



The Leader in All of Us

Using leadership skills to understand ourselves and others better.

When we think of a leader, we usually imagine someone who has some sort of authority over others. However, **we all have the ability to exhibit leadership by setting a good example in our interactions with others.** In fact, there are certain skills and qualities that almost all of us can learn to understand ourselves better and thereby relate better to others.

For example, studies have shown that **empathy is an important quality that almost all successful leaders exhibit.** It's important to realize that exhibiting empathy does not mean always agreeing with the other person, telling them what you think they want to hear or trying to please people all the time. On the contrary, we are most often effective as leaders when we are able to make reasonable decisions based on our understanding of others and ourselves.

Another related approach is to remember the old saying, **"It's not what you say but how you say it."** In fact, research has shown that most of our communication comes from non-verbal clues such as tone, facial expression and body language. If your body language and tone doesn't match the words you say, the listener may not understand the message in the way you intend.

Most effective leaders have learned to or intuitively use a type of communication called the "I-message" in order to help control themselves and respond more positively to others. This is simply a statement that starts with the word "I" rather than "You". How does this help? The other person is less likely to get angry

or defensive because he or she is not the focus of the statement, rather, your feelings are. "I-messages" are less accusatory and allow us to demonstrate leadership by taking responsibility for and communicating our own feelings.

Active listening is another skill often used by good leaders. In this approach, we start by listening carefully to the other person's communication, including paying attention to the non-verbal clues. Then, rather than assume we're sure about what's being said, we ask questions or paraphrase what we've heard to check it with the other person. This technique is particularly useful when talking to someone we've had a lot of contact with because our tendency is to think that we've "heard it all before" so we assume we know what's being said before we actually hear it.

All of these techniques, skills and approaches require us to have a certain amount of self-regulation to use them effectively. This means that **we need the ability to control, rather than be controlled,** by our feelings and responses to them. What distinguishes a good leader from others is the ability to control or even channel negative reactions into positive ways.

Finally, it can be a great help to have a coach to help guide you and give feedback and support throughout this process. **If you want to develop these skills, give your EAP a call.** Our coaching services offer a great resource to work on these and other skills to help you decide on and achieve your goals.