



**Key leadership strategies
for team building.**

By Bob Hooley, DTM, AS

Bringing Out the Best in People

Leadership success is built on our ability to communicate and coordinate the best efforts of a group of people to reach a common or agreed-upon goal. Successful leaders understand this is best accomplished by drawing on the strengths and desires of those they guide. Toastmasters International is a great training ground for skills that translate to greater career and leadership success.

Nearly 25 years ago, Alan Loy McGinnis – a family therapist, corporate consultant, writer and public speaker – wrote a book called *Bringing Out the Best in People*. It was well received, gaining exposure and acceptance among progressive leaders at that time.

Over the years, I've had the chance to reflect on the ideas and principles outlined by the late

author, who was based in Glendale, California. In fact, his 12 rules from that book are attached to the wall above my desk as a reminder of how important they are in leading and coaching the people I work with across North America.

If you are committed to being an effective leader or manager (whether in your career, community or Toastmasters club), perhaps these

rules should be near you, as well. They provide the foundation for effective management, leadership success and leveraged teamwork

I include the guidelines here, expanded with my own thoughts, for your inspiration and illumination:

▪ **Expect the best from the people you lead.** Often people will rise or fall to the level of our expectations. So envision them as they could be, not as they are! Don't limit them by expecting less than their best. Then-District 21 Governor Irene Evans, DTM, challenged us to be Number One during my year as area governor. This challenge slowly caught on with our members and we made this goal a reality.

▪ **Make a thorough study of the other person's needs.** Each person on your team is an individual with specific strengths, weaknesses, needs and dreams. Taking time to know them makes it easier to lead and direct them for mutual success. This strategy worked successfully for me in rebuilding my Toastmaster club when I served as an area governor, and later in my role as District 21 Governor. It is one of the foundations of my success in serving clients.

▪ **Establish high standards for excellence.** Leaders fail when they accept mediocre results or don't set high standards. Don't be afraid to challenge your team to live up to and surpass achievable goals and standards of excellence. We do this in our Toastmasters evaluations of presentations and we see vast improvement. Why are we reluctant to do that in our leadership roles? People will amaze you when you set the bar higher and lead by example.

▪ **Create an environment where failure is not fatal.** Mistakes are a natural part of life, and taking risks

means occasionally falling short of the goal. If your team feels supported and encouraged, it will take risks and move past its comfort zone into the winners' zone. Help your group learn from any mistakes or missteps, and enable team members to move ahead with energy to face the next challenge. This is one of the underlying secrets of Toastmasters: We provide that safe place to experiment and to stretch.

▪ **If they are going anywhere near where you want to go, climb on other people's bandwagons.** At times, it works best to let others lead and be the supportive cheerleader, coach and champion for their success. However, you need to be honest and realize that people are not always going in the same direction, nor do they share the same values that you live by. In that case, let them go and stay your own course. Others who share your values will follow and support your leadership.

▪ **Use Models to Encourage Success.** This goes to the heart of leadership by example. Make sure the principles of success that you point to are

modeled in your own life and in the lives of those you promote and delegate to succeed. When you take personal responsibility for your success in any leadership role, you encourage those you guide to follow suit.

▪ **Recognize and applaud achievement.** People do not work simply for money. Deep inside each of us is the need to feel appreciated and important. As a leader or manager, the most effective thing we can do is to recognize achievement and effort from those we lead, and to share and publicly applaud their accomplishments. This can be applied equally in club, corporate and community roles.

▪ **Employ a mixture of positive and negative reinforcement.** We understand it's a good thing to provide praise and positive reinforcement for our team members' efforts. This affirms their actions and encourages them to move ahead.

It is also necessary at times to apply the opposite tack when one of them is doing something detrimental in the fulfillment or follow-through of their role. Letting them



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know what is not acceptable is also part of a leader's role. We can do it nicely and in kindness, but do it we must if they are to grow and maximize their potential. Amazingly enough, people appreciate knowing their boundaries.

▪ **Appeal sparingly to the competitive urge.** Each of us has a natural competitive edge. If used wisely, competition can be a great tool to higher achievement. But it also has its dark side, allowing divisive actions and attitudes to creep into a team environment. Focus on the team accomplishment and mutual win. Encourage each member to compete for higher standards and *personal* skill development.

▪ **Place a premium on collaboration.** This is where team “works,” and where effective leaders learn to weave people from diverse backgrounds, agendas and experiences into an effective unit. Brainstorming is one way of effective collaboration, allowing each to build

and draw on the brainpower of another.

When I was a very nervous area governor with struggling clubs under my care, I asked Peter Legge (a Golden Gavel recipient) to speak to the clubs. I hoped that seeing a great speaker would inspire them to apply what we teach in Toastmasters. It did, and each of those five clubs finished the year as Distinguished Clubs or better.

▪ **Build into the group an allowance for storms.** It is not always smooth sailing as a leader or manager of team efforts. Storms, challenges, detours and disasters can strike when you least expect them. As a leader you need to build in allowances for these unexpected obstacles in your team's progress and have some back-up plans in place.

▪ **Take steps to keep your own motivation high.** You are “on” as a leader all the time. This means people will be looking at you and taking their cue from you. So you

need to keep your personal motivation high and maintain a positive outward attitude (even when you are experiencing personal challenges or doubts).

You may need to find a trusted advisor who you can discuss your doubts with in private. Letting your negative feelings show can be devastating to your team. They look to you as being confident and clear in focus. Don't disappoint them.

Learn to apply these strategies in your leadership path, and the road will be smoother for both you and those you are guiding. 📖

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