

Leadership is Sometimes Lonely

- Leaders must always take responsibility for their mistakes and for those of their team. Owning up to failures demonstrates integrity and is an acknowledgement of humanness. Taking responsibility for team mistakes earns trust and makes it safe for team members to take accountability for their own actions.
- Leaders must sometimes give feedback that people don't want to hear. It might be feedback about the way they performed on a particular task or general feedback on job performance. It isn't pleasant to give people bad news, especially when those people are not self-aware enough to know for themselves. The responsibility to do so falls on the leader.
- Leaders must sometimes go against the crowd in order to do what is right. In some situations, the entire team might favor a particular course of action, but the "right" action – legally, morally, or per company interests – is different. It is the leader's responsibility to take the right action regardless of what the crowd wants to do and to then find a way to help the crowd accept and live by the decision.
- Leaders must always hold themselves to a higher standard of behavior if they wish to retain the respect of those they supervise. With all eyes on the leader, the team takes its cues on how to behave from how the leader behaves. The effective leader ensures that she or he is not used as an example for bad behavior by others.
- Leaders must sometimes make tough choices that leave people sad or angry. Every good team is comprised of people who have differing ideas and opinions. When it's time to make a hard decision between different options, the leader must be decisive, even if some on the team do not like the decision.
- Leaders must sometimes tell people "no." No, you can't spend that money. No, you can't have a raise. No, you can't have that promotion. No, you can't hire three extra people. No, you can't run that controversial ad campaign. And these are just a few examples. But with the "no," leaders should provide honest, compelling explanations that help people understand and accept the decision.
- Leaders must sometimes not tell a joke even if it's sure to get a good laugh. Some say there is an element of truth in all humor. Whether that is accurate or not, a joke that has a member of the team as the victim takes on a whole different meaning when the boss tells the joke. Team members will look for hidden meaning in every joke a boss tells.
- Leaders must always stay out of the rumor and gossip business. It can be tempting for a manager to share hints of insider news. Admittedly, it feels good to have people cling to every word. Wise leaders realize that those people are attracted to the news, not to the person sharing it.
- Leaders must not allow themselves to become uniquely aligned with one subset of the team. If a leader goes to lunch with the same three people every day, the other ten people on the team will feel they are at a disadvantage. That can lead to charges of favoritism, and because we humans tend to favor those with whom we spend the most time, the charges might actually be legitimate.

