

# Mastering the 4 Fundamentals of Effective Leadership

WHEN YOU'RE IN NEED OF A REFRESHER OF WHAT GOOD LEADERSHIP ENTAILS, REVISIT THESE BASICS.

BY MARK LUKENS

Sometimes real leadership innovation isn't about creating something bright and shiny and new. Perhaps it's about dusting off an old piece of wisdom that others have forgotten in the rush toward novelty. Or maybe it's about taking lessons long recognized in other disciplines but not applied in our own, whether that means learning something from a different area of business or from an entirely separate field.

A recent blog post authored by management coach Justin Locke hit on an important insight that is both taken from outside business and often overlooked: the importance of fundamentals.

Mastery of a musical instrument means going over the same basic lessons again and again until they become instinctive, mastering the fundamentals before you apply anything more advanced. The same lesson can be applied in leadership--get the fundamentals right and the rest will follow.

Here are four fundamentals of good leadership worth mastering:

## 1. HUMILITY

When you're at the top and everyone is looking up to you for guidance it can be easy to think that leadership is about you. But that's a deceptive and destructive way of thinking.

As historic leaders such as George Washington have realized, leadership is about the people around you. Recognize their concerns. Live with the difficulties they face. Make your focus on them rather than on yourself, your ideas, and your status. If you do those things then people will follow you no matter what it takes, just like they did for Washington.

Remember, leadership is about the led.

## 2. COMMUNICATION

Good communication is central to every human relationship, and so to every business relationship. Whether it's with customers, colleagues, or suppliers, clear communication builds trust, improves productivity, and ensures that the job is done right.

Good communication is about listening as much as speaking; planning as much as delivering; personal moments as much as addressing the room. There are lots of details to work on, but they all come back to the fundamental point of communicating well.

### **3. TRUST**

Trust is vital to leadership and it isn't something that just happens. You have to earn people's trust, and to practice the skills that will help you to do this--communicating clearly, listening to others, setting and living up to clear expectations.

But trust is a two-way thing. If you don't show others that you trust them then you reduce their ability to do their best work and you prevent them from ever fully trusting you. So you also have to learn to trust others, and to act on that trust. Don't try to control the details. Recognize that solutions other than your own may be good enough or even better than what you came up with. Let others do their best without you peering over their shoulders. In the end you'll all get more done.

### **4. INNOVATION**

It's easy to get stuck in familiar patterns. After all, following the same routine is easy and it feels safe.

But anyone can follow a routine. A leader needs to innovate and to show others how this is done, or the whole organization will slip into complacency and stagnate.

Practice trying new things and developing new ideas. Apply skills from outside of your field. Develop new thinking habits. Train your brain to innovate.

If scales are the fundamentals of learning to play music then principles like these are the fundamentals of learning to lead. If we keep practicing them then the other skills and habits will easily follow.

But unlike scales the fundamentals of good leadership can't be easily deduced. So what do you think they are? Do my suggestions ring true for you, or have I missed the most important point? Let me know what you think--let's work on our scales together.

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