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On Your Best Behavior

A great leader behaves like one. BY NEAL WHITTEN, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



We're always searching for those attributes that make the difference between a good leader and a great one. Here's a starter list of the behaviors and actions that set the leaders you admire most apart from the pack.

- **Understand and practice empowerment.** Understand your job, take ownership of it and do whatever is necessary—within legal and ethical parameters—to accomplish it.
- **Create a to-do list as one of your first actions of the day.** Focus on your top three priorities. How effective you are in accomplishing them defines your value and contribution to the project and the organization. And it may ultimately define your career.
- **Think for yourself.** Challenge tradition, authority and the *status quo* in a professional and mature manner. Routinely question your own behaviors and actions.
- **Embrace integrity in all that you do.** Listen to your inner voice and treat it as the wise and trusted friend it is.
- **Never avoid necessary confrontation.** Always give problems the sense of urgency and importance they deserve.
- **Adopt the mantra: “If it is to be, it is up to me.”** Assume that problems do not go away unless you take appropriate action to mitigate them.
- **Don't require the personal approval of others to function.** Recognize that you can't please everyone. Accept that others may have a contrary—but also valid—opinion.
- **Focus upon and solve the issue at hand.** It's not about assigning blame or finding fault. Don't allow the “who” to sidetrack you from discovering the “what” and the “how.”
- **Don't make it personal.** It's all about what's best for business.
- **Perform random acts of kindness.** The positive environment this creates can be contagious.
- **Don't dwell on yesterday.** Admit mistakes, learn from them, apply those lessons going forward and move on.
- **Treat others as you would like to be treated.** You will be remembered and revered for how you made others feel.
- **Think like a leader.** It's not about the ability of those around you to lead, it's about your ability to lead regardless of what is happening around you.
- **Exercise tolerance.** Care about mistakes that people make, but care more about the people who made them.
- **Appreciate all those who have helped you.** Give credit where it's due. Your success, in part, is made possible because of the shoulders that have supported you along your journey.
- **Readily seek help and advice.** Be open to learn from others—there's a treasure of knowledge, wisdom and experience all around you.
- **Check your ego at the door.** It's never about you. It's about the project, the sponsor, the client, the team, the company and others.
- **Define who you choose to be.** You are what you perceive yourself to be; your vision becomes your reality.

If this list appears daunting, focus on adopting just one action each week and you will steadfastly improve your overall effectiveness. Leading others—and yourself—will become more deliberate, effortless and natural. Even leaders at the top of their craft need to occasionally brush up on some of these behaviors. **PM**

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