6 Shifts to Develop a Leader's Mindset

FranklinCovey

Whether your organization is a start-up or has been around for decades, there's no denying the disruption and tension everyone is facing because of today's unpredictable circumstances. Rapid changes within organizations like structure, schedules, and the broad adoption of remote or hybrid environments have caused a ripple effect, requiring organizations to shift and innovate to keep up with changing needs.

Leaders are not exempt from the impact of so much change. If your leaders' approaches toward work haven't changed significantly in recent months or even years, it's likely they're not actually leading. Leaders need more than a retroactive managerial playbook, causing resistance to change. Leaders need to shift how they think and what they do to succeed in the new world—and it requires a new mindset.

Contents

The Power of Mindsets

The results we get depend on what we do. What we do depends on how we see the world. If we want to get better results, we have to begin by changing our mindsets.

MINDSETS

SEE

DO

GET

RESULTS

PRACTICES

SEE-DO-GET CYCLE
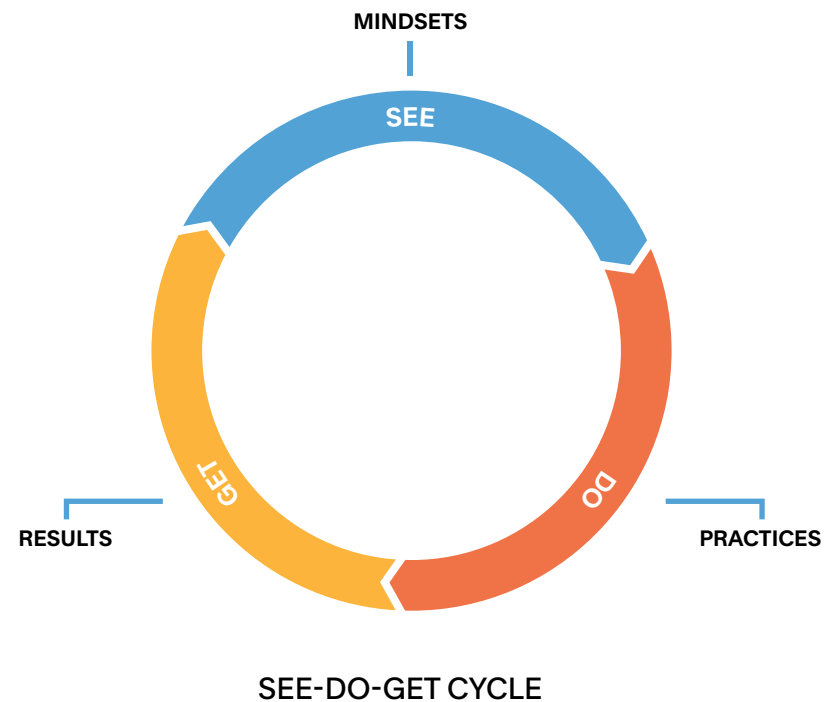
1. Focus on getting things done with and through other people instead of only doing things yourself.

You may have tremendous technical skills (and maybe they're even a big reason you got promoted), but those skills won't carry you as a leader. Getting great results from a team of individuals requires a whole different skillset. The primary measure of your performance isn't how many sales deals you close, how much code you write, or how terrific your analysis is—it's how many deals your team closes, how much code your team writes, and how terrific your team's analysis is.

This sounds like a simple shift, but many leaders struggle with this shift. To some, all those meetings with direct reports and up-and-across conversations don't feel like "real work." But seeking, organizing, and communicating information is real leadership work that, when done well, allows you to leverage your team for a much greater impact than you could ever achieve on your own.

Embrace the mindset, then consider, plan, and communicate the details.

What does an ideal outcome look like, and can you explain it clearly to your team?

How will you organize and delegate the work?

How much guidance does each direct report need to achieve that ideal outcome?

How will you get what your team needs from others across the organization?

And once the work is underway, what course correction needs to happen for the plans to work?

Great leaders understand that they can't determine these things in isolation. It takes two-way conversations, meetings, and other real work.

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2. Connect with your direct reports as people so you can help them do their best.

Nearly every decision you make at work impacts your direct reports' lives, and not just how they spend their working hours. Leaders can greatly influence people's livelihoods, professional growth, careers, and personal happiness. Sound daunting? It can be. But think of the opportunity: Every time you help someone overcome a challenge, meet a goal, take on something new, see themselves as more capable, or feel more engaged at work, you're making someone's life better, not just getting work done.

Get to know your direct reports. What's important to each person, and how can you help them thrive? The more you help others succeed, the more you'll succeed as a leader.

Embrace the mindset: If you don't already have regular 1-on-1s with each direct report, schedule and start holding them now.

Make 1-on-1s invaluable—don't cancel. This is dedicated time for building a stronger relationship, coaching, and discussing career development or anything else the person needs to succeed in their role and grow for the future. You may be accustomed to leading conversations but be careful not to dominate your direct reports' 1-on-1s. You'll have more meaningful, revealing conversations if you ask thoughtful questions and spend most of the time really listening.

Use the space below to draft a message to your team members explaining the importance and objectives of a 1-on-1, and then send out individual meeting invitations.

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3. Choose and use your words wisely—your feedback influences others' behavior.

Are your direct reports doing good work? Great work? Could it be better? While they have their own opinions, they're also looking to you—the one responsible for evaluating their performance—for feedback to help them learn.

Well-delivered feedback is one of the most powerful tools a leader has to influence direct reports' behavior. It helps define and clarify expectations, gives people insight into the impact of their actions, and provides clear direction on what they should be doing more and less. It can also be a huge motivator, showing direct reports that you are paying attention, recognizing their effort, and caring about their progress.

Still, most managers don't give enough feedback, despite its vital importance.

Embrace the mindset: Meaningful feedback should be a conversation, whether reinforcing or redirecting.

To ensure your feedback is usable, root it in an observation of a specific behavior (e.g., "I noticed that you sent a detailed agenda ahead of time") followed by its impact (e.g., "That really helped everyone prepare for the meeting, so we got a lot more done"). And to be sure you're giving enough feedback and distributing it fairly across your team, consider setting a weekly quota for the number of times you give feedback to each direct report.

Use the space below to draft feedback you can give to at least one of your team members. See the checklist at the right to help communicate your expectations effectively.

1. Consider your perspective. It's important to first assess your feelings about the situation at hand. Are you anxious about hitting deadlines or annoyed about a missed one? How you feel may alter how you communicate expectations. Try writing out what you want from the other person to clarify your thinking.

2. Consider the other person's perspective. Factor in their skill level, challenges, and their relationship with you. If they've been on the team for a while, it may be easier to stay in sync about what is expected, versus a new team member who's still navigating a large learning curve. Communicate in a way that will be effective and helpful to that individual, and keep in mind that this may differ from person to person.

3. Have a dialogue about your expectations. Share context about why you have these expectations, and then use specific language to clarify what you want from the other person. Be sure to speak with clarity and direction, then remember that a conversation is a two-way street. Hold space for your employee to share feedback as well, then use clarifying questions to make sure you understand each other.

4. Follow up on your discussion. Make a goal to send a recap email to your employee within 24 hours of your conversation. Providing details in writing serves as a way to hold both you and your employee to what you talked about and gives you a record to refer back to if needed.

4. Always be learning, even when it's uncomfortable.

A leader's job is so complex that it's impossible to be great at everything you do. To make matters even more challenging, the context of every situation matters—an approach that worked for you with one individual or in one situation may not work with another. But here's what you can get great at: Learning from your inevitable mistakes, making adjustments, and improving over time.

It also may help to preemptively identify some areas where you're weaker. For example, do you typically excel at solving detailed problems but struggle with influencing higher-ups? If you know that about yourself, then you may want to focus on improving how you advocate for yourself and your team and possibly rein yourself in if you're tempted to get involved in every detail of your team's work.

Embrace the mindset: Seek feedback from your direct reports, peers, mentors, and leader to learn how you're coming across to others and what you could be doing better.

It can be uncomfortable and even personally painful to open yourself to criticism—nobody wants to hear how they're falling short. But it's critical to build your self-awareness and course-correct before a habit does significant damage to your team or career.

Use the space below to craft a message to your direct reports, peers, mentors, and/or boss seeking some feedback on your leadership style. Ask specific questions to help you make the most of this feedback. For example, "What are specific ways I can better support you in your role at the moment?"

Another way to supercharge your learning: Seek input and advice from experienced managers, mentors, and peers whose skills you admire. Having a strong network of advisors can help you avoid mistakes and realize that you're not alone in your challenges.

5. Tap into your resilience to lead through ambiguity and change.

As a leader, you're supposed to be in charge. But with shifting company strategies, restructurings, unclear priorities from your boss, and other waves of change and uncertainty, you may feel like you don't have the control you thought becoming a leader would bring.

Yet, it's your job to navigate a clear path forward for your team. If you're panicked in the face of uncertainty or putting on a happy face and acting like everything's completely fine, your team will notice your behavioral cues and not only feel as unmoored as you do, but potentially start to disengage.

To guard against this, foster self-awareness about how you typically react to uncertainty and change so you'll be better equipped to manage your emotions and calmly assess your situation (both the opportunities and

challenges). And don't forget that while you may have very little visibility into changes that may upend your day-to-day, your team has even less context and access to information. It's on you to communicate with your direct reports about what you know (and don't know!) and then lead them forward effectively.

Embrace the mindset: Take a balanced approach to assessing your situation because defaulting to worst-case scenarios or relentless optimism won't help you in the long run and won't do a thing to allay your team's fears and concerns.

How do you feel about a change? What do you and your team stand to gain and lose? How can you help the team move forward?

In the space below, list one upcoming change and write out how you feel about the change. What will you gain or lose, and how can you help your team with this change?

Communicate clearly with your team about what's going on, why, and how it affects their work. Pay careful attention to how your team members respond and look for opportunities to unite and motivate the team, regardless of whether you see a potentially bright future.

6. Manage your energy so you can work sustainably without burnout.

If you're a typical leader, your work gets cut into slivers by meetings, interruptions, and mentally switching back and forth between big-picture thinking and daily troubleshooting. You face business problems and people problems, and at the end of some days, you'll find your to-do list longer, not shorter, despite your best efforts.

In an attempt to get it all done, you may skip morning workouts, eat lunch at your desk, finish up emails before bed, and let work spill over into your weekends. These strategies may even feel more productive—for a while. But you can't keep it up long term. And besides, your own chronic overwork sets a bad example for your team.

Being a leader is a marathon, not a sprint. You need a clear, calm mind and healthy body to be able to focus, manage your emotions, and make good decisions. So how do you achieve those things in the whirlwind of your workdays? Start by ruthlessly prioritizing your time on the most important work—and keep in mind that one of those "most important" things is self-care.

Embrace the mindset: Build a habit of regularly prioritizing your most important work, so you keep your workload realistic and don't waste precious energy.

Do a personal assessment of your work/life balance, attitude, and health habits—specifically how you eat, exercise, and sleep. Depending on what you learn, you might set a new work/life boundary, work on managing your emotions, schedule regular exercise, tweak your diet, or try tactics to get better sleep.

Rate yourself on a scale of one to five as to how you are doing in each of the areas. If you fall below a four, list one thing you can do to improve in that area.

Nutrition	*Please select*
Exercise	*Please select*
Sleep	*Please select*
Work/Life Boundaries	*Please select*

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The 6 Critical Practices for Leading a Team™

Leadership has always been a tough job, but now it's more difficult than ever. Leaders need to embrace the constant change thrown at them and develop new mindsets, skillsets and toolsets that meet their people's ever-changing needs and deliver breakthrough results.

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