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The Five Practices of Exemplary Student Leadership®

In this section we summarize the five practices of exemplary leaders and associated behaviors that form the foundation of the *Student LPI*. (More in-depth descriptions of each leadership practice can be found in *The Leadership Challenge*.) At the end of each summary are two behavioral commitments that leaders make to put the practice into use (see also Visuals 2A and 2B, “The Ten Commitments of Leadership,” in Appendix B). Students and young adults may find they have already demonstrated these practices and commitments in many of their activities—for instance, on sports teams, in school or on campus, in church groups, or in clubs and other organizations. The *Student LPI* will enable many to consider the leadership skills they already possess as well as to explore the skills they want to develop.



Model the Way

Leaders have a philosophy—a set of high standards by which the organization is measured, a set of values about how others in the organization should be treated, and a set of principles that make the organization unique and distinctive. Leaders stand up for their beliefs and show by their own example how others ought to behave. Leaders build their credibility by maintaining consistency between their words and deeds.

Being a role model requires clarity about personal values. Focusing other people’s energies and commitments requires developing an alignment between the values of the leader and others in the organization.

The commitments of leaders to *Model the Way* involve

- **Finding your voice** by clarifying your personal values
- **Setting the example** by aligning actions with shared values

Note: The following case studies also appear in Chapter One of the *Student Workbook*.

While Jason Hegland was the captain of his water polo team, he learned the hard way about how to be the team leader: “First, I was just plain bossy. I was also stubborn. Things were supposed to go *my* way. Worst of all, I didn’t show anyone else what they meant to the team as a whole. I cut people down when I should have built them up.” Luckily, early in the season, a teammate brought these flaws to his attention, and, to his credit, Jason reflected on what was really important and quickly made changes, in his words, “to show everyone how a real captain acts.”

One of the first things he did was to get himself to school every day at 5:00 A.M. for practice. When he saw other players during the day, he would ask them why they weren’t at practice. Soon enough, Jason said, “The message about practices sunk in and we had 100 percent attendance.” He also opened up communications. Every day he asked his teammates: “What didn’t we do well yesterday that we need to work on today?” He asked those who were better players than he was what he needed to do to improve himself. Furthermore, Jason stopped focusing on errors and became the “head cheerleader” for the team, mentioning at each postgame meeting at least one good thing that each of his teammates had done.

As for results, Jason pointed out that, while the changes he made in his leadership style didn’t lead his team to the state championship, it was the first time that any school from a Chicago suburb placed within the top ten, and most importantly, he said, “That year the team members were the closest that they had ever been to one another.” The lesson for Jason: “I learned that those who follow you are only as good as the model you present them with.”



Inspire a Shared Vision

There is no freeway to the future; often there are not even paved roads, only uncertain terrain and wilderness, so pioneering leaders rely on a compass and a dream. They look to the future with a sense of what is uniquely possible and passionately believe that people working together can make a difference. Vision is the leader’s magnetic north; it gives direction and purpose to the organization.

A leader’s vision is insufficient to create organized movement. Leaders must enlist others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes, and dreams so that others clearly understand and accept the vision as their own.

Leaders breathe life into their vision with strong appeals and quiet persuasion, generating enthusiasm and excitement for the common vision. They see a future full of possibilities.

The commitments of leaders to *Inspire a Shared Vision* involve

- **Envisioning the future** by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities
- **Enlisting others** in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations

The insight for Filip Morovich was learning that “leadership is not about being the great heroic solver of all problems; it is about inspiring people to believe that the problem can be solved by working together.” In one of Filip’s classes, the assignment was to produce a one-hour musical play (with singing, dancing, and all the rest!) on some historical theme. Pretty much everyone in the class was afraid and daunted by this task because few of them had any theater experience or particular acting talents. Filip described the scene: “The group was adrift and everyone was sitting around staring at one another in stark silence. I got very angry inside, and at that instant I had a vision. A real flash of lightning in my mind made it clear to me that we could be successful. But at this point it was only my idea, only my flash of inspiration, and so I had to share it and make it a common belief among us all.”

He decided some drama was necessary to get everyone’s attention, so he picked up his pen, raised it high in the air, and dropped it onto the binder on his lap. A bomb going off in the room could not have been louder. This had the intended effect and Filip launched into inspiring a shared vision: “I used a hopeful and positive tone of voice. I was excited and called on our collective strength as a team to move forward and be successful. I hoped that my excitement and positive mood would prove infectious and revitalize the group. We all noticed an uplift of our mood and we could literally see a sparkle of hope returning to one another’s eyes. The key was making the vision of our success a joint process because we all came to believe that we could do this.”



Challenge the Process

Challenge is the opportunity for greatness. Maintaining the status quo breeds mediocrity. Leaders seek and accept challenging opportunities to test their abilities and look for innovative ways to improve the organization. People do their best when there is a chance to change the way things are. Leaders motivate others to exceed their limits.

Most innovations, however, do not spring directly from the leader. Leaders realize that good ideas come through the ears—not the mouth—and listen to the counsel of the people who use their services and products and the people who do the work.

Leadership is closely associated with change and innovation; the quest for change is an adventure and the training ground for leaders. For leaders to get the best from themselves and others, they must find the task enjoyable and

intrinsically rewarding. Leaders are experimenters. They find ways to get outside the imaginary boundaries of organizational convention. They take risks—and focus on mistakes as learning opportunities.

Leaders get people started by convincing them that the impossible is possible and by taking the first step themselves. Breaking problems into manageable pieces keeps people from being overwhelmed. Planning small victories makes the larger goal seem achievable. Small wins breed success and set the stage for building commitment to the new path.

The commitments of leaders to *Challenge the Process* involve

- **Searching for opportunities** by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve
- **Experimenting and taking risks** by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes

Allison Avon told us that the idea of Challenging the Process took on real meaning for her when she was in charge of her school's annual Charity Fashion Show. The school typically raised funds to buy toys for the children at a local Head Start program. For various reasons the program administrators didn't want the school to buy the children toys, and "we couldn't convince them otherwise." Everyone was pretty discouraged and wanted to cancel the fashion show.

Allison wasn't ready to give up, so she asked everyone for their ideas and what alternatives they could imagine. As a result they decided, "Perhaps if we bought the children educational items such as books instead of toys, then maybe the Head Start program administrators would be more receptive." In the end the fashion show and their day with the children—sharing and reading books together—were great successes. As Allison reported: "The results were better than we could have hoped for. This process of trial and error gave me a new perspective on what is required of a successful leader. When the process challenges you," Allison retorts, "challenge back."



Enable Others to Act

Leaders know that they cannot do it alone. It takes partners to get extraordinary things done in an organization. Leaders create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. They build teams that feel like a family and make people feel like owners, not like hired hands.

Getting people to work together begins with creating cooperative goals and sustaining trusting relationships. Leaders understand how being trustworthy is the reciprocal of trusting others. They make sure that when they win, everyone wins.

Empowering others is essentially the process of turning followers into leaders themselves. Leaders realize how power is not a fixed-sum quantity but an

expandable resource. The process of strengthening others is facilitated when people work on tasks that are critical to the organization's success, when they exercise discretion and autonomy in their efforts, when their accomplishments are visible and recognized by others, and when they are well connected to other people of influence and support.

The commitments leaders make to *Enable Others to Act* involve

- **Fostering collaboration** by promoting cooperative goals and building trust
- **Strengthening others** by sharing power and discretion

With beads of sweat dripping down his face, Peter Freeman continued to attack the nails with his hammer. It was a blazing hot day in Harlan, Kentucky, and he and his classmates had to finish the roof by the end of the week; but it was already Thursday and the roof was not close to being finished. "As I looked around," said Peter, "I saw a group of kids who were unmotivated, tired, and hot." He began nailing again, thinking to himself, "We have got to finish this roof." He looked up again and saw another possibility: a group of highly motivated, energetic people who would work together to accomplish the task. It began to dawn on Peter that "merely working hard on my own would not allow us to reach the goal of finishing the roof in another day."

So he set out to enable those around him, reminding them of the purpose and urgency of their task and how important it was for them to work together as a team. "This brought about an amazing change," he reported, and "rejuvenated and reenergized, my friends attacked their work with vigor." Peter realized that he could not accomplish "my goals on my own without the help of a team." The key was to involve others in making key decisions and sharing ideas about how to best accomplish "OUR" goal. "I asked for their opinions," Peter explained, "finding out from them what they thought was the best way to go about things." In fact, before he realized it, others got excited and took on new responsibilities, making choices and acting like leaders themselves . . . and the job was done!



Encourage the Heart

Getting extraordinary things done in organizations is hard work. The climb to the summit is arduous and steep. Leaders encourage others to continue the quest. They give heart by visibly recognizing people's contributions to the common vision. They express pride in the accomplishments of their teams. They make people feel like heroes by telling the rest of the organization about what these individuals and the team have accomplished.

Leaders have high expectations both of themselves and of their constituents. They provide people with clear direction, substantial encouragement, personal attention, and meaningful feedback. Leaders make people feel like winners, and winning people like to continue raising the stakes!

Celebrating team accomplishments adds fun to hard work and reinforces team spirit. Celebrations increase people's network of connections and promote information sharing. Fostering high-quality interpersonal relationships enhances productivity along with both physical and psychological health.

The commitments of leaders to *Encourage the Heart* involve

- **Recognizing contributions** by showing appreciation for individual excellence
- **Celebrating the values and victories** by creating a spirit of community

“Being a leader on my volleyball team,” Kirsten Cornell explained, “forced me to learn lessons about encouragement and put them into practice.” One of her main goals was to create a positive atmosphere on the team: “So I made sure that I recognized people for making good plays with gestures as simple as high-fives and words of praise (and my teammates got in the habit of doing the same).” As Kirsten put it: “I found that encouraging my teammates was one of the easiest and most beneficial thing I could do to make the team better.”

Kirsten said that part of creating an uplifting attitude on the team was letting the players know that she had confidence in them: “I showed my teammates with both words and actions that I believed in them. With words I would tell them that I knew they could make a perfect pass or get a great hit. With actions I showed them my belief in them in a tangible way by spreading out the sets between players so that everyone had a chance to get into the game.” Also critical, she said, was “taking an honest interest in each player. I got to know my teammates as both people and athletes. I knew the things they were dealing with outside of the thirty-foot square where we met to play, and this allowed me to realize when they needed extra encouragement and support.”

Finally, Kirsten created a culture of celebration by acknowledging accomplishments, however small they might have been, both on and off the court (for example, having birthday cards signed by everyone on the team). “This culture,” she explained, “caused us to have fun while we worked and to take pride in what we achieved together.”