

# Say Hello to Leadership!

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It's safe to say that learning the basics of leadership could be the best hour you have ever spent on life-long learning – and begin at the beginning!

*Interacting effectively with other people is important to everyone—whether employee, leader, follower, constituent, or community member. Learning the basics of leadership could be the best hour you have ever spent on life-long learning.*

## Defining Leadership

Merriam-Webster defines leadership as “the capacity to lead” or “the act of leading.” Pretty straightforward, right? The qualities of leadership are a paradox; we can find more than five thousand different definitions in the literature. Part of what makes leadership vague and difficult to define is the wide variety of aspects that are included in various leadership definitions. But a good working definition of leadership includes three important components. The act of leadership must be:

- ▶ **A group phenomenon.** A leader can't practice leadership without at least one person (follower, constituent, employee) supporting him or her.

Leaders are defined by the fact that they are leading or directing others towards a specific path. Leadership involves a process of which a large part is the fundamental leader – follower relationship. Without that process (and relationship), there is no leadership.

- ▶ **Directed by a goal.** The leader must be leading the group toward an objective that followers believe in.

Another aspect that defines leadership is the progression toward a shared goal. Over the last several years, leadership has turned from primarily leader-centered goals to more follower-centered goals. Leaders have found it is much easier to motivate others towards a belief or action they believe in.

- ▶ **Organized in a hierarchy.** No matter how tight or loose the leading structure is, there is always some type of arrangement needed within the leader-follower relationship.

A final aspect that defines leadership is the presence of structure. A leader-follower relationship with no structure is merely chaos; structure provides the organization needed for successful goal attainment. It should be noted, however, that diverse situations require different types of structure to be the most effective.

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## LEADERSHIP DEFINITIONS

*The art of influencing an individual or group, regardless of the rationale.*

–Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson

*The ability to mobilize people towards a shared vision, while encouraging individual development in the process.*

–Kouzes and Posner

*A relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good.*

–Komives, Lucas, and McMahon

*Conceived as the focus of **group processes**, as a matter of **personality**, as a matter of inducing **compliance**, as the exercise of **influence**, as particular **behaviors**, as a form of **persuasion**, as a **power** relation, as an instrument to achieve **goals**, as an effect of **interaction**, as a differentiated role, as initiation of **structure**, and as many combinations of these definitions.*

– Bass

As you can see through this final definition, leadership can be illustrated through a variety of different elements. Each of these pieces helps to define leadership from different angles. By working on skills and knowledge associated with any of these factors, one can improve his or her leadership potential. Effective personal leadership development begins with simply being aware of the intricacy of leadership, and being willing to explore these intricacies.

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Using the information we have learned, write your own definition of leadership:

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## The Relational Foundation to Leadership

Understanding how important relationships are to leadership greatly improves leadership development. There is a basic relational foundation to all leadership, and it is shaped by three basic principles:

► **Knowing**

- Yourself
- How change occurs
- That others may have a different view than you do

► **Being**

- Ethical
- Principled
- Open
- Caring
- Inclusive

► **Doing**

- Socially responsible acts, consistently and congruently
- Community participation
- Actions based on your commitments and passions

## Citizen Leadership

Citizen leaders, including a large number of individuals working for Extension, are people within the community who are interested in making the quality of life in their community the best it can be. Out of this concern grows a desire to contribute toward the public good and to pull together community members for the good of the community. Community action is the result. Citizen leaders take responsibility for community problem solving, decision making, and other community actions.

Extension agents are often seen as citizen leaders—or leaders within their communities. Their role can be as fundamental as being a role model or an information leader who provides necessary resources to community members, or as involved as holding a community office and having a positional leadership title.

Citizen leaders are a useful and important part of community life. They work with community members to assist in identifying opportunities or problems; they may help to propose a common purpose and assist in developing goals and objectives. The citizen leader helps people connect their differences to the common purpose that drew them together. Ultimately, citizen leaders realize that individuals must not only contribute but gain something from the process. By having a working knowledge of leadership basics, knowing how to apply leadership within different situations, and having an awareness of issues within your community, you can be an effective citizen leader.

### STEP OUT & APPLY

How aware am I of the subjective aspects of leadership within my situation – the values, culture and tone within my organization?

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How am I working to bring out the best in others? How am I valuing and respecting their differences and motivating and inspiring them?

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How am I “walking my talk” and modeling the values I believe in?

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## LEADERSHIP MYTHS

Leadership myths, or misconceptions about the nature of leadership, are a final piece of the leadership puzzle. We can learn quite a bit about leadership by discussing what it *is not*. Making sure that everyone has a strong foundation of leadership knowledge is important when developing effective leaders. By the end of this section, we should have enough knowledge about what leadership is and isn't to develop a good definition.

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### MYTH 1. LEADERSHIP IS A RARE SKILL.

The belief that leadership is a rare skill was rooted in early leadership theory that claimed that leaders had certain characteristics that made them different from the average individual. Ironically, these skills were generally found in individuals with money or prestige—or those born into leadership positions.

What makes this statement a myth is that leaders can be found in a variety of situations—from the top CEOs of businesses, to that volunteer at the soup kitchen, to a layman at church. A large number of leaders are needed in a variety of situations across society—and looking at leaders only in heroic or positional leadership positions is a narrow and misguided way of judging leadership. Although *great* leaders may be rare, everyone has leadership potential.

### MYTH 2. LEADERS ARE BORN NOT MADE.

Similar to Myth 1, the belief that leaders are born not made is directly tied to early leadership theory that established leaders as great, charismatic heroes who were often born into leadership positions. This belief plays into the assumption that great leaders are born with a unique genetic makeup, as if their future leadership role was fated or inherited. Individuals born as princes, princesses, lords, dukes, etc., were groomed for and ultimately assumed leadership positions—maintaining the caste system in Europe and other locales.

What disproves this myth is that history tells us there were terrible kings and queens—individuals who didn't know the first thing about being effective leaders. The truth is that most leadership competencies and skills can be learned. Leadership education is fundamentally based upon the premise that most leadership knowledge and skills can be taught and that although certain individuals have tendencies to excel at some leadership skills—being particularly good at public speaking, for example—many leadership skills and competencies can be learned and improved upon.

### MYTH 3. LEADERS ARE CREATED BY EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES AND GREAT EVENTS.

In history we can find numerous examples of individuals who stepped into leadership positions during great events such as wars, demonstrations, social movements, etc., who ended up being noted as some of the greatest leaders in history. The old saying “what doesn't kill me makes me stronger” illustrates how trouble can make us stronger people, but that doesn't mean that great events are necessary for leadership development. The truth is that leaders are just as likely to be found participating in the everyday workings of your local community as they are leading a civil rights movement. Emergent leaders are also common – those individuals who see a need within a leadership situation (i.e. committee, organization, etc.) and step up to take charge. Leaders are needed in every aspect of society, and it is more likely that you will acquire your leadership training through a traditional educational or training arena than by leading a group to war.

### **MYTH 4. LEADERSHIP EXISTS ONLY AT THE TOP OF AN ORGANIZATION.**

Look at any major organization today and you will see a plethora of “leaders”—COOs, CEOs, and CFOs. Often, the larger the organization, the more of these “leaders” you will see. If we think about the definition of leadership for a moment, we realize that these positional leaders are just the most apparent in an organization—the leaders we hear the most about. Although many organizations house a large number of positional leaders, generally the larger the organization the more opportunities there are for leadership at all levels. Large organizations may have thousands of leadership opportunities available, from positional leadership arrangements (i.e. managers, directors, etc.) to informational leaders or informal opinion group leaders. Just because you don’t hold an official title doesn’t mean that you can’t influence others in your organization; sometimes, you may even have more influence than those higher up.

### **MYTH 5: LEADERS ARE CHARISMATIC.**

Some leaders are charismatic, but a majority are not. Charisma can be defined as “a special magnetic charm or appeal.” Charisma has been a characteristic of some of the great leaders—John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohandas Ghandi, to name a few. However, if you think of the vast majority of leaders you have been exposed to in your life, most of them are probably all too human. They may be well dressed or dowdy; articulate or inarticulate; charming or dull. There may be nothing in terms of personality, speech, or style that sets them apart from other individuals. Although some may claim charisma is something individuals are simply born with, a more likely possibility is that charisma is a result of the leadership process. Constituents grant effective leaders their respect, which creates an “attraction” between them. Thus, while some noted leaders can be described as very charismatic, a more accurate goal for effective leadership should be to develop a mutual relationship of respect between yourself and your followers.

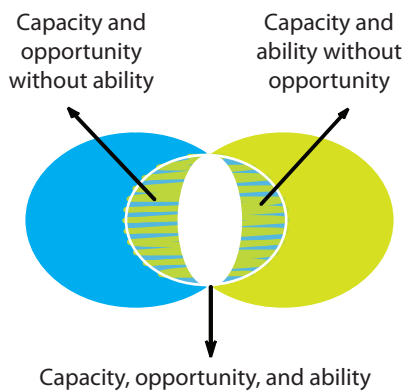
### **MYTH 6: A LEADER CONTROLS, DIRECTS, PRODS AND MANIPULATES OTHERS.**

This myth may be the most damaging of all. Power, manipulation, control—all of these terms have negative connotations. Although power has a direct relationship with leadership, leadership is not so much the exercise of power *over* others as it is the genuine *empowerment* of others. Sharing power, as a leader does when empowering his or her constituents, actually helps to create synergy, a mutually advantageous situation for all parties involved. Leaders embody true (and much more effective) leadership by pulling rather than pushing; by creating achievable expectations and rewarding progress; by enabling others to use their own initiative.

## Conclusion

Leadership by itself can be considered an intimidating and complex subject. However, once you break it down and focus on different aspects, you will find it a bit more straightforward. Today we discussed definitions of leadership, the relational foundation to leadership, and citizen leadership; we also debunked several leadership myths. To conclude, consider the figure below: *Capacity* (knowledge); *opportunity* (chance for progress); and *ability* (skill). Ideally, leadership occurs at the juncture of these three factors—with the necessary knowledge, chance, and skill (Figure 1.) By adding to your leadership foundational knowledge, recognizing the chance to be a leader, and learning and practicing new leadership skills, you can make yourself the most effective leader possible, within your workplace, your community, and beyond.

**Figure 1.** Leadership occurs at the juncture of capacity, opportunity, and ability.



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