

The Golden Rule of Leadership

Leading others is a privilege, not a right.

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Scanning headlines, popular literature, and reflecting upon what my colleagues and I experience on a daily basis, I am struck by how many leaders (managers included) have seem to either have forgotten, never learned, or are too self-absorbed to get it. It, being the Golden Rule of [leadership](#): Leading others is a privilege that is earned, not a right. Leaders who understand that leading others is a privilege understand that leading, first and foremost, is about service.

Why is it that so many leaders seem to forget that leading others more than any thing else should be held in reverence? Sure, you might have earned the role—late nights, played the political games just right—and maybe you legitimately deserve the leadership chalice.

Congrats. However, being the leader does not always mean you deserve to be the leader. And just because you are the leader does not mean you have a right to lead others. You have been granted the privilege to lead others. Being the leader means that you have been placed in a position to serve others—your customers, investors, your [team](#), and the employees who are part of the company or division you run.

I recently recalled a quote whose source I cannot remember that so aptly distilled what I think is the essence of great leadership. The quote was from an ex-military man who leads survival courses. The quote went something like this: “Real leaders forget about themselves and instinctively react in the interest of their team.” I wonder how many leaders, when things get rough, when the [politics](#) get nasty, when the share price takes a hit, instinctively react with a “me” or a “we”? Too many times I have seen leaders duck and cover, throw their people under the bus, throw their positional weight around and instead of leading from a place of service, lead from a place of ego.

You are privileged to be in a position where you can direct, shape, and focus the potential of people to a specific result. As a leader you are charged with great responsibility:

- A person’s time
- A person’s efforts
- A person’s hopes and [dreams](#)
- A person’s ambitions
- A person’s thoughts and insight
- A person’s sense of self and worth

So what does it mean to be a leader who leads from a place humble privilege versus a place of perceived right? Whether you are content with a “me first” leadership style or looking to evolve how you lead, here are the principles that I think begin to move the needle on leading from a place of privilege:

1. Respect—Earn It. Although you earned the promotion you need to earn respect. Respect does not come with the promotion or role of leader. It’s not like AC and leather seats as part of a package of new car options. Nope, respect is something that you have to earn.
2. Humility—Get Used to It. Remove your ego enough to learn from others—your team, employees, and customers. Don’t just admit mistakes. Admit your mistake and then ask what you can do differently.

3. Service—Provide It. Put others first in defining how you lead and fulfill your role.
4. Gratitude—Realize It. Be [thankful](#) for the role that you are in and that you have been placed in a position to lead others—it is an honor. Share your gratitude to the people you lead for the work and sacrifices they make.
5. Humor—Find It. I add [humor](#) to this list because without humor it all becomes dry, stale, and bland. As a leader you need to be able to [laugh](#) at yourself, find “funny” in rough situations and help others do the same. And, really, wouldn’t companies be better places to work if people laughed more?