

## THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

What is leadership? According to John C. Maxwell, well known author, leadership is influence. This word...influence...is a simple, straightforward, one word description that places leadership within everyone's reach. All of us can exercise a certain degree of influence on someone, at some point, in some place. Leadership isn't about titles, positions or flowcharts. It's about one life influencing another.

Another quality associated with leadership is Character. Booker T. Washington stated that "Character is power." The first lesson we must learn is that broad leadership is built from deep character. An infrastructure of great character is essential to support great conduct. The trust and involvement of our followers will be parallel to the level of our own character.

Warren G. Bennis stated that "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality." Most of us learn the hard way that leadership is not merely having a vision. Anyone can dream. Effective leadership is knowing how to lay down the action steps for yourself and the organization so that the vision can be realized. This requires us to be practical and to understand the process along the way.

Enthusiasm is another quality that leaders need in order to be a success. Ralph Waldo Emerson stated it so clearly when he said "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." An enthusiastic attitude places a leader above his peers, opens his mind to creativity and provides motivation to his people. Enthusiasm is contagious...If we are enthusiastic about 4-H, our enthusiasm will be catching...and there's no telling what we can accomplish!

At some point in our leadership roles, we are bound to fail. Henry Ford said "Failure is the opportunity to begin again, more intelligently." Failure was never final to Mr. Ford, nor was it fatal. He expected failures on the way to success. It was all a part of the learning process. He allowed failure to tutor him, then he continued on down the path that was much smarter and wiser. Our failures are not a negative thing...unless we fail to learn from them and keep on trying to do things the same old way.

Another characteristic of a good leader is one that continues to seek out

opportunities to learn new things. Rick Warren stated: “The moment you stop learning, you stop leading.” Leaders are learners. Once a person feels they have a firm grasp on all the answers, they have quit being teachable and will soon cease from leading. Their thoughts and methods will become dated and eventually stale. Good leaders are hungry for learning, all the way to the grave.

Maxwell said...“Leadership development is a lifetime journey—not a brief trip.” Many of us probably feel like we’ll eventually learn all there is to know about leadership. However, there will always be more principles to learn and more strategies to try. These are just a few of the characteristics of a good leader...What other things do you see as an important part of leadership? The more we grow, the more we will recognize that leadership development will take a lifetime. It’s not something we can learn in just one weekend retreat. We must commit our lives to it.

As you evaluate your own personal leadership skills, what is it that you need to focus your energies on? How influential are you with those you are trying to lead? Has your team that’s here this weekend developed a vision and what are you doing to lead others down the path toward that vision? Do you need to work on being a person of character and set a good example for others? What is your level of enthusiasm and have you learned from past failures? Do you need to make a commitment to life long learning?

Our challenge to you is to take the leadership skills you have learned this weekend and from previous experiences and apply them as an Ambassador or Rec Team leader. Never think that you know everything there is to know about leadership. Always be open to new things and different ways to approach a project. Don’t be afraid to go into the unknown and try something new. In the words of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. “If you want to succeed, you should strike out on new paths rather than travel the worn paths of accepted success.” What new path will you take as you leave the Texas 4-H Center tomorrow on your way to success? The path to great leadership is up to you.