**Principles of Leadership**

**By Rufus Parker**

* Know yourself and seek self-improvement
* Be technically proficient
* Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions
* Make sound and timely decisions
* Set the example
* Know your people and look out for their well-being
* Keep your people informed
* Develop a sense of responsibility in your people
* Build the team
* Don't take on more than you can handle

The principles of leadership are a set of guidelines that you can use to assess your leadership abilities and to develop a plan to improve yourself so you can help develop those under you.

When we think of principles, we think of basics. They are those things that are required of you as a leader to be successful in leading others. Let's take a look at each:

Know yourself and seek self-improvement: To know yourself, you have to know who you are and what your strengths and weaknesses are. When you know who you are, it allows you to take advantage of your strengths and work to improve your weaknesses. Seeking self-improvement means to continually develop your strengths and to work on any weaknesses you have. This will increase your competency and the confidence your people have in your ability to get things done.

Be technically proficient: As a leader, you must study to know your job. Understand how to plan, budget, requisition, and use available systems of technology. This is enhanced when you know yourself and your limitations.

Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions: Leading always involves responsibility. Those who do not want responsibility should not become leaders. If you choose to become a leader, then you must seek out responsibility and take responsibility for any decisions that you make while you are in the leadership position. Don't point the finger at others for failures. As President Truman said, "The buck stops here."

Make sound and timely decisions: As a leader, you must be able to assess situations and make timely decisions. Situations that require timely decisions, but are delayed, can have a major impact on the organization or someone's life.

Set the example: As stated earlier, you must be a role model. People look to you to do the right thing and to show them the correct way. It's one thing to tell people what to do; it's another thing to show them how to do it. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Know your people and look out for their wellbeing: You must know and care about your people. It is not just enough to know their names; you should know some things about their livelihood, family situations, their likes and dislikes. They must see that you care about them and their loved ones. They must see that you are willing to stand with them in the bad times as well as the good times.

Keep your people informed: Keeping people informed helps them to make decisions, execute

plans within your intent, and take initiative; it also helps to improve teamwork and to enhance morale. People like to know what's going on.

Develop a sense of responsibility in your people: Leaders who will not delegate authority to their people will never see people who feel they are a part of the organization. Leaders must give people things to do and then let them do it their own way. General George S. Patton said, "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what needs to be done, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

Build the team: As a leader you must develop a team spirit within your people. They must not be allowed to operate independently. As the apostle Paul stated, "Now are they many members, yet but one body." You only become a team when your people trust and respect you and each other as fellow members and when they see the importance of their contribution to the overall organization. As stated earlier, team development is essential in every organization.

Don't take on more than you can handle: Some leaders do not know how to say no. They feel that their boss will see them as failures if they say that they are unable to take on another task or assume more responsibility Even Jesus asked the question, "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" (Luke 14:31). In other words, you need to consider the cost. Trying to do more with less will only create frustration and will cause your people to quit.

The principles of leadership will help you to accomplish your mission and to care for your people. They are the foundation for leadership. Like the traits of character, there is no formula that shows which principle is more important or how you should apply them. As a leader you must develop a balance of these principles in yourself and in your people.

The above article, “Principles of Leadership,” is the eleventh chapter from *Developing the Man in the Mirror*, by Rufus Parker.

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