

Veronique Ademar and Salma El-Shurafa

How to be a better leader



It's not about the skills, it's about the willingness, say Veronique Ademar and Salma El-Shurafa of the Pathway Project, an executive coaching consultancy.

If you were to Google the sentence 'How to become a better leader', you would find approximately 29,500,000 results. There is endless advice available on leadership and how to become a better leader, most of which centres around developing the correct 'leadership skills'.

It is useful to be aware of the right leadership skills and one should regularly read relevant research and tips on how to improve a given skillset if only as a reminder of what you might be working towards.

It also pays to consider why leadership skills are important in any given environment. For example, are you being asked to lead on a project at work or are you required to manage a team of people in your role?

If you are very lucky, you might have learnt something new when reading articles on leadership, or perhaps you found them a good reminder of what you already knew.

However, ask yourself this: Have you actually used any of these pointers and applied them to your job? Have you actually made an effort to acquire the leadership skills listed?

You probably told yourself 'This is great and very true, I should do this or I should apply that' but didn't put much effort into changing your

behaviour, learning the new skills and then applying them in your job. You probably went back to your usual ways.

In a world where 'being a better leader' is on everyone's agenda, why aren't conventional solutions taking hold? Here is the thing: There is no miracle recipe to becoming a better leader.

Everybody wants to be fitter and knows what to do to get there: Eat healthy and exercise, and yet many seem to be looking for a solution that is quick and effortless. If the results are not immediate, they tend to simply give up.

According to recent studies, it takes an average of more than two months, 66 days to be exact, for a new behaviour to become habit. So, whilst everything you know about leadership is very relevant, doing something about it will require time and effort.

Accordingly, what you should be researching is not actually how to become a better leader, but rather, how to activate your willingness to change, and acquire those new skills and implement them, thus becoming a better leader.

Humans are naturally resistant to change, but you can make it happen. Here are our four commandments for activating your willingness to change.

COMMANDMENT #1: Know Yourself

Identify your strengths, weaknesses, needs, motivations, beliefs, values and

what makes you tick – all these aspects trigger your habits and dictate your behaviours, what you are able and not able to do.

To start the process to change, you must first know your starting point. Thus, self-awareness is the only way to activate self-development. Knowing all of these aspects about yourself will give you the power to influence your attitude and behaviours to reach what you want to achieve.

Leadership starts with you. Attitudes and behaviours have a direct impact on people around us, whether it is positive or negative. And being aware of that impact on others is key. You must question yourself, reflect and understand how you work as an individual as it will help you tune in and see yourself from different perspectives. This requires dedication and you will become your own catalyst.

COMMANDMENT #2: Have a purpose

Why do you want to become a better leader? It is important to identify your main driver in seeking this change, be it better pay, your boss telling you to do so, or even society dictating it.

Leadership is not just a title or a label but a way of being. 'A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still'. If you do not have a clear purpose for why you need to change, you cannot live that change.

The best leaders all have a sense of purpose, a deeper motivator and meaning to what they do which is

beyond them. Without having a clear purpose your motivation will be lost. Ensure you have a purpose and understand why you're doing this, or it will be difficult to put your thoughts in actual motion.

COMMANDMENT #3: Be vulnerable

This one can be difficult. Most people perceive vulnerability as a weakness. In fact, vulnerability is a strength and is part of being human – your true self.

When you let your guard down and are open, it establishes trust and respect with people around you and sets a strong foundation for communication at the workplace. Showing vulnerability means you might not have all the answers, but are transparent and can even admit that you can make mistakes. This creates a genuine connection with others, and an authentic culture where individuals will be able to have honest conversations, be accountable to each other, and learn from their failures.

As a leader, you have to come to terms with the idea that you are not perfect and there is nothing wrong with allowing others to see your human side.

COMMANDMENT #4: Decide to act

Knowing the concept of what makes a great leader is good and having a purpose is great but these will only remain thoughts if you do not put them to action.

Make it tangible and hold yourself accountable, whether it is writing them down as goals, committing to them as part of an official professional development plan, or whatever works best for you. Commit to making a real change, one that is carried out through not only words but also actions.

There you have it, four simple commandments to lay the groundwork towards transformational change.

The ten thousand mile journey starts with a single step. So, it doesn't matter whether it is going to take you 66 days or more, what matters is that there is a will and a

decision to become the best leader you can be.

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About the Authors

Veronique Ademar is a Partner & Executive Coach at the Pathway Project. She speaks fluent English and French and has over 12 years of experience as a Human Resources professional, People Manager and Internal Coach. Veronique has held various Regional roles such as Recruitment Manager, HR Business Partner and Talent Manager with several Fortune 500 companies in the UAE and Switzerland for both the private and public sector. The industries she has worked in include Pharmaceutical, Tobacco, Oil & Gas and Hospitality. Veronique's areas of expertise in HR lie primarily in Coaching, Recruitment, Employee Relations, Performance Management, People development, and Processes & Procedures.

Salma El-Shurafa is the founder and Executive Coach at the Pathway Project. She draws on her 11 years of experience as a Human Resources professional, entrepreneur and executive coach; and speaks fluent English and Arabic. She has worked with wide variety of individuals, ranging from directors, managers at Fortune 500 companies, entrepreneurs, across industries, and other professionals in the Middle East, China, India and Singapore. Salma has previously worked in the Banking and Building material industries and her areas of expertise include Compensation & Benefits, Performance Management, Job descriptions review and Processes & Procedures.

The Pathway Project provides outstanding tailored executive leadership & career development coaching to professional who are navigating the dynamics of the global Middle Eastern market.

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