

# BECOME A GREAT LEADER!

by

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A bar manager asked me recently if I had any suggestions for becoming a better leader. The person asking me was “thrown” into a management position because he was really good at what he was doing previously. It was “assumed” he must have the abilities to be a good manager because of his previous great work performance. In other words, he got promoted to his level of incompetence.

Management skills are learned over time – they’re not inherited. You need *training*, which creates *knowledge*, to become a good, effective leader/manager - and you need time (experience) in order to develop what you’ve learned to do. Always remember - *experience* does not mean you have knowledge. I’ve met many a manager who uses the line, “Hey! Don’t tell me! I’ve been doing this for 17 years!” (Have they been doing it wrong for 17 years?). Time, i.e. experience, does not take the place of knowledge. Time *enhances* knowledge! To become a good, effective manager you need time in grade that coincides with a lot of knowledge – which equals *knowledge with experience* – the best combination of all!. It’s not an overnight thing.

I believe the most important management requirement is knowing how to deal with people. You have to tell people what to do (and probably how to do it), and you have to do it in such a way they stay motivated and achieve the desired goals. How you communicate personally and professionally with your staff to get a job done determines their level of respect for you as well as your likeability.

Here are some of the techniques I used over the years to develop my teams. They work. Use them to develop your own style of becoming a great leader!

- a) Always say “thank you” to staff that are doing well and trying hard. Show appreciation! It lets them know you are noticing them. It’s important to be noticed and appreciated for what you are doing. The word “please” goes a long way, too!
- b) Do you smile a lot and have a positive outlook on just about everything? Cheerfulness is contagious. Most people will respond to a cheerful person rather than someone who is surly, grouchy and yells a lot. If you yell at anyone because of a work situation, trust me, they will get even; all of a sudden they’re not around when you need them, they can’t stay to cover a shift for a late arriving bartender, etc. You don’t need that kind of attitude when you’re three deep at the bar and on the verge of losing control. You need everyone’s help and cooperation – all the time!

- c) Do you seem to always have a skip in your step? Do you display an aura of energy, which in turn depicts a sense of urgency? Make eye contact. Don't look down or around when talking to someone, especially if it relates to business! Give staff your full attention when they're trying to get through to you. And most importantly, listen to your staff. Encourage constant input. It makes your staff feel they're contributing.
- d) Don't allow drama to fester amongst your staff. Stop the petty disgruntlements immediately. Try not to let anything carry over to the next day that can be resolved that night. Lead! Don't hesitate to take corrective action. I recall nights after closing, sitting at a table with 2 employees who didn't like each other, yelling and screaming their derisions, with me acting as referee, until we finally worked it out! Whatever it takes! Promote team family! Your staff must get along with each other! Anyone who becomes a cancer to your team, anyone who thrives on the drama, has to go.
- e) Be prepared to jump in and help your people when a work related situation gets out of control. You don't want your staff continually working in the weeds. Stress creates turnover. Encourage your team to help each other to get through bad situations.
- f) Let your work ethic form a pattern of leadership. The most successful men I know still mop floors and pick up trash when they see it needs to be done and no one is doing it! Don't think for a moment that just because you're a manager those days are over for you. They're not!
- g) Never walk past or delay an action that needs immediate attention. If you do so you're just saying to the world, "That's not my problem". In other words, "I know it's wrong and I just approved it by doing nothing about it". You can't do that as a leader- ever!
- h) Understand strengths and weaknesses. Every member of your staff has a bunch of each, including you. Don't ask someone to do something they're not qualified for (or capable of) and expect positive results.
- i) Know something about every one of your employees outside of work. Are they going to school? If so, what are they studying? What are their hobbies? Do they like to travel? Would they be interested in going into management one day? It's amazing how many outside-of-work skills can be used in your business. I once hired a cocktail waitress who was studying music at a local university. I made her my entertainment director and she loved her second job. An art student made my brochures and table tents. During a casual interview one of my employees mentioned how much he loved doing landscaping. Guess who improved the entranceway to our club? Another time I had a bunch of guys and girls who loved to bowl and they invited me to join them. So I took it a step further. We

formed a couple of bowling teams and joined a league. Not only did bowling together make a closer team family at our club, we soon became the meeting place after for all the other bowlers (36 lanes x 8 bowlers per lane = a “full house”! – nine months a year)! Our sales went up 40%! Really! Your employees probably have an abundance of talents that can be used for the betterment of your business. Find out what they are. Use them. They’ll love you for it.

- j) Enhance your team family capability by remembering everyone’s birthday! It’s simple to do, it works, and every member of your staff will appreciate being recognized by everyone else on their special day. Get a cake, or order a couple of pizzas, start a birthday pool where everyone chips in a couple of bucks and gives the cash to the birthday employee at the end of the night. Or how about a birthday dinner for two (a trade out with a local eatery)? The ideas are endless! What’s important is that you recognize the employee on his/her birthday!
- k) Look like a manager. Dress appropriately. Keep a change of clothes with you in case you have to get out of your suit or dress to do a dirty job!
- l) You’ll never need a name tag that says manager if you always look poised and don’t over-react to anything! You must always stay calm, cool and collected under the most difficult situations! Remember the ducks? They swim for survival. On the surface, the duck appears to be having a nice swim across the lake. Underneath, you’d never know an alligator is chasing him and he’s paddling like hell to escape and survive. I’ve felt like the duck many times in the bar business, but tried to never show it on the outside.
- m) Hide your tattoos and body piercings. No trendy haircuts. Stay clean shaven. Look like you’re in a position of importance (you are!). Ladies – don’t overdo the make-up or the jewelry. Avoid high heels and clothes that are uncomfortable to work in.
- n) Always be early for work! Keep a list of things to do that you refer to everyday. Always be willing to stay late, if necessary. Lead!
- o) Don’t play favorites, ever. You’ll lose respect. One of the most demeaning acts a manager can commit is showing favoritism to less qualified staff. This takes the wind right out of your team family sail.
- p) Display a great sense of humor! Make it a part of your personality. But know when, how and where to draw the line. Business always comes first.

- q) Treat your employees better than you do your customers! Walt Disney said that. I'd say he was pretty successful in the hospitality field, wouldn't you?
- r) Don't be a clock watcher! Management in the hospitality industry is expected to work 50-60 hours a week, sometimes more. Get the job done, whatever it takes!
- s) If your club uses a lot of bartenders and servers (tipped employees), make sure everyone is making money! Don't kid yourself - no one in this business works for minimum wage. If they're not making money, you need to find out why and then do something about it. More training? Splitting up shifts more fairly so everyone has a chance to make money? Otherwise, they'll find work elsewhere. The last thing you need is more turnover.
- t) Get up for breakfast instead of lunch! Nightlife hours can get the best of anyone. Set a good example (and stay healthy yourself) by starting each day right.

In the bar business I learned a long time ago that you have to have the horses to pull the wagon. No horses? You won't go very far and you'll end up hating your job. You've got to continually feed your horses and continually steer them in the right direction! Everyone has to pitch in (pardon the pun) to get the job done. They must be fed (or led?) into performing.

You've got to make your team like you and respect you. It's not going to happen just because you wear a name tag that says manager. Think about using some of the techniques I have used over the years. They work. Throw in some laughter, make the job fun, and you'll be amazed at how you can change your team for the better – because of, after all, you're their leader!