



Mastering Leadership Psychology

"If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person." ~ Fred Rogers, The World According to Mr. Rogers: Important Things to Remember (Hyperion, 2003)

Whether you're starting out, changing jobs mid-career or completing your last decade of work, leadership success depends on how well you manage yourself and interact with others.

Mastering leadership psychology is crucial for professional development. What got you here won't get you there. Success depends on knowing, appreciating and accepting who you are.

You can turn deficits into strengths when you understand them. You can play to these strengths and avoid their inherent traps with sufficient self-knowledge and support from the right people.

Effective leaders also use psychology to understand and motivate others. As you ascend to positions of greater power and responsibility, you'll increasingly rely on social and emotional intelligence.

A rapidly changing business environment will pose numerous challenges:

- An increased workload as markets become more complex
- Situations that require political savvy and exemplary interpersonal skills
- Time and energy management
- Unprecedented pressure and stressors
- An increasingly diverse global workforce
- Rapidly evolving products and services
- Unpredictable market changes
- Technological advances

Whether you work in manufacturing, retail or services, your understanding of human psychology will drive optimal business outcomes.

A Message from Nancy...

I have a couple of questions to ask you:

1. Is your business as successful as you think it should be?
2. Are you and your team able to pinpoint the solutions necessary to create positive changes to get where you need to go?



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This article examines three essential psychology skills that every leader must master.

Psychology Skill #1: Know Yourself Well

“Knowing yourself, and knowing the forces that affect the people who work for you, holds the key to being a successful leader.” ~ Kenneth M. Settel, MD, Clinical Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, CEO Psychology: Who Rises, Who Falls and Why (RosettaBooks, 2012)

The very character traits that peg you as a high-potential leader may also prevent you from making it to the finish line. Every strength has a downside when carried to the extreme. Self-awareness can prevent self-sabotage.

You probably have a sense of your personal talents and liabilities. Learning how to leverage them at work—amplifying your strengths, while minimizing your weaknesses—sets the stage for good interpersonal relationships. You’ll become less vulnerable and sensitive to criticism. You’ll also learn more about your leadership constitution:

- Do you have the drive, personality and desire necessary to shouldering executive responsibilities?
- Can you cope with the associated stressors and the job’s highs and lows?

Even the strongest, most talented leaders have flaws. Each of us is driven by conscious and unconscious forces that must be channeled into positive outcomes, so it’s important to seek personal development opportunities at every stage of your career. You won’t gain self-knowledge in a vacuum, so consider working with a mentor or experienced leadership coach.

Psychology Skill #2: Lead through Engagement

“When the best leader’s work is done, the people say, ‘We did it ourselves.’” ~ Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu (604-531 B.C.), Tao Te Ching

Engaged employees are 22% more productive, according to a new Gallup meta-analysis of 1.4 million employees. They also enjoy double the rate of success, lower absenteeism and turnover, and fewer safety incidents and quality defects.

In an engaged workforce, people want to come to work. They understand their jobs and appreciate how their specific responsibilities contribute to the organization’s overall success.

An effective leader builds integrated teams: knowledge “communities” whose members work together creatively to achieve the desired results. If you expect your people to back initiatives with focus and enthusiasm, develop five essential skills that Dr. Settel describes in his book:

1. Maintain your focus. Don’t lose sight of your personal and organizational goals as you face the everyday onslaught of complex information and technology (yet another reason to retain an executive coach). Ask yourself:

- a. What are my guideposts? My first priorities?
- b. Am I sticking to my path, or am I getting distracted?

2. Maintain your values and integrity: Regularly assess whether you’ve strayed from your personal and organizational values. Ask yourself:

- a. Am I keeping to principles and standards in spite of pressures and frustrations?
- b. Do I resist the lure of competition and greed?

3. Effectively prioritize and allocate resources: Keep resources aligned with long-term goals and strategies. Strong voices, from inside and outside the organization, will place conflicting demands on you. Maintain a clear sense of what truly matters in the long run.

4. Understand your people’s expectations: Subordinates have expectations from important parental figures, including their bosses. They count on your love, support and approval. Understanding these desires makes you a better leader, especially when expectations become irrational.

5. Serve as a role model: Everything you say and do is magnified and interpreted, often in unintended ways. Your communication and behavior carry weight, influencing others. Employees want to know that you love your work and appreciate their contributions. They closely watch how you handle challenges and achievements, and they will mirror your behavior.

Ask yourself:

- How am I engaging my staff?
- Do the people who work for me appear happy, or do they frequently complain?
- Do they always ask for more time, resources or money, or can they move forward with what’s provided?

- Who is generating new ideas? Do I encourage employee participation in planning and strategizing?
- Can people carry out tasks without direct supervision?
- Am I sympathetic to, and supportive of, others' needs and concerns?
- How resilient am I when faced with setbacks and obstacles? Do I allow my people to help me find creative solutions?
- Am I generous with positive feedback? Do I frequently recognize progress?

Psychology Skill #3: Manage Emotions

“In successful and emotionally balanced companies, the people working in them discuss things, no matter how bad things have gotten. They don’t run and hide, they don’t name call, and they don’t put their foot down. They’re willing and able to talk without rancor and in a straightforward manner about what is bothering them. I call this process ‘carefrontation.’”
~ Dr. Barton Goldsmith, “Carefrontation,” *Office Solutions*, Fall 2009

Each of us is an emotional being. For decades, business experts discouraged emotional expressions at work. These days, we know it’s impossible—and actually detrimental—to ignore or suppress them.

Awareness of emotions actually lends wisdom to our decisions and interactions. Emotional intelligence is now viewed as a hallmark of high-potential leaders.

We want to be liked, appreciated, rewarded and respected. We need friendships at work—some level of closeness and affection. We thrive when we have a work environment that allows us to safely express our opinions and feelings, including our aggressions.

If you expect your people to put aside their emotions and “just do the work,” you’re failing as a manager. Emotions are a fundamental part of what makes us humans, so you must be prepared to deal with, understand and accept them.

Regardless of your industry, you’ll encounter three common emotional needs at work:

1. Attachment and connection: Some people’s social needs are minimal, while others are more pronounced. Some prefer to work alone, viewing social interactions as obstacles to productivity. At the other end of the continuum

are people who never want to be alone. Be sensitive to people’s basic needs so you can place them in the right jobs and supervise them effectively.

2. Dependency, independency and interdependency: People depend on others for approval, validation and love. Even when these needs are satisfied outside the workplace, people seek to satisfy them at work. A good leader is sensitive to how much direction and interaction each employee needs to thrive at work.

3. Aggression, anger and conflict: Aggression is a primal human behavior. When properly harnessed, it can energize a team and be productively channeled into creative projects. That said, aggression can also be disruptive. Many people are embarrassed by, or uncomfortable with, anger—especially their own. It’s up to you to recognize the early signs of aggression and talk openly about people’s feelings. Channel it away from destruction and toward innovation.

“Being ‘carefrontational’ requires a willingness to take a risk and to be understanding of the person you’re talking to,” Dr. Goldsmith writes. “If you’re not willing to share something that is bothering you with your teammates, then your working relationship will be diminished.”

Debunking Old-School Beliefs

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.” ~ Charles Darwin

Commonly held management assumptions are often wrong—particularly when they fail to address human nature.

Dr. Settel highlights the following counterintuitive truths that invalidate previously held business notions:

1. Organizational conflict can be positive.
2. Rewards and punishments may not effectively inspire employees to work harder or better.
3. Stressed-out employees shouldn’t be given less work. Give them more gratifying work.
4. Performance reviews can be destructive unless delivered in a development-focused, constructive way.
5. Your unconscious mind drives you more powerfully than your conscious one does.

6. Successful leadership is not about personality, but how you apply it.

You needn't hold a PhD in organizational behavior to understand people's emotions. You do, however, require a rudimentary understanding of their psychological needs.

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