



## **Develop Your Leadership Potential**

By Jen Denys, B.A., CHRP, CPC

There is an ongoing debate in the realm of leadership – can leadership be learned or is it a gift that you are born with? There are compelling arguments on both sides and I am not completely sure where I stand on the issue. I do think that there are people who are called to lead something larger than themselves and others somehow find themselves in a leadership role without quite knowing how they arrived there. Regardless of how a leader has emerged, I do believe that there are common strategies all leaders can utilize to develop their leadership potential. Whether you opt for a formal program or to design a personal career plan, I recommend incorporating the following seven elements to develop your capacity as a leader.

1. **Learn about leadership.** Someone once told me that every leader should have a book about leadership at their fingertips. For an avid reader, that's easy, but there are many other learning opportunities as well. Reading about leadership need not be exclusive to textbooks – biographies of great leaders and extraordinary people may be more appealing to some. Learning can also take place in more traditional settings such as lectures, workshops, online courses, salons, etc.
2. **Learn about yourself.** What do you need to be successful? How do you make decisions? What is your leadership style? What time of day do you work the best? How do you communicate with those around you? Sophisticated psychometric assessments and careful reflection can answer these questions for increased effectiveness.
3. **Find a mentor (or lots of mentors!).** If you haven't experienced what a mentor can do for you personally or professionally, get on board now. Mentors offer advice, guidance, support, encouragement and the benefit of their experience. It is a great way to build a professional, supportive network.
4. **Get a coach.** As a coach, I like to point people to the benefits of retaining a certified professional. However, a confidante who possesses a natural ability to listen beyond what is said, act as a sounding board, ask challenging questions, and helps you be accountable to your goals may be another option. Be sure to set boundaries related to confidentiality, subject matter and the scope of your roles.

5. **Join a leadership community.** We all want to belong and finding people who can share in your struggles and celebrate your successes is very powerful. Your community can be your mentors, coaches and family or it can be a group of professional peers.
6. **Find your balance.** We all work best when the simple things are taken care of – family, nutrition, exercise, sleep. Determine what is out of sync in your life, enlist the help you require and take action. Make time for family, join a gym or take a yoga class, invest in that personal makeover, organize your home and office, etc.
7. **Lead something.** There's only so much preparation that can be done before you are in "analysis paralysis". Jump in at work or in your community and take the lead on a project. No one gets it perfect the first, time, the second time or any time. The more experiences you acquire, the more opportunities you will have to transfer ideas to future situations.

Leaders, it is never too early or too late to develop your abilities as a leader. As the marketplace gets more competitive, organizations are searching for leaders who can engage, coach and mentor those they lead. Self-managing and being accountable for your own performance is an essential part of leadership success.

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