

## Facilitative Leadership Lesson #1: Be a Facilitative Leader

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."  
Margaret Mead

Dear Reader,

Are you are in a formal leadership position? If so, you probably know better than anyone that leadership represents far more than merely a job position. Leadership spans a spectrum of skills and qualities.

If you aren't the formal leader, it's quite likely that you've had ideas about what your leader "should" be doing. Perhaps you've felt powerless to affect any change from where you stand.

Facilitative leadership is an attitude that anyone can practice.

The basic definition of Facilitation is to make easy. In terms of group facilitation, to design, conduct, and manage a healthy group process making it easier for the group to accomplish its purpose.

Facilitative leadership invites and empowers others as opposed to commanding and directing. While there are situations where facilitative leadership may not work, in most instances, it's the best way to lead, especially when you want to build leadership within your team. As a relational form of leadership, it also lends itself to being practiced by unofficial leaders.

Again, leadership is more than a mere position. John Tropman has this to say about leadership in his book, *Making Meetings Work: Achieving High Quality Group Decisions*:

"Leadership can exist everywhere and anywhere-in the firm, in the family, and in the civic organization. It's not associated with a position as such, though common parlance often makes that association. We talk, for example, about senior managers as organizational leadership, we expect moms and dads to exercise family leadership, and we think of clergy as religious leaders. This misconception needs correction. Leaders are, as defined above, people who help us to change. They sometimes are those who occupy positions of power, but often they are not. Indeed, many individuals in high positions continually disappoint in the leadership dimension."

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**Ten Qualities of Facilitative Leaders**  
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So now you may be asking, "How do I improve myself as a facilitative leader? What does one look like?" The following list will help you identify some of the behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics of a facilitative leader. Try them on one at a time and see how they work for you in your groups.

1. You're Facilitative vs. Directive. Facilitative leaders know that they're not here to "fix" anyone. While they may be the "designated" leader, they understand that they don't always need to have all the answers. As a facilitative leader, you see your job as one where you help your team members expand the horizons of their awareness, and facilitate them taking responsibility for their actions, past, present, and future.
2. You're not a "know-it-all." Being the leader doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be the "authority" on the subject at hand. The amount of brilliance unleashed in your team depends on how well you let go of your need to know more than anyone else.

3. You're a guide on the side vs. a sage on center stage. The way most of us were raised and schooled, we were conditioned to shut up and listen to the wisdom of the "expert" on the podium or the person "in charge." But if you consistently approach your leadership from the perspective that the wisdom in the "room" is far more potent than the "sage" in front of the room, you'll see your people more engaged, having more fun, and achieving greater results.

4. You believe in your people. You see, invite, and challenge your people, not based on what they've done, but what you know they can do based on the latent abilities you see in them - abilities that they may not be aware of just yet. Empowering your team takes a huge burden off of you to do everything as the leader. This is replaced by the burden of faith you must maintain in what's possible and hold that vision in the midst of chaos and uncertainty.

5. You're transparent. You don't withhold relevant thoughts and feelings to try to look good to your team. To the degree we are honest about what we see and experience, the more effortlessly we will move forward, and the more powerful our invitation is to others to accept and see what is.

6. You make adjustments instead of judgments. Facilitative leaders are models of functional behavior. You engender trust by telling the truth and doing what you say you will do. You gracefully accept constructive feedback from your team members. When you make mistakes, you own them, correct them, and move on.

7. You're over yourself. You accept yourself fully, flaws and all. You've given up presenting an image you think others want to see and offer your unique self as you are, placing your focus on greater visions, on others, and on the task at hand.

8. You practice extreme responsibility. You get that you choose your thoughts, feelings, and actions in every moment no matter the outer circumstances. When the unexpected occurs, instead of letting it set you back, you simply ask, "What's my next action?"

9. You practice being present. You live in the present knowing that this is where you get your power and knowledge of right action. You simply notice where you are and when you're not here, you choose to be "here" now. People's ongoing patterns of behavior show up constantly in their everyday interactions. Being available to the present moment helps you discern these behaviors, provide compassionate feedback when possible, and see the underlying dynamics that cause problems in groups. Ironically, the best future possible will be derived from living solidly, fully, and effectively in the now.

10. You take excellent care of yourself. You engage in regular centering and self-care practices to help you stay in peak condition physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Engage in practices to expand and cultivate your awareness such as meditation, martial arts, tai chi, yoga, good nutrition, exercise, diaphragmatic breathing, practicing presence, etc.

Your Homework:

Which of the qualities above really got your attention? Take a minute to jot down some thoughts on what you can do to exercise this quality today. Then go take action. What is your own definition of facilitative leadership? Are there any qualities missing that you would add that you're good at? That you'd like to improve?

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