

Developing Leadership in the SCA

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Introduction

Leadership is a learned skill. Leading is not easy. There is no single trick that makes all situations better. It requires more interaction than you might have had before. To know the best style to use in a given moment, you have to get to know the people you are trying to lead. Even if they seem to have similar experiences, they are all unique with unique reasons for the way they are. Being a good leader means taking the time to know all of the people and their motivations.

Leading

Who is a leader?

Anyone can be a leader. It doesn't take a pointy hat or a fancy title. Some who get those things do sometimes think that by virtue of getting these things they are automatically imbued with leadership. They are wrong. Leadership is skill that you learn to use and it takes time and care to use. Like any skill, the more you use it, the better you will be at it. But it is a constantly evolving skill. Techniques that work for one group of people won't work for the next. Challenges that were solved in one way will fail to be solved by the same way in the future. It takes practice and patience to be a leader.

Leaders are people who help others succeed. Leaders are people who can get groups of people to work together. Leaders are people who know where resources can be found to solve problems. Leaders are people who inspire others and assist them to be motivated towards their goals. Leaders are people who are able to put their egos aside to soothe another's. Leaders are people who earn respect and work to keep it.

Leading is hard but rewarding work.

Leadership styles

Each decade seems to spawn a new set of leadership styles. Most can fit into the following model: authoritarian, democratic, and submissive. Leadership style is not a static trait you adopt. It is a toolbox. There are times when each style is the most appropriate to use in a given circumstance.

Authoritarian leadership

In this style, you give commands. You control the information. You determine the strategies. This style works best in situations where there is danger (the house is burning; out NOW), in situations where people may not know what to do, or when someone is pursuing an agenda they shouldn't (something illegal, thoughtless, or dangerous).

I can easily see this in battle situations. In fact, part of a marshal's job is to know when to be authoritarian (HOLD). But it can come up in service situations as well. "We are going to serve the soup, now."

Democratic leadership

In this style, the “leader” and the “follower” have equal weight on decisions. It is often collaborative. It naturally takes more time and often needs more buy in. This style is best in situations where planning is needed, in situations where many ideas can yield the desired result, or when individual expertise can be utilized.

Submissive leadership

In this style, the “leader” gives control to the “follower.” The leader is more of a resource in this case. The “follower” may come with a specific problem that the “leader” has expertise in. This style is best in situations where the “followers” pretty much know what to do but have need of resources from the “leader” to succeed.

Know Yourself

One of the first things you need to do as a leader is know yourself. It takes a great deal of self reflection. It may sound like Human Resources speak but one of the first tasks you should give yourself is a mission statement and core values. Think about the tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Gawain had his virtues on the inside of his shield. It is a very timeless and medieval thing to do. Think of the mission statement as a motto, honor before victory, for instance.

You need the mission statement and core values so you understand who you are and what you are trying to do. The mission statement could be something like: I am a mentor because _____. Or I like to organize events because _____. Or I teach my dependents because _____. There are tons of variants you can use. The point is to have a simple direct statement about why you are doing what you do. Or to further define what it is you actually do.

Core values would then be a list of traits you have, want to have, or want to impart. A handful is enough. These are the values you will have while you pursue your mission.

I said “want to have” because we are all human and sometimes make mistakes. Even leaders can have leaders. So we are all works-in-progress.

Once you have refined your mission statement down to a sentence or two and your values down to a handful or so, you need to write these down and have them somewhere you will see them often. Yes you need to do this. You need to constantly remind yourself what you are doing and why. You need to think on these things often. Again, you could emulate Gawain and put your values on the inside of your shield and every day pray/meditate on these values and how you will act on them today.

How these will serve you is thusly: when you look at a situation, when you speak to someone, you should be acting and speaking in accordance with your mission and your values.

Examples:

Joe Erhmann, well known high school football coach, has this as his mission statement: “I coach to help boys become men of empathy and integrity who will lead, be responsible, and change the world for good.”

Notice what is missing. Nothing about winning. Nothing about scoring points or being great players. Why? Because if he succeeds in his mission, the young men he coaches will probably win games as often as not but will be great human beings. Football is his vehicle for imparting his values.

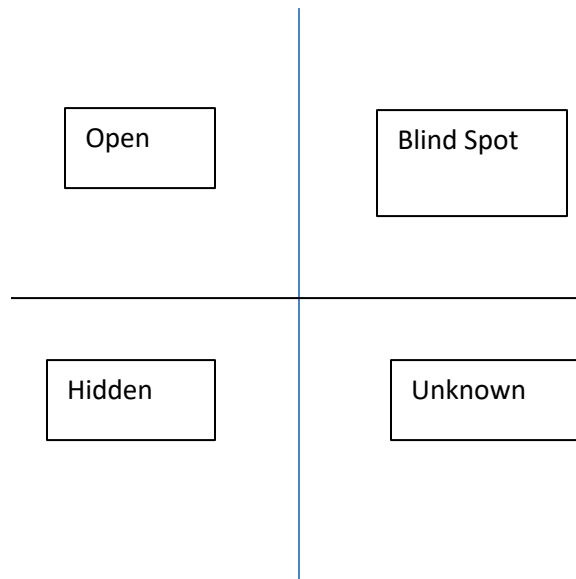
My work place recently got a new CEO and we redid our core values. Our core values are:

Integrity, Resourcefulness, Effort, Respect, Teamwork, Stewardship.

I have a framed copy of this above my desk and I look at it and think about these values often. We talk about our values often at work.

Johari's Window

This is another tool to know yourself better. And because psychologists love matrices and diagrams, here we go.



In the original study, a subject and a peer would write out adjectives that described the subject. Where they agreed, those go into the open space. This is information that is universally known about the subject. Things the subject wrote but the peer didn't go in the hidden area. Things the peer wrote but the subject didn't go in the blind spot area. The goal is then to expand the open area.

Feedback is the mechanism to take things from the blind to the open area. Disclosure is how to move from the hidden to the open area. And self-discovery or joint discovery would be how to move from the unknown to the open.

Ideally, you would do this with a series of peers to get a fuller picture.

This type of analysis can be done with many different goals. What things am I good at? What are my flaws? Etc.

For leadership though, the more you know about yourself, the more you can improve what might be lacking, and the more you can share with those you are trying to lead. Some things others just don't

need to know about and that is okay. The goal isn't total disclosure. It is to be more aware of who you are.

Self-awareness then leads to confidence and that quiet assurance that is neither ego nor vanity. You don't have to prove your prowess; you and others already know.

The study was originally published in 1955. If you google, Johari's window, you will find a lot of information on how people and companies use this tool.

Your Philosophy

Your mission and values should be fairly constant but how you apply those items should be flexible. This is your leadership philosophy. I actually took this from one of my company's books, *Coaching Better Every Session*, by Gilbert. By flexibility, I mean you will have to adapt your philosophy based on your dependents/students. You need to get to know them, understand how they think and learn, and adjust your style to work with theirs.

In developing a philosophy, here are some questions you can ask and answer. Again, this was originally developed for coaching so I have adapted it somewhat.

1. Why do I lead?
2. What are my values?
3. What types of experiences do I want my dependents/students to have?
4. What is the definition of success?
5. What is the purpose of subject/service/area of expertise?
6. What are my responsibilities to my dependents/students?
7. What are my ethical standards?

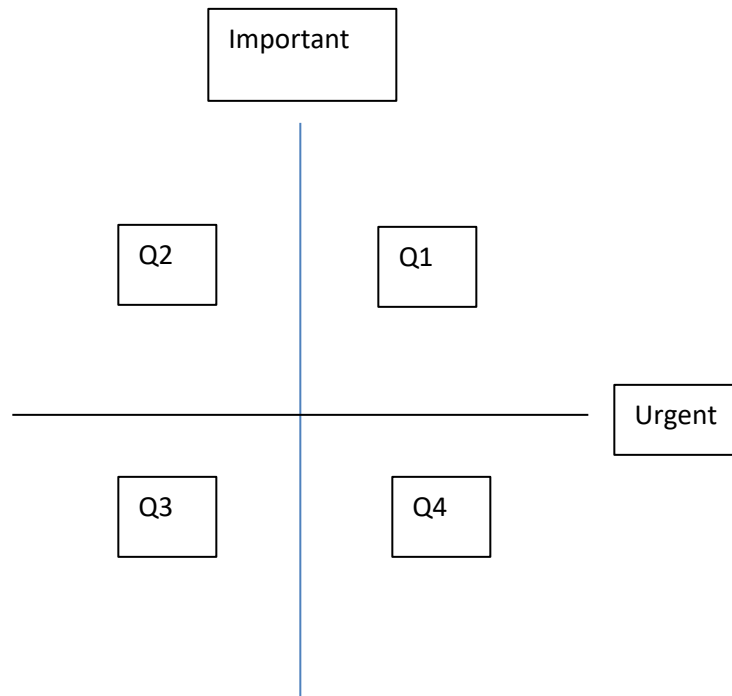
Questions 1 and 2 are already answered; these are your mission and values. The other questions might vary over time and by your subject. Success for one dependent might not be the same as success for another dependent.

Throughout this book, there are anecdotes from various studies and coaches. One of the most common themes is that coaches (i.e. leaders) are striving to develop good people, not good athletes. The same applies to all leadership. The goal is to help someone become the best person they can be, not the best fighter, best artist, or best autocrat. Fighting, art, and service are the vehicles that we travel in but they are not the destination.

One last tidbit, Coach John Wooden from UCLA developed the idea of athlete-centered coaching. At the apex of his pyramid of values, it states, "I have not taught until they have learned." That is a powerful statement. Your job isn't over until they have succeeded.

The book calls this athlete-centered coaching but we can call it dependent-centered leadership. To do it well, you need to know yourself, know your student, and adjust how you interact with each student and over time as they develop.

Important v Urgent



In Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective people, he covers this concept, important versus urgent. Important things are just that, important. They are the things that matter, planning, relationships, values, results. Urgent things are things that have to be done now. Let's take a child crying. This is urgent; you have to respond to it now. You have no idea if it is important or not until you get there.

Q1 is where things are both important and urgent. These have become emergencies. It demands your time and energy now. Mistakes might be made here because you don't have time to think about them. Or you might have to settle for a "good enough" solution because you don't have time.

Q2 is where things are important but not urgent. This is the sweet spot and where you want to focus your time. You can plan. You have time to discuss, debate, and try out solutions to find the right one.

Q3 is somewhere you don't want to spend time on. Things are neither important nor urgent. If they have to get done, then they will eventually be either important or urgent eventually. This is busy work.

Q4 is a time waster. Things are urgent but not important. You should be actively trying to move these things to either Q2 or Q3 when you can. It is hoped with sufficient planning and manpower, you can move these items.

Examples of what is where. Let's take a phone call. It is urgent but may not be important. The only way to know is to answer it. It might be a Q1 thing so we have to deal with it now. It might be a Q4 thing really but because someone called you, it is a Q3 thing.

Q2 things are the things you want to work on. The things that are important and you want to make sure you do right. You want to spend as much time here as possible. One of the ways is to not procrastinate. As thrilling as last minute term papers are, they will be better if start as soon as you can. Cooking dinner is better as a Q2 activity. No last minute runs to the store because you have to cook dinner now.

Delegate

How do you move items out of Q1? One way is to delegate. What is not important to you might be more important to someone else.

Delegation primarily works for democratic leadership situations. Part of delegation is empowerment. In addition to the responsibility to do a task you give the power to make decisions on the tasks. Without empowerment, delegation is just micro-managing. Most times, people don't like that.

For something like Maidens, other people need to do part of the work. Those people have the power and responsibility for their areas. One of the ways I facilitate that is I make sure everyone knows as much as I do about that site and decisions. That way, when they need to make decisions, they know as much as I do about what is going on.

Don't just delegate the tasks you don't want to do. Keep the other person's desires, strengths, and goals in mind too.

Follow Through

One of the most important things to do as a leader is follow through. If you say you are going to do something, you need to do it. This is why many peers advocate that you don't take on too much.

It is actually more important that you follow through on things for people you don't interact with as often than with people you interact with very often. I am not saying that you should blow off your normal associates. Your normal associates know you normally follow through and will be more inclined to forgive if you happen to drop the ball.

Someone who only interacts with you once in a while will judge faults more harshly. So make sure if you commit to something with an infrequent associate, you follow through.

In general, you need to follow through and be up front with what you can do and what you can't do.

Deadlines are important too. Even if they are artificial, a deadline helps give a sense of when something needs to be done and how important it might be. It gives a clock on when the item becomes urgent.

Motivations and Inspirations

In the realm of management training, these are often defined specifically but we use them interchangeably so much that it is better to leave the distinction vague. It is like in moral philosophy where morals and ethics are very specifically defined but in our modern, everyday usage we use them generically.

People sometimes say, “I lead by example.” That is wrong. Leading is an active process. What you are doing is “inspiring by example.” Someone sees what you are doing and it ignites a spark in them to want to do something like it. You are inspiring them. They are inspired by you. Leading is when you help them take the next step; doing what that spark inspires.

Doing what you are doing will inspire others. They may see you on the battlefield and want to fight like you do. They may see some artistic thing you made and want to learn how to make it as well. They may see how smoothly an event runs and want to learn your secrets.

Motivation is then encouraging someone to pursue what they are inspired to do. How you motivate is leadership.

If you don’t exactly agree with how inspiration and motivation are defined here, that is okay. Let’s agree that they can be somewhat interchangeable. It is the leadership that is more important.

Your Needs Their Desires

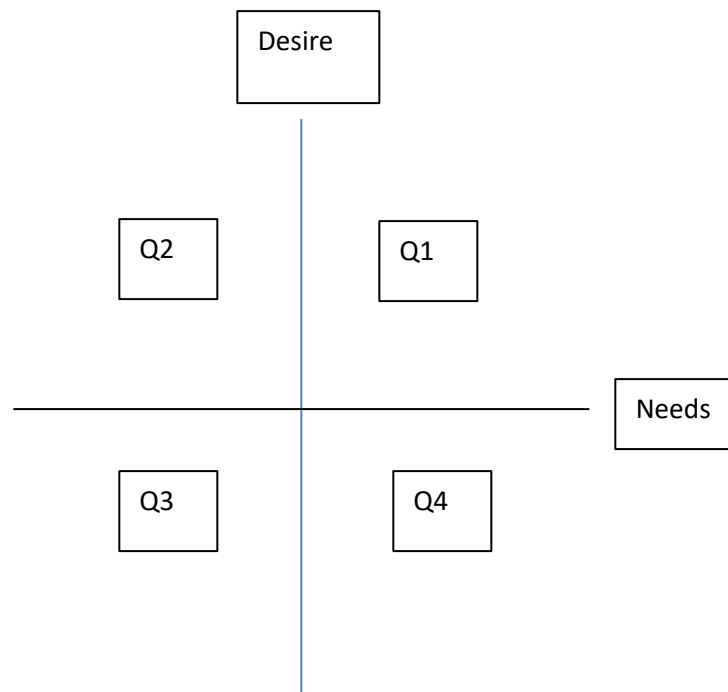
Motivations and inspirations are ways of expressing our needs and desires. They are the things we want to do and the reasons we want to do them. This is where needs and desires intersect.

Part of leadership in the SCA is often wrangling other volunteers. For an event, tournament, project, you need a certain number of people to do some job. Service in the SCA is also one of the few areas that works in a scarcity environment.

What does that mean? It means that the number of spots for any given task is limited. It happens at all levels of the SCA. You only need one KSEN per Kingdom. You only need so many marshals for a tournament. You need two guards per shift to guard the royalty room.

For some areas, scarcity isn’t a huge problem. For instance, in most martial activities, if you have too many marshals, those who wanted to marshal can do the activity instead and be happy with that. For other activities, scarcity is a problem. Two people might want to run the same event. Perhaps, they both like doing it or perhaps, one or the other just wants the experience. The event only needs one autocrat. Someone is going to be unhappy that they aren’t the autocrat.

This is where needs and desires intersect.



Looking at this quadrant graph, there are really only two quadrants we need to worry about, Q1 and Q4. This is where we have high needs. Q1 is pretty easy to fill jobs. We have a high need for these jobs and there is a high desire for these jobs. They will get filled. Examples might be feast server (free meal), event steward, etc. Q4 has high needs but low desire. We need people in these positions but not many people really want to do it. Examples might be Troll attendants.

Q2 can be problematic in a scarcity environment. There is high desire so a lot of people want to do these jobs but we have low needs. I will again use feast server as an example. Then you have people who want to do a specific job but you don't have the position they want to fill. Q3 doesn't need a lot of worry. We don't have a high need here and there is also low desire. These jobs aren't important and we might be able to do without them.

Every situation will be unique so we can't just pigeonhole functions on this graph. You will have to look at your own event history to determine how to fill out this graph. But the key point is this: How do you move people from Q2 to Q4?

Why do people do things?

People have some really powerful motivations. Money, food, sex, removal of pain, fulfillment of pleasure. Clearly, in the SCA, there are limits to which motivations we can try to fulfill.

In the SCA, people will do things because:

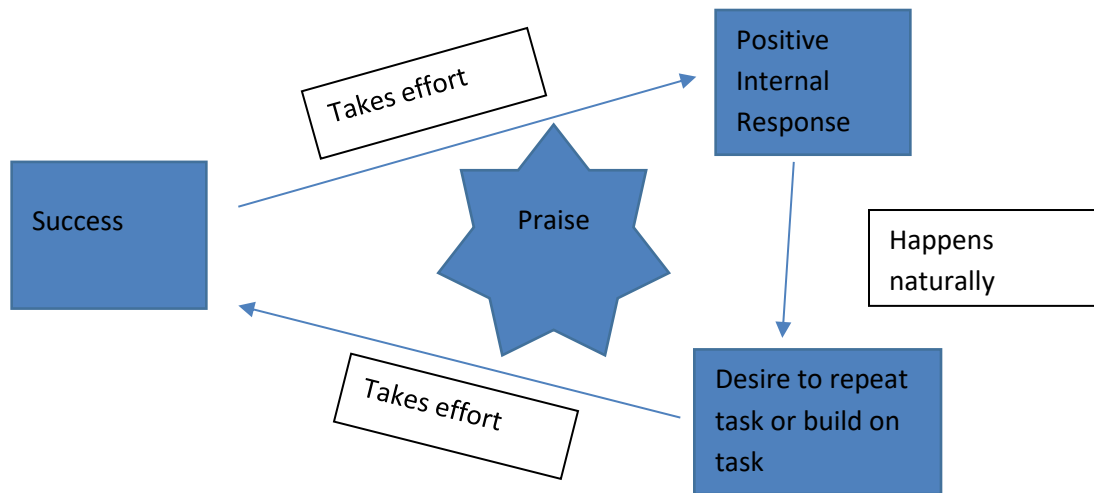
- It is something they like
- It is something they are good at
- It is something that needs to be done
- Someone they respect/like have asked them to

People will continue to do things for as long as it is fulfilling on some level.

Study after study has shown that once you met a base level of subsistence (i.e. a base level of money to for a job), people leave managers, not jobs. There are other reasons, closer to home, more interesting work, etc. But the largest reason someone leaves a job is because they had poor leadership. That leader didn't understand them, didn't know how to make them feel important, etc.

Praise

All of the above examples rely on a positive feedback loop. The first two are somewhat self-sustaining. The last two definitely need assistance. The feedback goes something like this. Success at the task leads to positive external responses (praise) leads to positive internal responses ("feel good about oneself") leads to increased desire to do again or do more. So all praise is important. It is the positive reinforcement. But without the praise, internal satisfaction is lower and the desire to help again or at a higher level is less. In time, it goes away.



Success takes effort to turn into feeling good about it. The desire to repeat takes a bit of work to go back to wanting to achieve success again. Both are uphill processes. Positive Internal response to desire to repeat happens pretty fast. That is a downhill process. Praise is the engine that makes all of this happen quickly and efficiently.

For example, I decide I want to learn to leatherworking. It takes effort to go from the initial success, which might be mediocre in quality but it is the best I have done to date, to feeling good about it. Once I feel good about it though the desire to make something else happens quickly. It then takes some effort to achieve the next success. If someone is teaching me, their praise on my efforts makes the engine work faster. Their praise helps me feel good about my initial success. Their praise helps me achieve the next success faster.

What I see mostly happen in the SCA is that appreciation is scattershot. It might be one or two people saying “thanks.” It might be being called up into Court and thanked. But what it needs to be is more frequent.

This is where the Peers come in. I am not saying every single one of you needs to compliment everyone doing a job. But you all should have some sort of favor token that you hand out. You all should be looking at people serving in positions and thanking them. The key though that it has to be genuine. Some of you might be thinking, “I am a peer of the realm. I don’t have time to go around thanking people. Let the GoA people do that.” All praise is important. Think about it. You work hard. The janitor thanks you. That is good. The CEO thanks you. That is better. Those of you with the pointy hats and bling, you are who people are looking up to. Your words are important. And sometimes, what you don’t say is more important than what you do say.

I am not putting all of this on the peers. Everyone trying to be a leader need to get better at it.

Praise should be in public and specific. Mistress Zsof’s #wordfamewednesday is an excellent example of this. It is a call out to those that did good work and is specific to individuals. Try to avoid thanking people as a group. There are times we do it. Calling out all of the people who helped at SCA 50 in a letter may not be very effective. Calling out a small group of three people for their contributions might be effective. We want the person involved to know we are thanking them for their contributions in specific, not thanking them for being part of a group.

By public, it doesn’t have to be a large announcement either. Even the perception that someone else might hear you praising someone can be enough. It is a fine line to judge what is public enough.

Praising should also be in private. This is especially helpful for people who are uncomfortable with the spotlight.

Names and specific activity are important. Forgetting who someone is can be damaging. Take this example: “Thank you. What was your name again? Roger? Thank you Roger for helping today.” It doesn’t feel very personal. Whereas, “Thank you Roger for helping at Troll. We were shorthanded and you came through. Good job!” is much more personal and satisfying to both parties.

Discipline and critique should be in private. Far away from others who might hear you. You will gain much more respect when you don’t expose others faults and mistakes to the public space.

If you do make a mistake as a leader, any mistake, you should acknowledge it in public and state your remedy in public as well. Again, it is a respect thing. If you are willing to state (my example), “I forgot I

was supposed to speak for someone at their elevation. I am truly sorry and here are the things I would have said," that shows that you as a leader do not see yourself as infallible and will tolerate mistakes (because they will happen) as long as someone is willing to own it.

When Praise doesn't work

The most important part of praise is sincerity. You can't just say, "great job!" You have to mean it. People can tell when you don't mean what you say. Let me share another example.

My choir director apparently went to the positive reinforcement school of choral directing. He is actually a very good and knowledgeable man. But after every single rehearsal of a section, he would say, "Good! Great! Let's do that section again." We would do it again. We would do it slower. We would do it and stop after two measures. We would do it again but drop out various parts. We would do it again but all stand around the piano this time. Each time, he would say, "Good job!" or words to that effect. Did he really think it was good? Given the number of times we are redoing the same musical phrase over and over, I rather doubt it. More effective would be "something isn't quite right here. Basses, let's do that again." And then we do it as many times as needed to get it to where he wants it, then only afterwards say "Good job! That is what we need."

Another example is what is now common in A&S competitions: the criticism sandwich. For those who don't know, this is you give praise, then give your critique, then give another complement. It can work but what happens too often is the praise seems forced. That is the part that has caused it to fall out of favor in the business world. It turns out that people can tell when you are sincere and they vastly prefer to be told things more directly.

Give praise but you have to mean it.

Recognition

Another tool we have is recognition.

Recognition is actually another form of praise. It is more than saying, "good job". It is lending your prestige to their actions. #Wordfamewednesday is a better fit here. It might be a small ceremony. It might be a post where you acknowledge with specificity what someone did. It is important to get it right. Recognizing someone for something they didn't do, mixing up who did what, or leaving out an important part of what someone did can be very de-motivating.

Our award system is also a form of recognition. It is the prestige of the Crown added to praise. It is why we state that the award was given for "this reason."

Taking someone as a student or dependent can be a form of recognition. Your prestige in your area carries over to the student/dependent as someone you think is worthy to associate with.

Being someone's student/dependent can be a form of recognition.

Feedback

In addition to wanting sincere praise and recognition, people want feedback.

It is said that path to success is 10,000 hours with continual feedback to be excellent at something. A lot has been said about the 10,000 hours part but it is the feedback that is the important part.

Feedback needs to be sincere as well. But it needs to be nurturing too. Our goal is to keep someone interested in the process. We need to give them sincere feedback on what they did well (if anything) and what they did poorly (if anything) and then make sure they want to continue on the path.

We can't just gloss over the poorly part. Improvement means knowing what wasn't done well enough and fixing it. Some activities have instant feedback. Playing the wrong note on a musical instrument. Throwing a poor shot in a heavy fight. Burning yourself while cooking. Those are all feedback. But when telling another that they didn't perform to expectations, we need to be more careful.

In business, we can lay out exactly what the expectations are and the goals are. We can get buy in that the goals and expectations are mutually agreeable. For some SCA activities, this might also be possible.

In many instances of SCA leadership, it isn't. We still might need to give feedback. That feedback might be in the form of a discussion on how an event went and how to improve it next time. Here we use democratic leadership techniques to provide the feedback.

The feedback might be because someone came to us with a problem and doesn't know what to do. We might use submissive leadership techniques here by offering advice on how we solved a similar problem, offering contacts to someone who can help, or offering our own help.

It might be an authoritarian situation and we just need to tell the person what to do next.

In all cases though, the feedback needs to be sincere, specific to the issue, actionable, given with empathy. Yes, even hard to hear feedback can be given with empathy. We want this person to continue to interact with us, or the project, or whatever. Chances are, we done some similar ourselves, so empathy should be easy.

Miscellaneous tools and thoughts

Here is a collection of other things that a leader should have or tools to help with situations.

Loyalty to those not present

This is another one of the 7 habits. At its core, it means not talking bad about others when they are not present. Why is this important? Well, if you are willing to talk poorly about someone when they are not present, then chances are you are willing to talk poorly about me when I am not present.

Sometimes, we are asked in confidence to give our opinion on other's qualifications. That is not gossip. And more importantly, it is a trust. Information in those meetings/groups/lists is not for public consumption and should remain so.

Basically, this is just reinforcing your own ideals and values. If you demonstrate that you are willing to gossip or betray a confidence behind someone else's back, it can be assumed you will do the same to

any other person behind their back. However, if you are seen to keep your confidences, you will be assumed that you will continue to do so.

Creativity

Mark Rosewater is one of my favorite people to listen to. He is the lead designer of Magic the Gathering and he does a weekly podcast called Drive to Work. He also writes lots of columns. Mostly, he talks about designing games and Magic in particular. But some of his lessons apply everywhere. On Creativity, he frequently comments on how restrictions breed creativity. The same can apply to leadership.

The brain likes to save energy. Present your brain with the same type of problem, it will come up with the same solution. This is efficient. Being chased by a bear gives one solution. Being chased by a different animal, the brain will try the same solution. After all, it worked last time. And for many problems that are similar, this is good enough. To change the solution you come up, you have to change the starting conditions. You have to either give yourself restrictions or realize that the conditions are different.

Leadership is learning to do this and helping other to do so as well. Once you are past the learning phase, the times you need help to get past a problem. You tried to do things the same way and it didn't work. A leader learns to be creative to solve problems.

No excuses

We often say, "well, we are all human." That is true. It often feels like a cop out though. To be a leader is to be looked up to. Leaders attract followers; it just happens. The "we are all human" line diminishes both the leader and the follower.

People will make mistakes and leaders will too. That is a given. Some of those mistakes will be glorious in magnitude. It is how you handle it that will determine your leadership. A leader acknowledges publically what went wrong, takes the blame (even if it wasn't theirs to take), then states the remedy.

For example, I was supposed to speak at Mistress Sofya's elevation at Crystal Ball. I totally forgot about it. We were travelling away from the event when in the discussion, I realized that it was ME who should have spoken. I made a public apology with all of the things I would have said at that elevation.

Back to "we are only human." We are supposed to be GOOD humans. We are trying to be exemplary humans. When we make mistakes, we should act with that goal in mind. We might fall down but we aim to rise higher.

Leadership is also hard. You are always on. There is no time when someone isn't looking at you. I heard a story about the King of East or maybe Aethelmaerc. He would take off his crown and the crown would be escorted to bed with the cry, "the Crown is going to bed." The idea was that without the crown, he could potentially escape its demands. The truth is that even without the crown on his head, if something came up that needed the King's attention, he would have to deal with it. Even if he acted

extremely foolishly or even badly without the crown on, people would remember that and judge him. You are always on as a leader.

But not just as a leader. We are always looking at and evaluating each other. Your behavior matters always. We expect those of higher rank to behave better. We expect those with greater obligation to fulfill those obligations. It may not be fair but it is the reality. The fastest way to stop being a leader is to stop acting like one. People will gravitate towards someone else who acts like a leader.

Putting it all together

You may have decided you want to be a leader or leadership has been thrust upon you. How does all of this work?

It starts with you knowing who you are and what you are trying to do. Develop a mission statement or motto. List out some virtues/ideals/values. Remind yourself daily what you stand for and act accordingly. Use Johari's window to determine what is known about you and work to expand the "open" area as much as reasonable.

Be flexible with knowing when you use authoritarian, democratic, and submissive leadership techniques. Focus on what is important as much as you can. Follow through on your commitments. Offer sincere praise, recognition, and feedback.

When you do make a mistake, make no excuses, own up to it, apologize, and fix it. Be loyal to those not present. Use creativity to solve difficult problems. And go back to the mission statement and values, fine tune, and start the cycle again.

Leadership is hard. It is self improvement. It is being better than you were yesterday so you can show others what tomorrow looks like.

Conclusion

There are lots of ways to be a leader and lots of tools. These are just some. I don't have all of the answers. What I know comes from quarterly manager trainings over the last 20 years. Some has stood the test of time, some has not.

Of all the tools we have, sincere praise works the best. Really valuing and acknowledging another's worth is powerful.

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