

The Leadership Skill No One Talks About

This oft-ignored leadership skill is the secret to transforming your results.

By Karin Hurt & David Dye

There's a fundamental skill that many leaders aren't even aware of. They think they're doing everything right – inspiring their team, setting clear expectations, holding everyone accountable – yet they're not getting the results they need. People are behind on their work, and projects are stuck in neutral. Frustrated, they have no idea what to do.

So what's the problem? What's the leadership skill they're missing?

The Missing Leadership Skill

Throughout the world, there's a common reason leaders succeed over time: When it comes to changing a culture or transforming results, they don't just start – they finish.

Sadly, organizations are littered with leaders who start, but never finish:

- the board president who says the meeting starts at 9 – but when someone's late, doesn't say anything

- the manager who declares that a call must begin with empathy, confidence, and connection – but says it for two weeks and never gets back to it
- the team leader who facilitates a great meeting and helps the team make tough commitments – but doesn't follow up to see if those commitments were kept
- the leader who has a brilliant coaching conversation with an employee – but three months later has never checked on whether the desired behaviors occurred
- the team leader who declares a new era of entrepreneurial teamwork – but then never asks for a single new idea
- the manager who delegates a project, but never receives it back
- the committee chair who creates a deadline – and then lets the date pass without a word.

It doesn't take many of these failed commitments before your team loses faith in your ability to make change happen. Worse, you lose faith in yourself.



Make Your Choice

When you set an intention and follow through, your confidence increases. Your team members know they can believe you, trust you, and rely on you. Your credibility builds.

Finishing is a choice. It doesn't happen by chance. In fact, the chances are it won't happen at all.

Here's the deal: Life is busy. You've got more to do than time to do it. Your plan is going to get interrupted and your interruptions are going to get interrupted. If you don't have an intentional, focused way to finish what you start, it won't happen.

Effective leaders consistently choose to finish. And they don't leave it to chance or a heroic act of willpower.

Make It Automatic

If you have to spend energy trying to remember everything you need to finish you'll never do it. There's just too much going on and your brain has limited energy. Just thinking about every open loop can be exhausting.

There's a better way: Schedule the finish.

The moment you set an intention, make an appointment with yourself or with the other person where you will complete the intention or take the next step. The key is when. What moment in time will you follow up, follow through, and finish?

Here are some examples:

When you have a performance conversation, remember that the final step is the "enforce" step. Schedule a brief meeting to review the person's desired behavior ("Sounds good. Let's meet at 10 next Tuesday to see how this is going and if you have any questions.")

When you delegate, schedule a time where the other person will meet with you in person or by video to return the project to you, answer questions, and discuss next steps.

When you lead a meeting, conclude it by reviewing who will do what, by when. Ask "How will we know it's been done?" For instance: "We'll all have our data to Linda by Friday at 4 pm. Linda will send us the new process by Wednesday at 3 pm." Everyone puts the times on their calendar. If Friday 4 pm comes and Linda doesn't have data from Bob, she calls him. If 3 pm Wednesday comes and they don't have the process, they call Linda.

The key in all these examples is to make an appointment. There's a difference between a to-do item and a scheduled time on your calendar, particularly when that time is

arranged with another person. You'll both be far more likely to keep your date when it's inked into both your datebooks.

For items that don't naturally fit in a calendar (for instance, you're rolling out a new process to improve on-time delivery and quality), you can still make appointments with yourself to reinforce the initiative (communicate at least five times through five different channels) and to review performance.

When you create an expectation – particularly a new one that's the result of training or a new process – follow through on behavior quickly. When people get the behavior right, celebrate it, acknowledge it, and reinforce that this is what people like us do.

When it doesn't happen, have quick conversations to redirect people back to the new way of doing things. If there are problems that prevent people from doing what's needed, solve them quickly and visibly.

Finishing isn't flashy, but it's a leadership skill with a huge payoff. 

Karin Hurt and David Dye help leaders achieve breakthrough results without losing their soul.

They are keynote leadership speakers, trainers, and the award-winning authors of Winning Well: A Manager's

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