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# Follow that leader!

Learning to lead intentionally can make you a better business owner and a more valuable asset to your employees.

BY MONICA WOFFORD, CSP

**Y**OU HAVE THE CORNER OFFICE, THE FANCY BUSINESS CARDS, AND THE OUTWARD RESPECT of all those who now realize you command the future of their paycheck as the owner of your own practice.

This is it! You've made it. That euphoric feeling will last for about ... hang on ... OK ... and now it's done.

The reality is you are a leader, with or without that title and office. Leadership is something you have to earn.

Management is a title you can give yourself when you own the business. National studies report that only 24 percent of the population of middle managers actually shows a well-developed set of leadership traits, yet 83 percent of those same managers see themselves as having well-developed skills.

That means the way you see your management style isn't necessarily reality. You may have "arrived" and those folks who report to you know you are in charge; however, the way they see your management style may be quite different.

If that is the case, how do you improve as a manager — or better yet, become a more effective leader?

## Leadership takes work

Just like any relationship takes work, so too does leadership. You don't get married and let the relationship take care of itself, do you?

A bigger title on your business card doesn't mean all the work is over. In fact, the work has just begun. Employees won't trust you just because you tell them to, and they won't respect you because you say they should or you put it on a performance appraisal.

Employees won't believe you care because you say you do every once in a while.

You have to earn these rights, and that garnering of the corner office is not the sum total of the work it takes.

## What work is involved?

It isn't as difficult as it sounds to be a leader. Here is the secret: No matter what anyone tells you, you **are** a leader of the voices in your head, the actions you take, and the perceptions and beliefs you hold to be true.

If you wish to lead other people, one piece of the work will entail honoring and understanding those very same things in all the other people you lead.

It is an intentional decision to see the people you lead as



equally valuable contributing parties to the work you will be responsible for completing.

### 1. Value and honor the contributions of those you work with.

Each person you lead has experiences, backgrounds, beliefs, perceptions, and skills that got them where they are.

Ignoring those would be fatal to your team's unity. Teamwork only happens when each member of the team feels valued, special, and involved. This isn't about you telling them you value their work and then fixing it behind their back.

If you are staying late at the office to put the filing back the way you want it or to sort out an insurance billing mess, then you are not leading — you are managing to pay people who are not helping you build your business.

Leadership is about showing each team member you value their judgment, efforts, and work. If it isn't exactly the product you asked for, then that leads to step two.

### 2. Shift the focus of your role to the development of others.

One of the greatest challenges of middle management is figuring out exactly what their priority is. Some say it's the work they do, while others believe it to be the people they lead.

Some say priorities change depending on the day, or rather, the fire drill or patient load of the moment. No matter what, the priority of management may shift, but the priority

of a true leader is the development of those they lead.

The greatest leaders practice the skills of empathy, listening, and flexibility to allow others to grow and make mistakes that allow them to learn. Yet, in these same national studies mentioned earlier, only 5 percent of the respondents have well-developed skills in this area. A full 95 percent of middle managers show a need for training in empathy, listening skills, and flexibility.

Does that mean 95 percent of managers really do subscribe to the “my way or the highway” philosophy? This will not win you the “best leader” award, much less the respect from others or the pride of ownership from your team members. If it is your project or your way, what are they to have pride in?

**3. Ask those you lead for help and have enough self-esteem to accept it.** Those you lead may have an answer you have


been trying to figure out. Don't let an overinflated ego over office space and position status get in your way of allowing team members to play an active role in the work they are producing.

Ask them to help you and bring them along. Deny their help and you clearly demonstrate a belief that they couldn't help, shouldn't help, or aren't “special enough” to help. If that is what you believe, perhaps it is you who will benefit from a deeper belief that you are “special enough” to let others contribute.

It shouldn't take away from your status unless you let it and, in fact, the combined efforts of you and those around you should elevate the entire team and the entire project. This is neither the time, nor the place for, “I am doctor, hear me roar.” What would be more appropriate in this effort is, “I am doctor, how can I help?”

Leadership is an intentional practice, a conscious decision. It is the way in which we believe all leaders practiced their leadership skills, or at least that is what employees tell us.

What, you weren't born with leadership traits? Welcome to the rest of the 76 percent of middle management who would benefit from more training in the most common leadership traits.

You were born a leader of you. To be a leader of others requires intentional practice of new skills. When will you begin to lead intentionally? 



**MONICA WOFFORD, CSP**, is the CEO of Contagious Companies Inc., an Orlando-based training and consulting firm. Her 20 years of leadership experience makes

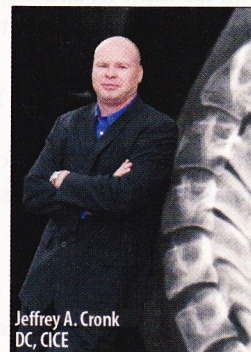
her a highly sought after coach, consultant, speaker, and trainer. She can be reached at 866-382-0121 or through [www.contagiouschiropractic.com](http://www.contagiouschiropractic.com) or [www.contagiouscompanies.com](http://www.contagiouscompanies.com).

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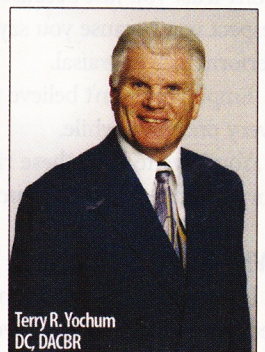
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