. Integrity at all times is crucial. Once integrity is lost, it may never be regained. A scientist has many tools. A leader has one, and that is integrity.

**Ora Pescovitz:** At its core, your brand is your reputation. It is important to remain true to your values and to demonstrate those values in all that you do. I became a physician-scientist because of my fundamental desire to make the world a better place for future generations. This is my checkpoint every single day and has been over the course of my career. Know yourself and be yourself.

**Should a person have (or use) more than one leadership style?**

**Ora Pescovitz:** A good leader empowers, encourages, and enables the success of those who make up the organization that he or she leads. Because people have different motivators, it is important to adjust to those diverse personalities. However, you should always remain true to your core, your values, and your mission.

**Angie Morgan:** I sincerely believe that individuals have one, true leadership style—that is, of course, their own. It is important for leaders to be aware of and practice the traits, principles, and qualities ascribed to leaders—such as accountability, credibility, consistency, integrity, etc. But first and foremost, leaders must develop their self-awareness to appreciate their strengths and improve upon their weaknesses in their efforts to influence and inspire.

**James Hernandez:** A collaborative leadership style is preferred in most situations. It is the leadership style that is most likely to lead to the best solutions. However, difficult situations may call for different approaches. In their book *Manager’s Desktop Consultant*, Essex and Kusy describe several conflict-management styles and their uses. Compromise can work if collaboration fails or if the issue is of moderate importance. Battling should be used only in situations when compromise is inappropriate and the issue is urgent and important, such as issues of safety or harassment. Giving in, called *harmonizing*, can be done if the issue is of trivial importance. Retreating is appropriate if the leader needs more time to assess the situation and the issue and timing are not critical.

**Ian Wright:** Changing your leadership style is very dangerous if it leads to a loss in authenticity. Honest reactions to events are more credible. If the situation is serious, then you should be serious. If you are giving an award or recognition, enjoy the fun.

Whilst genuine emotion is appreciated, there will be times when others will look to you to get them through difficult situations. It is important that you acknowledge problems, but don’t let your own personal feelings cause others to be unduly concerned (or buoyant), or to read too much into any given situation.

**How do I assess if my leadership style is effective?**

**Angie Morgan:** To paraphrase a quotation from Colin Powell in *My American Journey*: “The day that people stop bringing you their problems is the day that you have stopped leading them.” This is a great way to test if people find you influential. For example, if I am a leader or manager and no one ever knocks at my door to ask for my guidance, that’s a sign that my employees don’t seek me out for solutions or don’t trust that I can help them.

Every leader needs to hold themselves accountable to high standards and to regularly ask themselves the following questions:

- Do I add value to my employees? If so, how?
- If I were one of my employees, how would I describe my leadership style?
- How would my employees critique my leadership abilities? What would they say are my strengths and my weaknesses?
Are my actions selfish or selfless? What would others say?
Am I quick to anger? Do I show inconsistency with my emotions?
Do I take ownership of problems, or am I quick to place blame?

Ian Wright: You need to nurture an environment that encourages useful feedback. Some organizations insist that managers participate in 360-degree feedback or, even more usefully, mandate upward-feedback sessions for all managers. If these are managed well, they can be extremely valuable and sometimes even enjoyable. If these mechanisms are not available to you, seek feedback from people that you respect (not just your friends). If some form of mentoring is available, use this opportunity to discuss your approaches and performance.

Ora Pescovitz: The best gauge for success as a leader is the success, satisfaction, and dedication of the people in your organization. In an academic medical center, a gratified and supported faculty and staff lead to better care for patients, more innovative research, and a reputation as a preferred destination for learning. If these things are happening, I know we are on the right track. If not, I need to understand why, and this requires being accessible. In any role—leadership or otherwise—it is critical to be open to continuous reevaluation of how things are going and how you are doing. Everything is fluid, and you need to remain flexible and willing to adapt to changes in your internal and external environments.

James Hernandez: In Measure of a Leader, Daniels and Daniels used a unique approach to assess the effectiveness of a leader by examining the response of the followers:

- Do most people follow the leader, how quickly do they follow, and do they go in the same direction?
- Do most follow the leader’s vision and values, and do they adapt teamwork?
- Do individuals assist their peers?
- Are trust, respect, and growth of the team evident?

People enter science and medicine because they want to make a difference. In being a good role model and mentor, the ideal leader brings out the best in people. The best leaders are like umbrellas—they shield their followers so that they can do their best. As Lao Tzu said, “When the best leader’s work is done the people say, ‘We did it ourselves!’”

What advice would you give someone going into a leadership position for the first time?

James Hernandez: Reflect on why you want to be a leader. People follow leaders who show integrity, authenticity, and courage, not titles. Understand clearly what your supervisor expects of you. Talk less. Learn to listen well. Show your team that you care about them as people, not just as your direct reports. Your expertise got you this position, but your ability to lead will determine your success. Watch your nonverbal language. Don’t tease subordinates. Hold everyone to the same high standards. Know your implicit biases and face them. Mentor and groom others for success. Take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Ora Pescovitz: Create diverse leadership teams. Encourage bold thinking and courageous discussion. Inspire creativity. Surround yourself with mentors so that you continue to grow and evolve as a leader. Be true to your values. Embrace mistakes as learning opportunities. And make sure you love what you do and find meaning in it every day.

Angie Morgan: Spend your first 2 weeks on the job listening and learning. Meet with all of your employees, ask them about their professional ambitions, and even ask them what they want out of you. Pay attention to these answers, and challenge yourself to meet the needs of your team members. Also, meet with your manager, and get a crystal-clear understanding of what your expectations are and how you fit into the team. To set yourself up for continued success, get inside your boss’s head, and understand what is important to him or her—this knowledge will be very beneficial to you in the future!

Ian Wright: Start by participating in leadership courses that can help you begin to assess your leadership style and its impact on how others may perceive you. Implementing the right balance of devolving responsibility and trust may require some practice, but ensuring clear checkpoints and active communication can protect you as you learn how to navigate this new territory. Plus, how you listen and communicate will alter, depending on the purpose of your interactions. Before the start any formal dialogue with your staff, determine if you are there to coach, mentor, instruct, or even perhaps discipline. Doing so will help you to focus on your messages and instill confidence in those there to learn from you.

What is the biggest challenge that leaders face today?

Ian Wright: The big challenge today is the one that will likely challenge leaders for some time to come, which is
leading in a difficult economic environment and leading through organizational changes (many of which are occurring as a result of current economic conditions). See these types of situations as opportunities to drive beneficial change into any organization and as a gift not to be overlooked. Thought leadership in an industry or scientific field also requires many of the same attributes, such as listening, analyzing, and communicating, but it ultimately is earned through proven commitment to deliver resources, ideas, and products that solve problems in a way that many people will find exciting and innovative.

James Hernandez: The biggest challenges lie within. Many people in science and medicine have mixed feelings about authority. With practice, most leaders can learn to strike a balance between supporting people and holding them accountable. Leaders are not born, they are made; thus, the skills, knowledge, and abilities can be learned, including finance, quality, informatics, change management, and basic business skills.

Ora Pescovitz: I imagine that leaders in every generation face similar challenges. How do you keep your workforce engaged and driven, succeed with fewer resources in an increasingly competitive landscape, and effectively respond to regional, national, and international needs and shifts in thinking and priority? The adage about working “smarter not harder” is on the mark. This is why it is important to have intelligent, experienced, innovative, and diligent people on your leadership teams and throughout your organization. Nothing stays the same, and you need to be creative and committed to stay strong, effective, and successful.

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