

## leadership instalments

### Leader as Teacher

By Dan Gaynor

**OF THE MANY ROLES SUCCESSFUL LEADERS MUST PLAY**, few are more important than teacher. All truly successful leaders are skilled and enthusiastic teachers. Often we think about teaching as something that imparts new skills, and this is true, but it also builds relationships. Leaders who teach send the powerful message that they care about those they lead.

Too many leaders spend too much time telling people what they must accomplish and far too little time helping them learn how to get it done. Teaching plays a key role in giving team members the skills they need to succeed, so they can help the team succeed. This is why effective leaders coach both corporately and individually, and why they work constantly at becoming more effective teachers.

I have often said, that the teaching I do today is in many ways the most sensible thing I could be doing since leaving my own leadership career. I'm only doing what I enjoyed the most as a leader in the newspaper business - teaching. I believed then, as I do now, that as the leaders who reported to me became more knowledgeable, the teams they led would prosper. This is true of the team you lead, regardless of what they do.

So let me know turn my attention to some of what I have learned about effective teaching:

1. **Demonstrate.** You cannot teach without knowledge, but knowledge is not enough. All good teachers are comfortable demonstrating skills. You can describe something, but nothing beats demonstration. You should know which skills underpin success for the people you lead and be prepared to demonstrate them. Also in the demonstration category, appreciate the power of your example. I once heard a basic principle from animal training that stuck with me: every interaction is training. People watch leaders closely, make sure you are setting the right example in all that you do.
2. **Observe and provide feedback.** You demonstrate and then you give the learner a chance to practice. Let them try the skill with you observing, then provide feedback. Encourage what is working and correct when the performance is off course. Develop an eye for detail.
3. **Use patience and persistence.** Remember everyone learns at a different rate. You'll need to be patient enough to give people time to refine and persistent enough to stick with it when it's taking a little extra time. A word of caution though, when someone is just



not getting a key skill, it may be a talent issue. When this is the case, you have to move them out of the role and into something different they can succeed at.

4. **Pace the lesson.** Break big or complex skills into smaller digestible lessons. Too much too fast, will overwhelm the learner.
5. **Provide aids and lots of encouragement to build confidence.** During the early stages of learning something, like the steps of holding a difficult conversation, put them on a board somewhere visible and let them stop or pause when they need to. If they are struggling, help out at first. You can drop the aids as they get more proficient. A big part of teaching is building confidence.

As a leader, you have an obligation to fairness, and this means preparing people for the work you ask of them, but beyond this, teaching builds organizational capacity and it builds loyal relationships. Don't miss the opportunity it presents to build a stronger more motivated team

#### Discussion Questions:

1. How much time do you spend each week teaching, corporately and individually?
2. Which skills, practices and values does your team need to work most on today?
3. When are the best times to teach?

*To take your leadership team to a new, more skillful level, call to arrange a workshop.*

For other Leadership Instalments articles go to:  
[www.gaynorconsulting.com](http://www.gaynorconsulting.com)

Dan Gaynor can be contacted at:  
**403.880.1780**