

## Lead By Example: What Does it Mean?

Dr. Byron L. Cherry  
CEO, Succeed to Lead, LLC

We constantly hear the phrase, “Lead by example.” As leaders, we want our subordinates to be able to look up to us; it’s good for business! Yet, more and more, we are witnessing leaders fall from grace as their indiscretions or illegal actions come to light. Evidently, today’s leaders need a better understanding of this phrase.

Most people want to follow someone who has a strong sense of direction and casts a vision that resonates with them. Though this sounds like a simple task, it really isn’t. Leading is a word casually used and rarely understood. According to Schuler (2003)<sup>i</sup>, by incorporating certain attitudes and practices into your life, you not only improve your life, but begin to fashion yourself into the kind of person that others will follow and emulate, which is the very definition of leading by example. Schuler points out that life is a creative art and expectations are often self-fulfilling. “If we *expect* life to be good, if we *believe* it is filled with opportunities and cause for celebration, then we will notice those things and live so as to promote them, even without conscious intent. [However], if we believe life is a marathon of unremitting toil and scarcity, then toil and scarcity will be all that we find and experience, and we will inadvertently create the circumstances that promote them.”<sup>iii</sup>

In our fast-paced, technological society, people are constantly bombarded with visual and auditory messages. Some leaders rely on these signs or they look to others to help them make decisions. Yet, when leading from the front, there are no signs to guide or direct us. Good leaders make decisions based upon the best evidence available to them. They also listen to their people. They do not worry about pleasing the person on their left or right, but they are *concerned* about doing what is right and fair. Their credibility is at stake here.

Not sure of what behaviors are worthy of emulation? Who is your hero? What type of person do you look up to and admire? In general, people who speak well and kindly of others, are courteous and respectful, work hard, and treat others as they would like to be treated are seen as leaders. Remember, being a leader is more than a title— it is an action. The most important part of this equation is that leaders must never expect others to do what they would not do. You must be fair, firm, friendly, and dependable.

In this time of turmoil and uncertainty, people are clamoring for clear and real leadership. Are you willing to answer the call and lead by example?

---

<sup>i</sup> Dr. A. J. Schuler is an expert in leadership and organizational change. To find out more about his programs and services, visit [www.SchulerSolutions.com](http://www.SchulerSolutions.com) or call (703) 370-6545.

---

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*