



Coaches Corner:

The “How-to” Of Leadership Skill Development

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How does one develop new leadership skills or behaviours? Let's assume you've figured out (see page 12) or been told what leadership skills to work on. Here are six tips to follow to master these new skills:

1. ASK FOR FEEDBACK-FEEDFORWARD SUGGESTIONS

Don't ask people “How did I do when I ran that meeting?” Framing the question this way “pre-suades” people to look for gaps or deficiencies in something that's already finished. Instead, ask for suggestions for the future: “If I was running that same meeting next week, could you give me two suggestions to improve?”

2. JUST SAY THANK YOU

When you get a suggestion, don't debate, discuss, or analyse it. Just say Thank You. This person has just invested their time and energy into helping you out. Repay them by appreciating them. Resist the urge to respond otherwise as you'll seem argumentative, defensive,

and unappreciative.

3. AND KEEP ASKING

Research has found that the key to improving is regularly seeking feedback-feedforward suggestions on how you're doing. I recommend you ask for suggestions at least once a week from two different people you work with. Why is this important? It forces you to take ownership of your own development. Secondly and more importantly, it advertises you're trying and forces coworkers to notice your efforts. Since your leadership improvement is measured by their perceptions, not yours, getting people to notice is important.

4. IT'S OFTEN ADVISABLE TO START BY APOLOGISING FOR PAST SINS AND/OR OMISSIONS

While this may feel unnecessary, it can serve to help coworkers let go of the past and prepare them to help you move forward. Apologies are like hitting a “relationship reset button.” A simple example might look like, “I'm sorry I sometimes forget to encourage

others' ideas and participation. Moving forward I'll try to remember to do this.” The formula for apologizing is: Say you're sorry, Say you'll try to do better, and then say nothing!

5. BE THICK SKINNED

Even though you'll be asking for “feedback-feedforward” suggestions, some of what you receive might seem negative and critical. Remember, people often ignore the 90 percent that's working to focus on the 10 percent gap. Do your best to turn all comments into a future focused action you'll take to improve. When receiving negative feedback, if you feel your defensive hackles start to rise, ask yourself, “What 1 percent that they're saying is probably true?” This simple technique diverts you from making an emotional response and puts your thinking self back in control.

6. COMMIT TO THE PROCESS

Like learning any new skill (think improving your golf swing or learning a language), it can be a challenge and progress will come in fits and starts. It's important to be persistent. ♦