



Leadership means different things to different people. A definition usually depends on the perspectives, personalities, philosophies, values, and professions of those who define it. In its most basic form, leadership is defined as the art of moving others to want to struggle for shared aspirations. Therefore, a leader is an individual who possesses the ability to encourage, motivate, and/or influence others. Because of the multitude of venues in which leaders are found, what constitutes leadership varies a great deal (Kouzes/Posner, pp. 30-31).

A common misconception is that one must be in an elected or appointed position of leadership in order to be a leader. Some of the most influential and dynamic leaders were never in a leadership position—Mohandas Gandhi is a popular example. It is truly one’s ability to put together the right set of characteristics and abilities to be able to create and communicate meaning, genuinely care about people, communicate clearly and honestly, be aware of the larger context of situations, and foster relationships with others, that determines his or her leadership capacity (Scholtes, pp. 370-371).

Although there is no definite set of skills an individual must have to be a leader, here are some that are essential for the relationship-building which is critical to any leader:

- Active listening
- Conscientiousness
- Empowerment
- Effective communication
- Persistence
- Consistency

There are many styles of leadership. No one is right or wrong, just different. The following is a list of the most common styles:

- Autocratic:** Top-down approach that usually includes the leader making most decisions alone
- Participatory:** Leader includes followers in decision making and other processes
- Delegatory:** Leader often shares responsibilities with followers
- Charismatic:** Leader is well-liked by followers and has much influence in the organization
- Democratic:** A leader uses the opinion of the majority of the group when making decisions and when delegating responsibility

F. Hesselbein, M. Goldsmith, R. Beckhard, Editors. The Leader of the Future, pp. 199-200. Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco, 1996.
J. Kouzes and B. Posner. The Leadership Challenge. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1995.
Scholtes, Peter R. The Leader’s Handbook. McGraw-Hill: New York, 1998

A few essential elements of leadership a leader must keep in mind in her or his role are:

- Relationship building
- Team building
- Goal setting
- Creating/communicating a vision
- Delegation of responsibility
- Decision-making

FOLLOWERSHIP

An important component of leadership, ironically, is the concept of followership. In order to be an effective leader, one must not only understand what it means to be a good follower, but be a good follower him or herself. Significant and ever-evolving progress in technology, government, business, demographics and economics require leaders to rely on the expertise and knowledge of many advisors (Hesselbein, et al, pp. 199-200). It’s very important to never assume the leader is more important than the follower; indeed, without the follower, there would be no leader.

For more information on organization and personal development skills in the SOAR series, stop by or call UNL Student Involvement, 200 Nebraska Union, 472-2454; or 300 Nebraska East Union, 472-1780. Staff members will be happy to assist you and answer your questions.