



The Real Impact of Your Leadership

Do others see you as you see yourself? Do you need to make some changes to create better results?

By Alesia Latson

William James, the philosopher and psychologist, once said, “When two people meet there are really six people present. There is each person as they see themselves, each person as the other person sees them, and each person as they really are.” As a leader, how do you see yourself? And even more important: How do the people you lead see you?

Your actions and interactions leave a lasting impact. You can have the best of intentions, but if your impact isn’t aligned with the intention, your leadership won’t be as effective as it could be. Why? Because in the end, what matters isn’t who you think you are but the experience that other people have with you.

“**Be mindful of conditions that can hinder your success.**”

Now before you say, “I don’t care what other people think of me,” realize that you don’t need to care what they think. You do, however, have to care about the impact you have on others, on your organization, and your industry. Your impact leaves a lasting mark. What mark do you want to leave in the world?

To make sure you’re viewed as a leader others want to follow, take these steps.

Detail the kind of impact you want to have.

Most leaders have never detailed their personal creed. But doing so can be incredibly powerful. Therefore, get clear about who you are. Ask yourself: What do you stand for? What do you value? What roles do you play in life? Which of those roles are most important to you? How do you want to be known in your organization, in the nonprofit sector, in your community, in the world?

Once you’ve answered those questions, ask the most important questions of all: How do the things you just

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detailed show up when you're frustrated or when things aren't going well? Who are you then? How do you want to show up during the hard times? How do you want to be known when things are tough? How do you want people to experience you in the midst of adversity? Most leaders lose credibility when things are bad because they haven't thought about who they are in those situations and the kind of impact they'll have.

Find out how others view your impact.

You can ask for feedback about your impact either indirectly or directly. An example of an indirect approach is creating an anonymous survey using an online tool like Survey Monkey. While it's simple to do, the results aren't always specific.

A direct approach is to talk with someone you trust face-to-face and ask specific questions so you can get key insights. The secret to making direct questions work is to phrase them properly. If you ask someone, "Can you give me feedback on my leadership style?" you won't get the information you need. That's a difficult question to answer because it's not focused enough, and no one wants to hurt another person's feelings. Therefore, ask a more focused question, such as: "During today's meeting, I think I may have sounded defensive when I said the idea wouldn't work. How did it land for you?"

Notice that you're not asking for an evaluation. You're pointing out a specific incident and asking about the impact you had. Of course, this doesn't guarantee that people will tell you the truth, but it makes it more likely that they'll be open.

Change your impact, not you.

If the feedback you receive doesn't align with your perceptions about yourself, it's time to make some changes — not to you, but to your impact. First, get curious about the mismatch, not furious about the information. A good question to ask yourself is, "Under what conditions might a person experience me this way?" Because here's the truth: You might be a motivating, empowering, uplifting leader, but under certain conditions, even the most esteemed person can come across as harsh, cold, and defensive. So you need to be mindful of conditions that can hinder your success. Know your blind spots so you can shed some light on them.

With this knowledge, you can alter the impact you have on others. If one approach isn't getting the results you want, what other approach can you try?

Get real.

All leaders leave a lasting impact. What's yours? Is it the legacy you want? When you align who you think you are with how others perceive you, your enduring mark on the world will be a positive one. 

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More Keys to Effective Leadership

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Why Feedback Is the Key to Your Success (Vol. 35, No. 3)

Executive Presence: What It Is and How to Get It (Vol. 29, No. 6)

Rate Yourself as a Servant Leader (Vol. 31, No. 1)

How Do You Come Across to Others? (Vol. 23, No. 3)

What's Your Color? A Quiz That Will Revolutionize Your Relationships (Vol. 34, No. 4)

Leading from Feeling: Coaching Tools for Interpersonal & Organizational Excellence (Vol. 27, No. 1)

Beware of These Three Personality Pitfalls (Vol. 31, No. 4)

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