

# 15 characteristics of highly effective leaders



# Leadership Practices



Based on our experience, backed up by research we selected a set of 15 practices which are used by leaders and contributes to 'good' leadership.



We focus on practices, thus behaviours to avoid the pitfall of focussing on leadership and personality traits or even competences.



These are all activities all are able to do. Sometimes your focus or preferences will withhold you to chose them as an 'important' thing to do.



The set is NOT normative and is only intended to stretch your horizon on what leadership could be.



**Identify your true colours:**

Beautiful colours: I often chose for this practice and I'm good at it (I think)

Ugly colours: I know I should do this more, but something is withholding me to do this

Colours to discover: I want to explore this more to see how it suits me and to learn from it

**Unite people around a compelling purpose**

**It's your turn to  
change the world**



# Unite People Around a Compelling Purpose

- **Explanation:** A leader inspires by painting an attractive vision of the future—a “dot on the horizon”—that energizes and connects people. The purpose is more than daily tasks; it’s something people long for.
- **Examples:**
- Instead of saying “let’s build a ship,” help people dream about exploring the ocean.
- A research team working together to solve a medical mystery.
- A manager rallying the team around a sustainability goal that excites everyone.

**Focus on chances & opportunities**



# Focus on Opportunities (Instead of Problems)

## Explanation:

- Focus on growth and possibilities, not just limitations. People want to move forward, not only away from problems.

## Examples:

- During COVID, focus on what is still possible, like remote collaboration, rather than what's no longer allowed.
- When a project faces setbacks, encourage the team to brainstorm new approaches.
- After budget cuts, look for creative ways to achieve goals with available resources.



**Confront reality**

# Confront Reality

## Explanation:

- Dreaming is important, but a leader also brings realism. First dream, then consider current limitations.

## Examples:

- A leader with big ideas who grounds them by checking feasibility within the organization.
- Addressing the “elephant in the room” during change processes.
- Admitting when a plan needs adjustment due to market changes.

**Deliver results**



# Deliver Results

## Explanation:

- Build credibility by actually delivering results, not just making promises.

## Examples:

- A team leader who not only promises a project will be finished on time, but actually delivers it.
- Setting clear milestones and celebrating when they're achieved.
- Following up on commitments with tangible outcomes.

**Keep your team alert**



# Keep Your Team Alert

## Explanation:

- Keep reflecting and innovating, both externally (innovation) and internally (care for each other). Today's results don't guarantee tomorrow's success.
- Keep taking care: is everyone still aboard?

## Examples:

- Agfa missed the digital photography revolution by focusing too long on analog.
- Regularly reviewing processes to avoid "we've always done it this way."
- Encouraging feedback and open discussion about improvements and team cohesion

**Stick to commitments**



# Stick to Commitments

## Explanation:

- Say what you do and do what you say. Make agreements explicit and honor them, or communicate early if you can't.

## Examples:

- A supervisor clarifies whether an agreement is a firm commitment or just an expectation.
- Informing the team in advance if a deadline cannot be met.
- Using tools to track and follow up on commitments.

# Give Trust



# Give Trust

## Explanation:

- Trust is the starting point, not something to be earned. Trust gives wings and responsibility.

## Examples:

- Delegating tasks and giving the team autonomy, while providing a safety net if needed.
- Allowing employees to make decisions within their area of expertise.
- Not micromanaging, but being available for support.



**Make people feel strong & capable**

# Make people feel strong & capable

## Explanation:

- Help people feel strong and capable by focusing on their talents and sharing success stories.

## Examples:

- Complimenting a team member for successfully completing a challenging project.
- Sharing stories of "I did it!" moments within the team.
- Encouraging employees to take on new responsibilities and celebrating their growth.

**Help people to bounce back**



# Help People Bounce Back

## Explanation:

- Mistakes are learning moments. Don't downplay them, but discuss what can be learned and how to do better next time.

## Examples:

- After a failed presentation, discussing with the team what went wrong and how to improve.
- Creating a checklist for handling setbacks as a team.
- Supporting a colleague after a mistake and helping them regain confidence.

**Listen first**



# Listen First

## Explanation:

- Listen to understand, not just to respond. Stand beside someone before taking action.

## Examples:

- In a conflict, listening to all parties before making a decision.
- Asking open questions and letting employees share their perspectives.
- Holding regular one-on-one meetings focused on listening.

**Make people responsible & accountable**



# Make People Responsible and Accountable

## Explanation:

- Taking responsibility is a core thread in teamwork and shared leadership. Don't let people escape their responsibilities.

## Examples:

- Instead of "we should do this," ask "who will do this?" and "what if it doesn't happen?"
- Creating a culture where everyone is accountable for their actions.
- Explicitly assigning ownership for tasks and following up.

# Experiment



# Experiment

## Explanation:

- Dare to try and learn from what doesn't work. Not everything needs to be discussed in detail first.

## Examples:

- Trying out a new way of working and calling it an experiment to make it safe to learn.
- Encouraging the team to test "good enough for now, safe enough to try" ideas.
- Adapting quickly when something isn't working.

Talk straight

NO-BULLSHIT

HONEST FEEDBACK

CONSTANT

IMPROVEMENT &

INDIVIDUALS & A

QU

QUA

# Talk Straight

## Explanation:

- Communicate transparently and honestly, with care for others. People want to know where they stand.

## Examples:

- Being open about uncertainties during a reorganization.
- Sharing both good and bad news promptly.
- Saying “I don’t know” when you don’t have all the answers.

**Be authentic & trustworthy**




# Be Authentic and Trustworthy

## Explanation:

- Self-reflection and self-knowledge are essential. Being authentic means taking off the mask; being trustworthy means doing what you say.

## Examples:

- A leader who shares personal doubts and successes, setting a good example.
- Admitting mistakes and showing vulnerability.
- Acting consistently with your values.

A silhouette of a person walking on a beach at sunset. The person is walking from left to right, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long shadows. The background is a hazy, golden sky.

**Your best  
teacher is  
your last  
mistake.**

**Right Wrongs**

# Right Wrongs

## Explanation:

- Admitting and fixing mistakes is powerful. “Failing forward”: learn from errors and see them as growth opportunities

## Examples:

- Publicly admitting a wrong decision and actively working to fix it.
- Encouraging the team to see mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Creating a culture where it’s safe to admit errors.

# Todo

- Read each practices thoroughly and indicate whether this is a beautiful colour (your are really good at), an ugly colour (never tried, forgotten, no effort done, really?) or a colour to discover (interesting idea, I don't know, maybe, ...)
- Write the practices in the appropriate place in the next slide (you'll find the pdf to print in the online module)
- Circle the practices you want to explore further in this programme (can also be a practices you're good at and you want to build further on)

**Beautiful Colours**

**Ugly Colours**

**ME as a Leader**

**Colours to Discover**

# 5 leadership clusters

