

The Path To Leadership

This document outlines the participation for Jason Mewis in the ACEC 2011 Summit YP Session called "The Path To Leadership". In his presentation, Jason covers "Leadership is an Attitude".

THE SESSION

Title: *The Path to Leadership*

Description: *CEOs Share Tips on How to Advance Your Career and Think Like a Leader*

Presentation

Leadership is an attitude, not a title you are given. Leadership is something that comes naturally to some more than others, but in this profession it is inevitable – the only question is when... my answer is now.

In preparation for this session I did a little online research for **simple definitions** of leadership, here are a few that stood out for me - leadership is the **art** of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal (about.com), A leader is someone who has followers (Peter Drucker), Leadership is influence - nothing more, nothing less (John C Maxwell) and the one I find most applicable to my talk is - Leadership is a function of **knowing yourself**, having a **vision** that is well **communicated**, building **trust** among colleagues, and taking effective action to realize your own **leadership potential** (Warren Bennis).

At the root of being successful lies trust. Steven Covey wrote a book called the Speed of Trust, which I highly recommend, where he delves deep into the definition of trust, how you create it and the cost of not having it. He breaks trust down to 4 core areas – **Integrity, Intent, Capabilities** and **Results**. If you display strength in all of these areas people will trust you. The bottom line is that in order to be successful you need your leaders to

trust you but more importantly, you need those who report to you now, or who will in the future, to trust you as well.

So, I'll break down in practical terms what I see as key areas for you to display strength so that people above and below you will confident in you as a leader, even if you don't wear a leadership title yet.

Be a good communicator. This does not just mean being good at speaking or writing – are you good at understanding – comprehension? Do you easily “get it” when receiving instruction from your leaders and colleagues? Can you communicate instructions to others well enough so that they “get it”? Can you recognize if instructions you have communicated have not been adequately received or interpreted and adjust? People will trust you when they know through proof of experience that **you consistently deliver** after saying that you understood their instructions. And vice versa, people will trust you as a leader when you are able to consistently get others to deliver under your instruction.

Experience – Don't try to “climb the ladder” too soon. This is an area that I work hard on with my high achieving young professionals. You need to establish a solid foundation in the core of the business. With experience comes perspective that helps you to make better decisions as a leader. It also gives you credibility in the eyes of your colleagues. There are many aspects to your career that you can accelerate technically, you may be a natural speaker, you may be extremely organized and diligent, but **there is no substitute for experience** when you face a challenging problem as a leader in an organization.

Build general knowledge - Take an interest early to understand all aspects of the business you work in, including the technical aspects of other disciplines at a high level. Research and understand your industry and the workings of your clients. With this knowledge you'll be able to speak intelligently on most topics as a leader, whether it is with your colleagues or your clients. This builds on your credibility and experience.

Share your knowledge. You might have only 1 year of experience, but when that new graduate joins your company, you can show leadership by extending the hand of friendship, showing them around, and offering to help them if they encounter a problem.

Volunteer. You don't need to be at the top of any organizational pyramid in order to volunteer. You will be given responsibility in other organizations that will result in gaining great leadership experience.

Don't be afraid of a challenge. Take on jobs or projects **without hesitation.** You may not know how you're going to get the job done when you start, but show confidence and do what you have to do to figure out the solutions and meet the objectives of your stakeholders.

Show initiative. Look for better ways to do the work, even if it's simple stuff. When you complete the work assigned to you, look for other things to do. ***Don't be too proud to take on menial tasks.*** Carry this philosophy with you too. As a Leader there should never be a task that you wouldn't do

The Path To Leadership
"Leadership is an Attitude"

if it's necessary to keep the job or the organization going. This is also seen as leading by example.

Reach out to other people. At a conference or any other networking situation, natural leaders don't just hang out with their friends. Seek out the person standing on their own, who might be new, not know anyone. Or seek out that old guy and show that you are interested in learning from them. They may become your mentors, but they also may become your clients as well.

Project Managers are leaders. It's a different kind of leadership than Corporate Leadership. Project Managers have to be task oriented, gathering information and making decisions rapidly under deadline pressure. Corporate Leadership is more about building relationships, consensus and morale. It's something you do over the longer term.

Be a Specialist. Show leadership through the confidence to solve the problem. Show your ability to break new ground with innovative solutions. This is also different sort of leadership than Corporate leadership.

At the end of the day you can boil this all down to building trust. Trust inspires your leaders to elevate you to levels of more leadership responsibility. **But more importantly**, trust or credibility will *inspire others to follow* when you are elevated to leadership roles in your organization. This is one of the hardest parts of project management and management in general. If the people you are leading don't believe that you know what you are talking about, you will have a hard time getting them to



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follow your direction, especially if it is different than where they inherently want to go.

So **take the initiative wherever you can** to be a leader. Don't wait for someone above you to ask you to step up. This is the best way to climb the ladder and will establish for you a solid foundation for your career.



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