

Make Your New Year Resolution Today to Be a Better Leader

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Looking to implement some new strategies with your team in 2003? Put one important item at the top of your list: Take a hard look at yourself as a leader and make plans to improve your role in your organization.

Even the most seasoned executives among us need to step back and assess how we're doing. Are you truly walking the talk and motivating your team? The new year is an opportune time to re-think how you act as a leader and how you want your team to view you.

The most exciting and effective leader is one who thinks strategically—and acts tactically. Roll up your sleeves, take in the following tips and you'll be prepared for rolling out those new strategies. On to 2003!

The Effective Executive's Checklist: 9 Tips for Learning to Lead

Set the tone. Give your team someone to look up to by maintaining a positive attitude about your organization, its goals and every member of its team. When you adopt a "glass-is-half-full" perspective, others will follow suit.

Treat situations with integrity, humor and grace. These are some of the best qualities in successful leaders—and indicators of people who can handle the daily, necessary pressures of life with dignity. Make these a part of your demeanor and you'll find you'll get the same back from your colleagues.

Banish the ivory tower mentality. Don't hide away in your office. Go with your team on sales calls. Attend their meetings. Find out what they're doing day to day and show that you understand what they face.

Create an atmosphere of communication, trust and respect. Articulate these through your own personal mission statement tacked up in your office, through a tag on your e-mail, through the language you use when you congratulate a team member or help diffuse a dicey situation.

Engage your team every day. Show you value what they bring to the table. Seek out their ideas and advice on strategies and tactics to support the department's initiatives. Give positive feedback in public, and voice concerns in private. Build a "coaching" method of leading; people respond to guidance, mentoring and a demonstration of the outcomes you desire.

Shake things up every so often. Hold weekly meetings away from the office. Appoint a “leader of the week” to conduct the meeting while you sit back. Encourage creative, solution-oriented thinking.

Give credit where it's due. You'll earn your title when you recognize that everyone contributes to your organization's success—not just those in the executive suite. Be the first to spread the word that a team member has achieved a goal, brought a new client on board or implemented a smart idea inside the organization. And be the first to pat that person on the back.

Ask of yourself what you ask of others. Demonstrate efficient planning and time management. Be respectful of others' schedules by building plans on time, capturing staff input prior to a deadline and coming prepared to each meeting. Plan your projects to respect your staff's down time. Don't build work around the assumption that others will continue to stay late, work weekends and at home for you.

Above all, listen. Smart leaders know they serve as a sounding board for their team at crucial times and benign moments, as well. You'll learn a great deal by watching how people work together. Take that knowledge and put it to good use.



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