

TWO THINGS NATURAL LEADERS DO DIFFERENTLY

by Glenn Williams



For some leaders there is a natural flow to relationship building that has little to do with their technical skill or level of charisma. It is demonstrated in the way they carry themselves, how they relate to others and their ability to speak their mind with both confidence and humility.

It's the result of being grounded in their identity, beliefs and values coupled with a humility that allows others to be fully themselves. They know who they are, what their purpose is, which values guide their decision making, and [continually invest into the relationships that bring energy and life](#). And most importantly, they encourage and protect this development in those they lead.

While leadership may come more naturally to some, here are two ways you can learn to be the type of leader others want to follow:

1. Know thyself – leading yourself first

“Of all the skills and aspirations good bosses must have, self-awareness is probably the most important.”¹

A person who is aware of their own [personal strengths](#), the assumptions they carry, capability gaps, values, and how these elements affect decision-making and motivation are better able to recognize the effects these same internal processes have on those they lead, and how to manage them.

Every leader is at risk of not being able to motivate others if they hold misguided perceptions about their own blind spots, character flaws, personality, and level of competence which influences how they are perceived by others².

One organization we knew held a much-needed session to address the dysfunctional team culture and resulting poor performance. As part of the conflict management process, the leaders were asked to stand at the front of the room and the staff invited to come up and speak to a leader with whom they had professional interpersonal issues with. One of the leaders was shocked to find almost all of the staff were lined up waiting to talk with him. He had no idea his relational style was so abrasive that his staff were unable to make decisions out of fear of his response. This had obvious implications for motivation, innovation, and performance. While this process might be challenged, the key insight here is the leader's lack of self-awareness.

More often than not, team members are able to pick up when a leader is being incongruent. The disconnect between [the values they espouse to have versus what their behavior demonstrates](#) creates a roadblock for team members being able to fully trust their leader. This quiet distrust can manifest into an unhealthy team culture, frustration, a lack of motivation, and a lack of commitment and buy-in for the success of the team.

Here are some questions to reflect on to increase your self-awareness:

- What motivates me to succeed? What are the different motivational drivers of my team members?
- How do others perceive me? What is my relational style?
- Who are the key people in my world that are a source of honesty, energy, and support?

[Understanding ourselves](#) will equip us to better understand and lead the teams we are responsible for.

2. Find out what makes your team members flourish

Tied to the first point, a leader who is aware of themselves isn't threatened by the success of others. Conversely, they want to lead and be part of a team that thrives, which can only be achieved when the individuals on that team are encouraged and enabled to flourish.

Finding out [what is meaningful to your direct reports](#) equips you to lead with an individualized approach, where you are able to draw out the best from each member of the team for the benefit of the whole.

“Good bosses spark imagination and encourage learning by creating a safety zone where people can talk about half-baked ideas, test them, and even make big mistakes without fear of ridicule, punishment, or ostracism.”¹

In their book *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement and Creativity at Work*, authors Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, describe how fostering the inner work lives of their employees directly impacts a company's bottom line³. A positive inner work life is connected to the joy, pride, and satisfaction an employee has in their work.

Success, they say, comes through leaders facilitating their employees' progress in meaningful ways. As meaning - and success - is unique to each individual, leaders must discover [what meaningful work looks like to their employees](#) and do everything in their power to create an environment that enables it.

A leader who actively - and genuinely - desires to see others flourish will reap the benefits of teams who are internally motivated, have greater connections with their colleagues and the organization they work for, and have higher levels of engagement resulting in greater performance. Ignoring or devaluing the inner work life of your team will produce the opposite.

What's the bottom line?

You may not think you're a 'natural born leader', however, that doesn't mean you can't learn to lead more naturally. Becoming more self-aware and aware of those you lead will help to create an environment where others can flourish, and where you become the type of leader that people want to follow.

References

¹ Sutton, R. I. (2019, February 22). Why good bosses tune in to their people. McKinsey & Company.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/why-good-bosses-tune-in-to-their-people>

² Dunning, D. (2012). Self-Insight: Roadblocks and Detours on the Path to Knowing Thyself (Essays in Social Psychology) (1st ed.). Psychology Press.

³ Amabile, T., & Kramer, S. (2011). The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work (1st ed.). Harvard Business Review Press.