

Changing from within: How Professional Development can transform your leadership style

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Summary

Leadership is both an active research area and an act of practical skill where individuals continuously enhance their knowledge within unlearned areas, add value to the work that they do and positively move their team and companies forward. Leading where you are begins with introspection before you can develop your strengths to accelerate change.

Lead where you are

Practical leadership begins before you read a book or article, attend a conference or become a student within a professional development class. Leadership begins with a growth mindset of where it is not about you and it becomes about the willingness to learn, grow, and be of service to others. This article is intended to share how participating within professional development trainings can help you implement transformative change in your life and in the lives of those around you.

Clemson Cooperative Extension Service recognized the need to invest within their employees by creating the Extension Emerging Leadership Initiative (EELI) to develop future leaders, increase employee engagement and to help create forward actions to enhance the mission of Extension. The mission of EELI is to develop a core group of successful leaders that will inspire, have vision and impact to assist in moving the organization forward¹. To grow in leadership and professional development an individual will need to know thyself, what talents, passions, and areas that require growth. Being a participant within EELI can challenge your thinking, and help you become a change agent within your field.

Professional development is directly related to the day-to-day activities² of each individual. What we constantly do defines us. Leading where we are is the first step in building relationships that will foster trust with your fellow co-workers and upper management. Your creativity can begin with curiosity, the curiosity to learn about topics to expand your thinking regarding the subject matter that you may not be well versed in. This can provide you with the opportunity to create dialogue and open exchanges to become better and sharpen your skills for the use of project management, facilitation, and recruitment.

EELI has been a source of support with a foundation where participating staff can be a bridge for their own growth and development. Students share wins through fellowship, engagement, and appreciation for their individual and collective roles. Their goal is to create a coalition for change where safe spaces are created, to share their stories of life and professional experiences in designing equitable and inclusive infrastructures and systems for their fellow co-workers and those to come.

Communication is very pivotal in building teams and creating partnerships. Understanding that individuals with different backgrounds, learning styles, and change styles all comprehend and respond in a myriad of ways, and clear communication and expectations that are conveyed and successfully received helps to move progress forward. Delivery methods have to be varied yet as a team the end goal should be with united efforts.

CliftonStrengths Assessment

Several metrics and learning tools are available that may be utilized to impact personal leadership interactions. The CliftonStrengths assessment measures an individual's talents and categorizes them within themes. This metric can be

utilized to identify what your team or teammates do best and can help forge understanding of one another for teambuilding towards a common goal.

After you have the opportunity to complete the CliftonStrengths assessment, utilize your strengths when collaborating within and outside your program team to be most effective. Knowledge of knowing more about yourself, your purpose, your “why” is valuable in order to bring about transformational change at work, which can aid in implementing systems that create significant growth within the organization that improves performance. This introspection of where you are, how you think about what you do, and how you function alone or as part of a team is a great development for

An example CliftonStrengths excerpt from an Extension employee’s assessment follows:

Responsibility-take ownership of what they will do and committed to stable values of honesty and loyalty.

Relator-enjoy close relationships, fulfillment in working hard to achieve a goal.

Activator-work to make things happen by turning thoughts into action now rather than later.

Restorative-adept at dealing with issues and are good at discovering what is wrong and methods to resolve it.

Belief-have a defined purpose for their lives.

The above displayed strengths may be used as guiding principles to interact with others and can be instrumental when building a team. Understanding that other individuals operate differently than you do will aid in your first steps of fostering inclusion. As an example, when a boss or manager calls for a meeting, there are individuals who are quite comfortable with a quick meeting without knowing the topics of discussion. Then there are individuals who need to know in advance the topics of discussion and would absolutely prefer an agenda at least a week in advance. This can help to alleviate possible anxiety of the meeting topics and facilitate their preparation. This simple act displays you giving your best to understand and interact with others and to improve team functionality.

S.M.A.R.T. Goals

After obtaining new information on what your strengths are you may wish to set new goals for yourself. Setting goals is instrumental within your personal development growth as it can promote improved behaviors and guide your focus in keeping your momentum. The value of this information is instrumental in framing you to think strategically and create S.M.A.R.T. goals to execute plans and become more engaged at work and increase productivity within your role (figure 1).

Figure 1. Graphic detailing components of each S.M.A.R.T. goal. (did you develop this? Or did you copy from another source – need to include an attribution of source.)

SMART Goals



S.M.A.R.T. goals are established to aid in improving your skills and achievements. S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym that stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-Based, and can be utilized as a framework to guide you in setting goals that are clear, carefully planned, and obtainable. Figure 1 highlights the breakdown of what S.M.A.R.T. goals are.

Consider this example of how to adapt the goal, “I want to be a leader,” into a S.M.A.R.T. goal.

S=Specific

Example: “I will coordinate development of a new statewide program, with help from my program team, as I desire to be a leader among my program team.”

M=Measurable

Example: “I will lead development of one, new statewide program this year and submission of one grant to support that program.”

A=Achievable

Example: “My program team supports developing the new program. Information resources are available at Clemson and other Land Grant Institutions that will aid in program development. Grant support services will guide the team through the grant submission process.”

R=Realistic

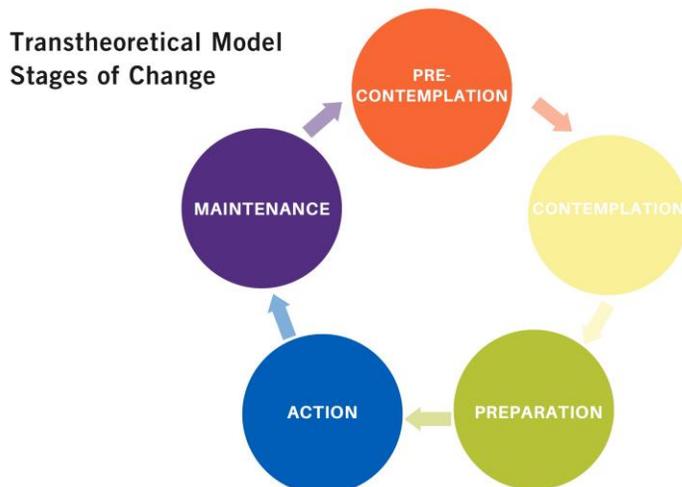
Example: “I will work with my program team director to ensure that developing this program meets one or more Employment Performance Management System (EPMS) objective(s) for the program team members involved.”

T=Time-Based

Example: “To achieve my goal of being a leader, I will set aside 3-5 hours per a week to read relevant materials, write and develop curriculum for the new program, write and submit a grant proposal (submission goal within the first 6 months of this year), and implement this new program within 3-4 months as a pilot within my county. During the pilot program, utilize pre and post evaluations to use as a reference for further enhancement and development for the statewide program.”

Once you have decided to challenge yourself by creating S.M.A.R.T. goals and you are on track with your timeline, it may be the moment to generate buy-in from others. The Transtheoretical Model, also called the Stages of Change Model, is a model that details an individuals’ readiness to change (figure 2).

Figure 2. Graphic detailing the Stages of Change model. (Or did you copy from another source – need to include an attribution of source.)



Assessing and respecting where individuals are within the five stages (Pre-contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance), and Termination) can help in gauging what may be the best approach for flexibility and adaptability, while continually moving toward the goal of facilitating organizational change. As a leader it is imperative to understand that individuals on your team have a different story, think and solve problems in their own unique way, and their motivations will be varied. With that knowledge, work to integrate more customized strategies to assess readiness to promote change acknowledging individuals may travel through these six stages at different rates of speed.

Below are ten guiding principles that you may find helpful in developing your leadership for a more inclusive future.

1. Know yourself, your abilities, talents, and passion
2. Be clear and consistent regarding your core principles and values
3. Be genuine
4. Embrace change and work to understand what is needed and when
5. Forgive yourself during the losses and the times when you fail
6. Learn from your losses and failures and become better in spite of them
7. Take the time to learn the best way to communicate with those you work with
8. Embrace difficult conversations, they help you grow
9. Never assume, ask questions for clarity and understanding
10. Be humble and give others grace

Take advantage of professional development opportunities to learn. Active participation in professional development training helps you develop a higher level of emotional intelligence, learn to actively listen with an empathetic ear, and connect employee daily responsibilities with the broader strategic goal. By striving to keep learning and implementing newly acquired skills, we support and continuously further the mission of the organization for which we work.

References Cited

1. Extension Emerging Leadership Initiative [Internet]. Clemson University. [cited 2020 July 7]. Available from: www.clemson.edu/extension/leadership/.
2. Mourão, Luciana. The Role of Leadership in the Professional Development of Subordinates. IntechOpen.2018. 10.5772/76056.

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