

Q How do I start strong as a new leader?

A Learn. Define. Coach.

SHE WAS NOT UNLIKE MANY OTHERS. In fact, her challenges were the most common I have seen in more than 18 years. Debbie was an accomplished worker. She was smart and motivated and after five years in her position, she got the nod to head the department.

"I loved the recognition. It was what I had been working so hard to get. Finally, I was a manager," she said.

"So, why the long face?" I asked.

"I've learned that leading people is much harder than I had ever imagined."

☞ Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others. ☞

— Jack Welch

The transition from individual contributor to leader means giving up what made you successful while doing things you're not yet good at.

It's like the frequent flier: She knows the ticketing process, where to put her luggage in the overhead compartment, how to buckle up. She's good at being a passenger. But imagine someone from the airline approaching her and saying, "You've been such a good passenger, how about flying the plane?"

Welcome to leadership.

"So what do I do?"

Learn what is.

Define what can be.

Coach others to get there.

LEARN // What does your boss expect from you? How is your success being measured? What behaviors are you expected to model? Ask your team, peers, customers a lot of questions. How do they do their jobs, what do they expect, what does success look like? What is working well, what isn't? Then listen. And learn.

Many times a new leader feels pressure to come in and make changes quickly. Like a first date, team members are sizing you up, trying to determine what kind of a leader you will be. If you blast in, make a bunch of changes, they might go along but they won't be engaged. If you listen, take time to truly understand and involve your employees in your decisions they'll respect you and support your direction.

☞ People don't resist change. They resist being changed! ☞

— Peter Senge

DEFINE // With help from your team, develop a plan and measurable goals and timelines. Part of your job is to define a meaningful mission. Your goals might be handed down from corporate or your boss. But, it's still important to personalize those goals by infusing your vision. Next, define a strategy about how to achieve it.

☞ The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant. ☞

— Max DePree

COACH // Before, you were a doer. Now, you're a listener, asker, teacher and coach. It's faster to correct your employees. But when you do, you encourage dependence and discourage creativity. Frequent, fair and informal coaching fosters better problem-solving and innovation.

☞ A leader's role is to raise people's aspirations for what they can become and to release their energies so they will try to get there. ☞

— David R. Gerge ■



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