

Everything I Know About Leadership

I Learned in Pedagogy Class

By Karen Thickstun, NCTM

We are all leaders. We guide students in every lesson. We lead studios and classrooms. As entrepreneurs, we steer small businesses and navigate careers. As colleagues, we collaborate and share insights to lead the profession.

Policies, procedures and schedules are essential for any studio business or association. Equally important is the leadership style with which they are implemented and managed.

Is leadership an innate quality that great leaders are born with? I don't think so. I believe that anyone can develop an effective leadership style. Reflecting on my own leadership experiences, I believe that (almost) *everything I know about leadership I learned in pedagogy class.*

As a pedagogy professor, I regularly emphasize certain principles. These principles can also positively impact one's leadership style.

#1 Ask Great Questions.

Great questions provoke discovery, curiosity and possibilities. Ask open ("what if") questions instead of closed ("what is") questions. "What if the composer had used E instead of E-flat in this piece?" is an open question that invites the student to speculate and experiment. "What is the flat note in measure 3?" is a closed question that only asks the student to report a fact.

Marianne Uszler (2003, 16) describes open questions as "little 'pushes' that stimulate imagination and problem-solving skills...(and) further a student's ability to form and express opinions."

"The future belongs to the curious. The ones who are not afraid to try it, explore it, poke at it, question it, and turn it inside out." (Maxwell 2014, 14). Questions encourage critical thinking and discussion, making the process as valuable as the answer. Curiosity pushes us forward.



#2 Listen.

Listen before you talk. “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” (Covey 1989, 237) Management professor Adam Grant tweets that “The true leader in a group is rarely the person who talks the most. It’s usually the person who listens best. Listening is more than hearing what’s said. It’s noticing and surfacing what isn’t said. Inviting dissenting views and amplifying quiet voices are acts of leadership.” (@AdamMGrant, September 28, 2022)

#3 Demonstrate.

Lead by example. Actions are more impactful than words. Actions provide a visual image that magnifies our language. Teachers demonstrate in lessons to provide a visual and aural image, knowing that their students are visual and aural learners. Likewise, effective leaders adapt their communication approach to accommodate different learning styles.

#4 Compassion and Empathy.

To paraphrase Theodore Roosevelt, “Students don’t care what you know until they know that you care.” This is true now more than ever. Especially in communities where everyone is affected by a pandemic or other event, effective leaders are sensitive to others. Actor Robin Williams said, “Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always.”

#5 Student-Centered Experience.

In student-centered lessons, the student is the focus of the lesson. What the student *needs* is more important than what the teacher *wants*. Teachers are aware of their students’ needs, goals and dreams. Effective leaders are in tune with the needs of their customers or members. How do they know what the needs are? They ask. See #1.

Teachers recognize that students change as they grow. Business leaders recognize that customers change. Both recognize there are generational changes. For example, Generation Z is the last generation that will be predominantly white. The smartphone is their primary device. They rely on images rather than words to convey their thoughts. These generational

traits have implications for teachers *and* leaders.

#6 Growth Mindset.

Great leaders have a growth mindset.

Have you ever said to yourself, “I don’t believe I have what it takes to be a leader. I only took this position because no one else would”? Or “I don’t know enough about marketing to grow my studio.” These statements reflect a fixed mindset and keep us stuck in the status quo.

Leaders with a growth mindset actively seek new opportunities. They ask, “What can I learn from this?” or “How can I help others to do this better?” They persist through challenging times and learn from mistakes. They value effort and celebrate the success of others. *Mindset* (chapter 5) by Carol Dweck further explores the impact of mindset on business leadership.

Great leaders evolve and innovate. They ask, “Am I doing this just because it has always been done that way?” They reconcile the new with the traditional through adaptation and flexibility.

As teachers, we already have many of these leadership skills. Lead on!

References

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