



MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

6 SURPRISING WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

BY CHRISSY CARROLL, MPH, RD

FINDING YOURSELF IN A RUT when it comes to managing your team? Not to worry—by embracing some out-of-the-box methods, you'll enhance those leadership skills and guide your team to success.

1. GET ORGANIZED.

Never quite latched on to the KonMari method of tidying up? Don't have any interest in categorizing your items by color a la The Home Edit?

Even if organizing isn't your cup of tea, it's still worthwhile to pay attention to your space (both in the home and workplace). Clutter can negatively impact your leadership abilities, and even your health.

For example, a study in *Current Psychology* found that clutter was linked to decreased life satisfaction among older adults. A similar study in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* found clutter had a negative impact on subjective well-being.

This isn't the only downside. Additional research in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* suggested that a cluttered house altered cortisol levels and also increased depressive scores among women.

As you can imagine, if your stress hormones are off kilter and you are feeling down, you're not as likely to be an effective and engaged leader. When there is too much visual stimuli (as is the case with clutter), the brain also has a hard time focusing, affecting your ability to think clearly about big picture strategy.

Take a look around your office or workspace. What do you no longer need? Is there any broken equipment or old files that can be disposed of? What systems can you put in place to keep inventory tidy? Take these steps to help conquer clutter.

A decluttered, organized space will help you better manage stress, increase focus, and improve your ability to lead your team.

2. TACKLE A BIG PERSONAL GOAL.

Want to run your first half marathon? Learn to play the guitar? Become fluent in another language?

Whatever it is, setting a goal for yourself—and achieving it—helps enhance your confidence and competence as a leader. When you set out to achieve something in your personal life, you'll run into challenges that often parallel those in your work life.

For example, when training to do your first road race, you might run into issues like...

- Finding time to run
- Feeling tired
- Negative feedback from others

If you think of your work life, you may discover overlap—such as finding time for all the tasks in the day, feeling tired, and negative comments from your team.

When you learn how to handle these as part of your personal goals, you'll find yourself better equipped to solve similar problems at work.

Limited research supports this concept. For example, studies show that participation in endurance sports is linked to better self-assessed leadership habits, increased self-efficacy, and potentially enhanced mental toughness. In a 2020 survey of athletes who were executives, 100 percent of respondents believed endurance sports had at least some positive effect on their leadership



development.

Not everyone will fall in love with the idea of running, of course, but tackling any big personal challenge can mimic these results.

3. MAKE TIME FOR REFLECTION.

It may sound a bit “woo,” but reflecting on your day—both the good and the bad—is a great way to improve leadership skills.

Try this reflection journaling exercise, which helps you process the events of the day, understand your emotions and reactions, and develop a plan for how to improve things in the future.

1. Each evening, write down one thing that went well during the day (great job!), and one situation where you could have exhibited better



Taking 10 minutes out of your day to think about your actions can help you make more conscious decisions in the future and

MAKE YOU A MORE EFFECTIVE LEADER.

leadership.

2. For each of the “could have done better” situations, come up with one specific action you could have taken to improve the outcome.
3. Repeat the process daily, and refer back to your list regularly. Look for any trends on skills you need to continue to improve, and celebrate the areas where you’ve seen growth.

Taking these 10 minutes out of your day to think about your actions can help you make more conscious decisions in the future and make you a more effective leader.

4. ASK WHY.

As a leader, struggling with employee mistakes or lack of motivation can be incredibly difficult. You want to find a solution, and do so quickly.

But it’s important to analyze the

employee's objections and struggles before developing a strategy to fix the problem.

Most of the time, we assume someone doesn't know how to do something. Research suggests knowledge gaps definitely exist for foodservice employees, and are key to address. However, they're not the only reason that people choose to behave in a particular way.

For example, let's say a new employee skipped taking the temperature of the chicken they cooked. At first, you might assume it's because they don't know how to do it.

But other reasons for making a decision may include factors such as:

- Family beliefs: "My mom always told me to just check if the chicken was still a little pink."
- Mindset: "Taking the temperature is a waste; there's no reason to do it."
- Perspective: "I'm so busy, taking the temperature just seems like an extra step that I don't have time to do."
- Misinformation: "I thought you only had to take the temperature of beef and pork."

Asking why someone made (or didn't make) a particular choice helps us learn how to better rectify the situation.

5. PRACTICE 1 PERCENT INFINITY.

This concept (courtesy of the Food Blogger Pro podcast) is simple: how could you become just 1 percent better in your leadership skills today—and then continue to do so each and every day.

Big ambitions can feel overwhelming and sometimes stop us in our tracks, but figuring out a way to get just a smidgen

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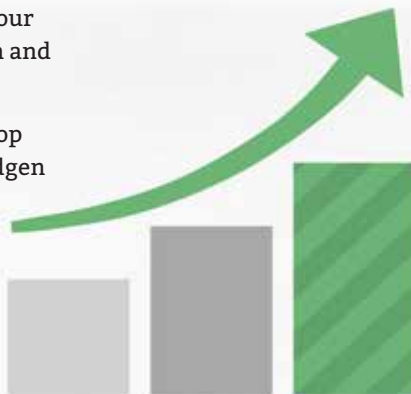
better is easier to grasp.

Here are some ways you might choose to practice this:

- Read a helpful industry article instead of scrolling social media while waiting in the checkout line at the store. (Even if you believe you don't spend much time on social media, check your phone settings and look at the "screen time" data. You may be shocked at how much mindless scrolling you have done in the last week.)
- Set aside 10 minutes each morning to consume helpful content about leadership—whether that's reading, listening to a podcast, or watching a TED Talk.
- Join a mastermind or business group—whether in your local community or virtually. These groups often meet monthly, and give you the opportunity to share your challenges and learn from others.
- Take a 5 minute walk at lunchtime to get fresh air and think about any problems you're facing. Creativity often comes with movement in nature.

6. RECHARGE YOUR OWN BATTERIES.

To be an effective leader, you need to take care of yourself. Make time for sleep, regular meals, and exercise. These choices maintain your health and wellness, allowing you to continue showing up for work each day.





TAKING SHORT BREAKS,
getting out in nature for a few
minutes, experiencing a positive
conversation, and regular meals
can all help restore our decision-
making capacity.

But there's another reason to practice this type of self-care. Throughout the day, making repeated decisions wears on us and can start to deplete our mental capabilities. Research suggests this "decision fatigue" can lead to choices that simply take the path of least resistance, even though they may not be the best decision for the department.


Taking short breaks, getting out in nature for a few minutes, experiencing a positive conversation, and regular meals can all help restore our decision-making capacity.

Just take this example: a study in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* looked at the probability that judges would issue a favorable verdict in parole hearings. Over the course of the day, the judges were most likely to grant parole during three distinct points: first thing in the morning, after a snack break, and after lunch.

Why? They could likely better assess the case at each of these points, as their decision-making skills were at full strength after the breaks.

The next time you're feeling stressed in your role, take 5-10 minutes to go outside and have a nutritious snack. You may find you are able to come back refreshed and ready to lead!

FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember, you don't have to tackle every tip at once. Start with just one of the concepts mentioned in this article, and build on your skills from there. These small shifts can make a big impact in your continued quest towards excellence in leadership. 



REFERENCES

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This **Level I** article assumes that the reader has introductory knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a basic understanding and explanation of the concepts of the subject matter and recalling of related facts.

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- Which of the following is true regarding research on clutter and well-being?
 - Clutter has no relationship with well-being or health
 - People with cluttered spaces tend to be happier
 - People with cluttered spaces tend to have lower ratings of well-being
- Constant exposure to clutter may lead to elevated levels of which hormone?
 - Leptin
 - Cortisol
 - Estrogen
- In a 2020 survey of athletes, what percentage of executives believed that participating in endurance sports improved their leadership skills?
 - 25 percent
 - 50 percent
 - 100 percent
- A brand new employee didn't complete temperature logs. What's a logical next step you could take as a leader, based on this article?
 - Ask them why they didn't track the temperatures to discover their objections or beliefs
 - Fire them immediately
 - Reprimand them in front of your entire team to make a point
- You decide to set aside 10 minutes each morning to read inspirational leadership content. This is an example of which concept?
 - 1 percent infinity
 - Decision fatigue
 - Reflection journaling
- What is the term for the mental depletion that comes with making repeated choices over the course of the day?
 - 1 percent infinity
 - Decision fatigue
 - Reflection journaling
- In the study on judges, when did they typically have the best decision-making capabilities?
 - First thing in the morning
 - After snack and lunch breaks
 - Both A and B



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