

# Advice to Emerging Leaders

# White Paper



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**About the Author:** Brian J. Townley worked in the banking industry for 26 years during which time he became a resource for banking leaders across the country. It became his passion to explore the many facets of leadership and inspire others to pursue their own passions. He credits the many inspiring people who he has met along his leadership journey. He is available as a coach and mentor to professionals in leadership positions.

[BrianTownley.com](http://BrianTownley.com)

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# Advice to Emerging Leaders

Leaders in the workplace come in many forms.

Some capture our imagination with their charisma. They seek situations where they are in the limelight. They like to shine, even if their shadow is cast upon those who deserve the credit for their success.

While others are respected for their quiet fortitude, their integrity and their willingness to share the spotlight with their team.

It's this type of leader who has chiseled away pretenses to reveal the core characteristics of true leadership. They inspire others to live up to their potential, instead of simply living with it. They recognize the difference between being a hard worker and a good leader. They can move a team to achieve great things because it's not all about the leader. They have shed the attractive veneer of celebrity to lead with consistency, courage, strength and accountability.

When the sparkle of the charismatic leader wears thin, it becomes clear they were a leader in title alone. True leaders inspire others to pursue greatness and aspire for higher goals. They don't do it through manipulation or fear, but instead by leading. Rethink leadership as a tool that will command authority by respect rather than a title.

Very few leaders start at the top—they start somewhere down the ladder and work their way up. The difference between them and the next person is that they exhibit strong leadership characteristics not only when it's easy, but especially when it's not.

## Know it, Be it, Do It

An emerging leader is an individual who is developing their core characteristics standing ready to coach the team. They don't forget what it's like to

be the employee, and they realize that the dynamic of the workplace involves multiple generations and constantly changing technology.

Preparing for that opportunity is an exciting challenge. I have taught professional development

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tactics to thousands of professionals around the world. I have found the most rewarding has been those who are just entering the game. It always takes me back to that time when the challenges before me brought on an excitement that became the fuel to my drive.

I once heard someone say, "The difference between a stepping stone and stumbling block is the character of the individual walking the path."

As emerging leaders are preparing for managerial roles, they can develop key elements of their leadership style. Collaboration in the work place is essential. Build upon that foundation with Disney's "Everything Speaks" attitude. That means be willing to do the little things, no matter how menial, to demonstrate a leadership attitude.

A leader is a member of the team, and a team is made stronger by each individual. Each individual is

made stronger by the unity of the team. Leaders know that if you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far go together.

Emerging leaders gain authority by respect. This takes time, but the results will be long lasting. This is the ideal time in one's career to build your own brand and reputation. It's important to recognize the power of perception.

Be a source of information and be available and willing when someone asks you for advice. Take it as a compliment because they are coming to you for a reason. It shows that you have earned their respect.

## Expectations for career growth

Leadership has been described as a process of influence in which one person can enlist the talents and support of others in accomplishing a task. A leader may simply be someone whom people follow or someone who guides or directs others. While others have defined leadership as organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal. However, I believe effective leadership is a balance of both.

In leadership, just as in life, everything is about balance. Leaders need to find balance to truly lead from the core. They must first understand that leading themselves is 50 percent of the equation and leading others is the other 50 percent. This means leading those who have authority in their life, as well as their peers and those over whom they have authority.

## Identify mentors

As we learn to lead ourselves, it's important to identify mentors in our lives. Without mentors, we are limited to our own experiences. Mentors can be a supervisor or boss, a family member who has walked the same path, a trusted advisor, a professor or a professional in your industry who can offer words of wisdom.

Mentors can be a grounding point, a person who will celebrate your victories and bounce off ideas. They can also be counselors through the rough spots that are opportunities for maturing as a leader. Developing a relationship with a mentor is rewarding and inspiring. They will cheer you on and build you up while

understanding the challenges that leaders face in the workplace.

## Embrace challenges and change

Emerging leaders want to be challenged and seek ways to exhibit they are problem solvers. They are not intimidated by training and technology. Instead, they show initiative and embrace change. They realize it takes time to prove their worth.

As industries struggle to focus on what customers want not just what the company wants them to have, leaders can be a liaison between the front lines and the board room. They also can be in touch with how technology is effecting the bottom line in their industry. Get a handle on how competitors use technology and become an internal expert on how your industry can stay in touch with this movement.

## Core values

A leader's core values should align with the company's core values. Communicate with your supervisor on expectations and understand the company's culture.

Leaders learn the mission statement of the company and can communicate it and inspire others to achieve it. This powerful dynamic can only be achieved when the core values of employees align with the core values of the company.

Identifying a company's values is not a new thing. It's taught and talked about in many books and corporate retreats. Yet, in my opinion, most companies' core values or mission statements don't hold weight. In order for them to have power and leverage, they need to fulfill a few important requirements.

Companies need to be willing to hire and fire based upon them. They need to be relationship-centered, primarily with employees and customers. Their language needs to be accessible, stripped of business jargon and transparent to the environments they serve.

When all these aspects are in place, something interesting begins to happen. The company has focus.

Micromanaging becomes less needed because creative initiative increases. Loyalty among customers and employees increases, and a brand is created that attracts future talent.

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## Stepping Up

As companies tighten the strings in a competitive marketplace, many times we see where fewer employees are expected to achieve the same results as a larger team. This may mean absorbing extra duties and being expected to do more with less.

I learned this early on in my career when I was asked to develop a data processing center even though I had absolutely no experience with computers. It was 1995, and computer systems were just taking over the workplace.

I knew very little about computers and asked why they would want me to create this department from the ground up. Our management team told me they had confidence in me. I had just spent five years earning the respect of the employees at the branch location I managed and had turned it into a well-polished ship buoyed by great working relationships. However, I was about to sail into unfamiliar waters.

The project entailed converting from an old data processing system to a new system, a major undertaking. I was working late nights and coming back into the office by 7 a.m. the next day.

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One morning, I woke up early after a late night working and thought I couldn't do it anymore without some assistance. I went to my CEO and told him I didn't think I could continue in that capacity. He said that if I wanted a career in this business, then I needed to understand that true leaders have to make sacrifices. This was the price I was going to have to pay. So I

reflected on that and decided to give my notice.

I went to my boss to inform him of my decision. He said, "I just wish you would have told me this was going on." I was thinking that he should have known. He said that if I would just hold on they would get me some help and they did. My end date came and went, and it was never mentioned again.

Sometimes supervisors can get so caught up in their own world they don't realize that employees need to be equipped in order to succeed. Situations can be corrected before they get to a volatile stage and a valued member of the team decides to take the exit route.

I share this story to remind leaders to remember what it's like to be the employee. My boss was a very busy man and from his perspective he had faith in me and he assumed that everything was under control because I hadn't communicated my challenges to him. I expected him to notice and essentially read my mind. As an employee, I should have gone to him and voiced my concerns instead of allowing tensions to mount. I had a responsibility, as well, to manage myself and communicate my discomforts.

As a leader, I learned from this experience not to allow a situation to get past the point of no return. Good communication starts with me, and I don't have to wait for the other person to approach me.

Leaders also should pay attention to when their employees' pulse is rising or they feel that their ship is sinking. Prevent a "dive and rescue" by warding off the panic. When an employee needs help, it's always better to reach out with guidance than have to reach down and pull them up.

Speak up when you're feeling overwhelmed but also be willing to step up when extra duties require extra hands.

## Retention

If companies are willing to invest in recruiting top talent, they also must be invested in retaining that talent through competitive benefits and incentives that make the employee feel valued and appreciated. Employees are less likely to jump ship for a competitor

when they feel they are involved in a respect-based relationship with their employer. This does not happen without concerted effort on the part of all levels of management.

Setting consistent expectations, performing fair and timely reviews, keeping lines of communication open and establishing constant dialogue with the bank's team establishes a culture where employees experience security, not chaos. Supervisors are trained appropriately to coach, not lecture, and incentives are offered to everyone, not just a select few.

They do what they say they will do. There's nothing more confusing than a leader who gives good advice but sets bad examples. All eyes are on you so take that moment in time to build a lifelong reputation.

Without a doubt, we know that employees are more engaged, more productive and ultimately more satisfied, when they feel they own the company's success and trust their leader. When a bank is committed to its employees they will be just as committed to your customers and without fail, will meet and exceed expectations for the long haul.

As emerging leaders look forward to future roles, they can remember the importance of being appreciating and expressing appreciation to others.

### **Moving from comfort zone to risk zone**

Emerging leaders can find themselves settling into the comfort zone, a place where life is easy but often not challenging. It is not a place where leaders should linger for very long.

Just beyond the comfort zone is the risk zone, where growth occurs, not overnight, but in time. We live in a microwave society but still the best meals are made in an oven.

If leaders are willing to grow patiently, they will develop an "I want to know more" mind set, which will become their greatest asset. Entering the risk zone may mean volunteering for training and responsibilities that are unfamiliar.

Just because a leader has a title does not necessarily mean it has the word "good" in front of it. I have learned as much, if not more, from bad examples of leadership than good. While authority may go hand-in-hand with the title, it does dictate the descriptive

term that ultimately becomes associated with that individual. Leaders earn their descriptor when they are passionate about what they do and want to be difference makers with positive results.

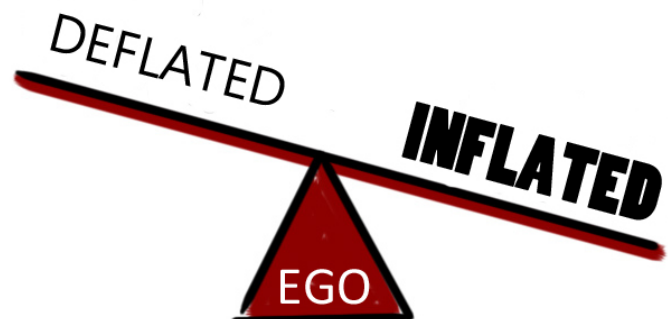
Ask, "Why would people want to follow me?" Compare that to a list of people who have impacted your life. Ask, "Why did I want to follow them? What characteristics if theirs impacted me the most?"

The answers to those questions most likely involve humbleness. Leaders who are willing admit mistakes—and we all make them—earn the respect of their team. They are willing to share the spot light with others. They realize that they are only as good as their weakest employee. They know that their team is a reflection of them.

This is evident in a balanced leader who keeps their ego steady. One of the biggest mistakes I have seen is when new or established leaders limit their impact with an out-of-balance ego. An inflated ego will overshadow talent every time. Inflated egos don't see reality and project the past onto the moment while missing the "now." A leader with an inflated ego is powered by interpretation, justification, proving, siding with, arguing against, judging, negating, denying and embellishing. This blocks success and creates division. It prevents an otherwise good leader from ultimately living up to their full potential.

Everyone has ego but good leaders keep it in a healthy balance. Don't let certain circumstances knock the balance off kilter. Consistent leaders have learned to keep an inflated ego in check.

Likewise, a deflated ego can undermine growth and strip the confidence of a leader. While not as noticeable, a deflated ego can be just as harmful to a leader who wants to earn the respect of their team.



# Advice to Emerging Leaders

## Challenges to developing leadership

If it were easy, it probably wouldn't be worth doing. Developing leaders—whether yourself or others—is hard, but rewarding work. Leaders must overcome a myriad of challenges and it's an ongoing process.

### Creative solutions

One of those challenges may be to be asked to perform a task or project that requires more resources than currently at hand. When I faced that particular challenge, I developed a strategy for requesting more support from management. I was asked to form a department that would require five people to handle all of the responsibilities. Communicating with my supervisor was essential. I needed his support and I needed to be clear about what was needed. It was time to reassign some duties within my department.

As a new leader my eyes had been opened to all the idle time among the employees in my department. It seemed that not everyone was so busy that they couldn't take time to visit frequently about what they just did for the weekend or what they had coming up the next weekend. We needed to focus on the work week itself while at work. When I witnessed these encounters, I would invite them into my office and give them a new responsibility. They caught on fairly quickly and the chit-chat came to a stop. This cleared up much quicker than if I had told them to stop talking. It was a very effective strategy because before too long I had delegated out all the job duties for the new department without hiring a single employee. It turns out we actually already had the manpower, it just wasn't being used effectively or efficiently.

We all learned something from this process. I learned that solutions are often right in front of us. The employees learned that by coordinating our efforts much more could be accomplished.

### Incentive programs

Another challenge that managers face is motivating employees. Leaders can inspire employees to motivate themselves. I learned this by creating a performance

and attitude incentive where I rewarded employees for both. I convinced my management to give me a small pool of incentive dollars I could hand out to employees who demonstrated an attitude that went above and beyond

For example, a teller covered for two co-workers who were out without complaining. Imagine what a thank you card with \$20 in incentive bucks or a coupon for a two-hour lunch next week could do to ease the tensions of being short-handed and endorse the appreciation of doing it with a great attitude. Imagine what that says to other employees who also want to be recognized for a great attitude.

This incentive program was inspired by observing two tellers playing a game of UNO during a very slow day at the bank's drive through. We had many tasks they could do when they were not helping customers. After we put this incentive program in place, employees would seek out additional work during slow times. Supervisors did not have to scold, beg or coerce. Instead, employees were more than willing to step up and help.

We found that incentives that are most appreciated by employees are time off, money and recognition. These are all very doable for most organizations and they can go a long way in terms of productivity and dependability.

### Engaging employees

Research reveals that only 21 percent of employees are fully engaged in the workplace. Engage your people with incentives and see results.

In fact, 25% of workers said they were capable of doing 50% more work. Why don't they? They cited reasons such as not being involved in decision making, the lack of rewards for good performance and no opportunity for advancement.

Another challenge leaders face is how to get employees to understand the needs of the customer. The employee evaluation process is a useful tool to engage employees with customers. I began requiring five success stories every month from my employees. We encouraged them to share examples of when they went above and beyond the call of duty to help