



Leading by Trial & Error
By Ann Golden Eglé, MCC
July 2018

Leaders are not perfect, though everyone expects them to be so, as do they.

This is an especially painful reality for new leaders — those who have been promoted to a brand-new leadership position within their company because they showed promise.

However, this promotion came with no specific leadership training and typically little support.

Becoming a seasoned leader takes time, experience, diligence, patience and awareness. Tough, often unpopular decisions need to be made. Mistakes will occur along the way, many of which you'll laugh at or use as learning opportunities later in your career.

For now, simply learn from them. What went wrong? What needs to be changed, eliminated or repaired? How can you do better next time? What support will you need moving forward?

Take client Caleb for example. He entered his new leadership position eager to please first, eager to learn and grow secondly. Last week, the team he now supervises were his equals, working side-by-side, sharing common complaints.

In his efforts to impress, Caleb took on all that was handed to him, and more. He wanted to show everyone that he was a capable leader, that he didn't make the same mistakes his ineffective predecessor made.

Caleb continued to go out for drinks with the staff that he'd just been promoted to supervise. He saw no reason to stop being their buddy.

As he knew how overworked they each were, he chose not to burden them by delegating the additional work that would help them grow. He took on their problems like they were his own, doing what it took to solve each.

How many mistakes was Caleb making? Where was this leading? Those of you reading this see it clearly as day. However, living the day-to-day challenges of being a new leader, Caleb thought he was doing what it took to succeed.

After one year in his new leadership position, Caleb's family life and health suffered due to his long hours and lack of exercise and proper nutrition. His work relationships suffered as he eventually had to make unpopular choices. He was unhappy and on the verge of burnout.

That's when he asked for help and we went to work. There was no judgement, rather a game plan for us to put into place.

Caleb had fallen into the trap that many leaders experience while seeking success: that of not stepping outside of his role looking in, instead of remaining smothered inside his increasingly demanding role.

Our work led to several items new and seasoned leaders need to keep in mind to succeed and enjoy long term job fulfillment.

Below are my 'Top 7 Tips' for long term leadership success:

Be the leader of you. Unless you take great care of yourself, you'll be limited in what you can offer your team. Be strict with yourself regarding family and romance time, exercise, nutrition, pensive alone time, time in nature and whatever 'you' need.

Create a life away from work. It's easy and even fun to work and play with the same people. In addition, create activities and relationships that don't involve work or even discussions about your leadership role. Expand into invigorating new conversations, new areas of interest.

Take vacations. It's vital to your long-term success to get away for more than a day here and there. It takes leaders a few days to unwind before fully enjoying their time away. Plan longer vacations a few times each year to revive and regenerate.

Stop the 24x7 work style. Experience periods of each day to breathe, not be 'on.' This is especially difficult for newer leaders. The space and time you create will bring benefits beyond what you can imagine to both you and your company.

Find a strategic advisor. Have that one person at work who will tell you the truth. This is the person with whom you can be vulnerable, and brainstorm challenging situations. They will provide valuable feedback on what they see in your meetings or presentations. This person may be a colleague, mentor or boss. The key is that you choose someone whom you trust.

Ask for feedback. Staff feedback is vital. Timing is also vital. As a new leader you don't want to look insecure asking for feedback after each meeting. Consider different forms of feedback in addition to annual reviews. For example, you might use a formal 360 survey or individual one-to-one conversations.

Ask for help. This is one of the most difficult challenges for leaders at any level. It's also typically a part of any formal leadership training program. Sooner or later you'll learn that you cannot do it all, be it all for your team. The help you need may be from inside or outside of your company. Know when you need it and be strong enough to ask for it. You'll soon be happy that you did.

Being a leader at any level of your organization is both a blessing and a curse. You will make mistakes. It's not for the weak of heart. It's exciting to be in a position to make changes, to affect people's livelihoods. As you see above, it can also be riddled with challenges.

As a leader, or a supervisor of a leader who may benefit, select one of these tips to put into practice today. Make it happen. Your company, team, family and most of all 'you' will reap the benefits.

Master Executive and Leadership Coach Ann Golden Eglé, MCC, has steered highly-successful individuals to greater results since 1998. President of Golden Visions & Associates, LLC, Ann can be reached at 541-385-8887 or subscribe to her newsletter at www.GVAsuccess.com