

Identifying the Leader in You

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Presenters' disclosures of conflicts of interest are found at the end of this article.

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Abstract

The leadership journey is often a long and winding road, with speed bumps and unexpected turns. During this session of JADPRO Live Virtual, presenters discussed the leadership qualities that they have found integral, including emotional intelligence, vulnerability, and personal reflection.

Achieving a goal may look like sunshine and rainbows from afar, but the leadership journey is rarely a smooth and unbroken path towards success. During JADPRO Live Virtual 2021, Elisabeth King, FNP-C, Executive Director of Genomics and Precision Medicine, City of Hope, and Sara Toth, FNP-C, Director of APP Services, Texas Oncology, shared strategies to help navigate the sometimes-treacherous terrain of leadership, including strategies to increase emotional intelligence and build professional connections.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND VULNERABILITY

As Ms. Toth explained, leadership is always under construction—a continuous process of striving to refine and learn new skills—but there are certain qualities that distinguish great leaders and facilitate this process: accountability and vulnerability (Table 1).

“Accountability means showing up, being present, actively engaging, and advocating and supporting other

APs,” said Ms. Toth. “It’s important to hold others accountable, of course, but you must own your own mistakes and hold yourself accountable, too.”

Table 1. Leadership Qualities: Accountability

- Show up and be present
- Actively engage
- Meet deadlines
- Own your mistakes
- Hold others accountable
- Trust: Build it and keep it
- Advocate

“Accountability is also about building trust, but keeping trust is even harder,” Ms. Toth added. “You must continuously earn trust to keep it.”

Vulnerability, on the other hand, is not about divulging one’s “deepest, darkest secrets” or sharing embarrassing life stories. Rather, said Ms. Toth, vulnerability is about engaging with one’s authentic self (Table 2).

“You must have the courage to raise your hand, to stand up, or to stand out, and ask ‘Why?’” said Ms. Toth. “That courage can lead to cru-

cial conversations, important connection, and creating change.”

The courage to be vulnerable also means asking for and appreciating constructive criticism.

“We don’t always ask for other peoples’ opinions but asking for feedback is a crucial aspect to learning and refining leadership skills,” said Ms. Toth.

INFORMAL LEADERSHIP

For Ms. King, her leadership journey began with an ambition gap, which she described as polite refusal of a call to increased responsibility.

“I did not really have any interest in doing anything more,” she said. “I felt good about my job. I felt like I was helping people, and I wanted to go home and enjoy my time with my family.”

Nevertheless, she gradually began to “dabble in the process” of improving her work environment by lobbying for increased benefits. While still reluctant to adopt a formal leadership role, she began to make positive impacts as an informal leader.

As Ms. King explained, although leadership research traditionally focuses on formal supervisors, modern approaches acknowledge that leadership is not tied to individuals’ formal hierarchical positioning. Informal leadership is characterized by perceived social status reflecting the degree to which an individual is perceived as a group leader by their peers even without formal authority.

According to Ms. King, informal leadership helps teams be more effective and be more adaptable in changing environments. The latter has been especially important amid the recent pandemic.

“Oncology already felt like a constantly changing environment, and then COVID-19 came around,” she said. “Having an informal leader helps the team to manage stress and become more adaptable.”

Informal leaders gain from their role, too. They benefit through increased power, status, and reputation, said Ms. King, and their demonstration of greater commitment to tasks also enhances their own performance.

EMERGING AS A LEADER

According to Ms. King, individuals are more likely to emerge as informal leaders when they promote team task accomplishment by initiating structure, and/or facilitate member well-being and positive relations through consideration behavior.

Table 2. Leadership Qualities: Vulnerability

- Authenticity
- Creates connection
- Courage
- Ask for and appreciate constructive criticism
- Creates change

“An important theme in the literature that comes up repeatedly is the idea of promoting accomplishments,” she said. “It’s not just about getting things done but making sure that people know about it, and the accomplishment needs to be celebrated.”

Ultimately, said Ms. King, leaders lead by example. They talk less and do more. And importantly, they sell every success as a team success.

“Leadership is the act of influencing others to work towards a goal,” said Ms. King. “Sometimes this requires subjugating self-interest for the sake of one’s coworkers.”

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

According to Ms. Toth, one quality that nearly all leaders share is emotional intelligence. Luckily, it’s a quality that can be developed and strengthened, said Ms. Toth. In a nutshell, emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify and regulate our own emotions, to recognize the emotions of other people and feel empathy toward them, and to use these abilities to communicate effectively and build healthy, productive relationships with others.

The psychologist Daniel Goleman put the concept on the map in his 1995 book “Emotional Intelligence,” which outlined 5 key elements to the ability: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1995).

During her presentation, Ms. Toth focused on the element of self-awareness, which she called “the foundation and the stepping stone” for all other skills related to emotional intelligence.

“Self-awareness is knowing what your tendencies are, specifically how you react emotionally to certain situations or challenges,” she said. “Self-awareness is also recognizing how your behavior can influence others, and how others can influence your emotional state.”

“Being self-aware of what you bring to the table can really make or break a situation,” she added. “It’s also important to know that if you start off

on the wrong foot, self-awareness can help you to stop, self-reflect, and start a new path.”

EQ VS. IQ AND THE PATH TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

According to Ms. Toth, emotional intelligence is the single biggest predictor of performance in the workplace, and the strongest driver of leadership and personal affluence. In fact, said Ms. Toth, research has consistently shown that emotional intelligence (or EQ) is more powerful than IQ, which is one’s ability to learn (Bradberry, 2009). While IQ is fixed at birth, for example, EQ is learned and developed over time.

“You can start and continue to learn EQ at any age, regardless of cultural or educational background and regardless of your current job,” said Ms. Toth. “Everyone can learn EQ and refine those skills along the way.” This is a critical concept to grasp, said Ms. Toth, because 90% of high performers have a high EQ. Comparatively, only 20% of lower performers have a high EQ. “If you compare two people with the same IQ, research suggests what will set them apart is their EQ,” said Ms. Toth. “Remarkably, emotional intelligence accounts for 58% of performance in all job types.”

“We highly recommend you continuously refine and develop your EQ skills,” said Ms. Toth.

Table 3. Helpful Resources for Leaders

- Ann Tardy: Founder of Mentor Lead, author, speaker, leadership trainer
- Ed Batista, Executive Coaching
- American Organization for Nursing Leadership
- Virtual Developing the Leader Within
- Advanced Practice Provider Executives (APPex) Leadership Summit
- The Enneagram Institute
- DiSC
- Advisory Board
- Harvard Business Journal
- APSHO.org Resource Center

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Building connections is another important aspect of leadership. One way to accomplish this is to “battle your busy,” an area that Ms. King acknowledged has been a personal lifelong struggle.

“I have a tendency to take on lots of projects and find myself constantly busy, which can impact my connections at work, at home, and with my friends,” she said.

To combat this, Ms. King recommended keeping your to-do list short, keeping track of your priorities, and being mindful of whether activities serve your goals or detract from them. She also recommended “unplugging” occasionally to recharge.

“Whether that means going on a trip with your friends or taking a hike with your family, it’s important to get away from work occasionally and take time to recharge,” said Ms. King.

Finally, Ms. King recommended improving communication skills by focusing on vocal quality (pause, accentuate, volume, emotion), active listening, and body language. It’s also important to know when to meet in person vs. when to meet virtually—especially in the time of COVID-19.

“Every interaction is an opportunity to lead,” she said. “Developing better communication skills will help you on the way to becoming a leader.”

The presenters also shared helpful resources for advanced practitioners on their leadership journey, shown in Table 3. ●

Disclosure

The presenters had no conflicts of interest to disclose.

References

- Bradberry, T., & Greaves, J. (2009). *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. TalentSmart.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, Inc.