



Learning Leadership Skills is a Waste of Time

by **MARCIA REYNOLDS**

If you are questioning whether you have what it takes to be a leader, the last thing you want to do is enroll in a training class. And please don't read another leadership book thinking that will help. Attempting to become a good leader by just learning leadership skills is a waste of time and money.

I should know, I have been teaching leadership skills for over 30 years.

Trying to learn new skills without changing the way you think about the situation where you will use the skills can be frustrating if not disastrous. The cognitive processing that must occur in order to master complex behavioral skills—which includes all communications and leadership skills—requires you to first reflect on your judgments, your values, and your perspective before you attempt to take them on.

Most importantly, you have to *feel*, not just know, that the skills are vital to your success. How much you *value* the skills and *desire* the difference they will make for you will impact your ability to learn them.

LEADERSHIP IS NOT A TOOLKIT OF SKILLS

Your behavior as a leader is the manifestation of your values. Other people will recognize your values in how you behave. They will then judge your skills based on how they assess your values to be in alignment with what you are saying and doing. In other words, they know when you are walking your talk.



Additionally, your values will determine how much time you will spend learning and practicing skills, so you won't get good at skills if they don't match what you value.

A value is what you hold as significant or useful. It could be a principle you live by or just something you judge as important to your life and work. In other words, you have to value what a skill will give you before you will set aside the time it takes to be good at it.

If you don't value sharing laughs and tears with a friend, you probably will have more acquaintances and colleagues than people who look forward to spending an afternoon with you.

If you don't enjoy how the flow of words can describe a simple object as well as a complex concept, you probably won't write the book you keep saying is on your list to do.

The same goes for leadership. If you don't care to spend time with the people on your team to understand their challenges, to give them a safe space to express themselves, and to show you care about them as humans, you might as well skip the leadership classes. Keep blaming the employees for being uninterested, ungrateful, and unwilling to talk to you. A leadership skills class or book will only waste your time.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP REQUIRES YOU REFLECT ON YOUR VALUES, REGULARLY

Ask yourself *if you truly...*

...like people?

Too many people are promoted to leadership positions who only like some people. This is not a good place to start.

...want other people to be more successful than you?

Too many high achievers are promoted to leadership positions but they like being the superstar. They have trouble giving away their secrets and letting other people shine.

...embrace ambiguity?

Too many leaders think they have to be the one who knows what to do and have all the answers no matter what. These leaders become the roadblocks to creativity, productivity, and growth.

...know how to let go?

There is a difference between giving up and letting go. If you just give up on trying to help people, they will struggle and resent you. If you let go of trying to control, fix, and push people to doing things your way, you might learn that most people are creative, resourceful, and able to grow if you believe in them, support them and get out of their way.

If you believe or at least want to believe in these four things, you might make a good leader. According to the book, *The Leadership Pipeline*¹, there are other shifts in thinking and values you will need to make as you climb up the leadership ladder. The higher you go, the more you will need to value how work gets done by groups of people.

Values are not hard and fast. As you change your point of view, your values might shift too. Coaching before, during, and after training can help you make the shift. With the right values in place, your attendance at a leadership skills class could give you a great return on your investment. **RL**

Reference:

¹Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter, and James Noel, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership Powered Company*. Jose-Bass, 2010.



Dr. Marcia Reynolds, President of Covisioning LLC, works with clients around the world who seek to develop effective leaders. She understands organizational cultures, what blocks communication and innovation, and what is needed to bring people together for better results. She has coached leaders, delivered leadership, coaching and emotional intelligence programs, and spoken at conferences for clients

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Excerpts from her books *Outsmart Your Brain*, *Wander Woman*, and her latest, *The Discomfort Zone: How Leaders Turn Difficult Conversations into Breakthroughs* have appeared in many places including *Harvard Management Review*, *Fortune.com*, *CNN.com*, *Psychology Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and she has appeared on ABC World News.