



5 steps to building a new leadership identity

By Marlene Chism

According to a “Global Generations” study by Ernst & Young, 46% of US managers have been managing for over 10 years, and most not received any type of training to develop their leadership identity. The belief is that because this individual was a star performer, has seniority, is a subject matter expert, a rainmaker, or a technician, they should be equipped to lead others. This tacit assumption leads to leadership dysfunction. The star performer micromanages instead of coaching others. The subject matter expert knows it all. The technical operator is overly aggressive, and the one who got promoted due to seniority still feels like “one of them.”

No matter what the context, newly promoted leaders often find themselves unprepared for what's required of leadership: making difficult decisions, initiating difficult conversations about performance or behavior, coaching others, and holding the team accountable. At the root is leadership identity. Here are five steps to building a new leadership identity.

1. Uncover your narrative

How do you define yourself? Are you a “hard worker” or a smart worker? Do you define yourself as a hard worker, or just “one of them”? How do you behave under pressure? Do you have the courage to initiate difficult conversations, or are you more of an avoider? Increase your self-awareness to build identity-based habits. Notice what you think, say, and do. What would you have to tell yourself to behave as you do? Behavior is your narrative acted out. Behavior drives identity.

2. Define leadership

Think deeply about what it means to be a leader in your organization. The more you think about leadership, the easier it will be to identify with being a leader. Your organization may have a definition for leadership, nonetheless, you need to create your own personal definition. For example, my definition for leadership: If leadership is about anything it's about alignment, and alignment is about focusing energy. From this definition I know that if I'm engaging in unproductive conversations the "energy" is unfocused and it's my job to course correct. Your definition of leadership might include servant leadership, compassion, innovation, or teamwork. Design a definition and see if you can align to and live from that definition.

3. Claim your values

When listening to others, it doesn't take long to know what a person's core values are. They say things like, "I want to be fair" and "It's my goal to create autonomy on the team." Yet, it's difficult for most of us to declare our top two values.

One of my top values is personal responsibility. This value shapes my behavior. (When I complain it means I need to stop blaming and start choosing.) Deciding on two top values makes decision-making easier and helps you to course correct early. What do you really value? Fairness, equality, compassion, service, integrity, creativity, or innovation? There are thousands of values to choose from, but values don't live on a website. Each value has a price to pay when it comes to living and leading from the value.

4. Envision a new future self

Who do you want to be? The key to creating a new identity is to stop living from your memories of the past and start living from the vision of your future. Picture your future self and how you lead. When you come up against conflict, how do you behave? What's holding you back now?

My work here is influenced by Dr. Benjamin Hardy and his book *Personality Isn't Permanent*. His work confirmed what I had been practicing in my own life and with my clients for years: we all have choices about who we want to be and what we wish to co-create; we just need a path to get there. One method I teach is to journal about your future self as if you are already that person. In your journaling include what it feels like, how you make decisions, and how you feel emotionally. (It's important to connect your vision of the future with the emotions you want to experience to make it manifest easily.) Thought plus emotion equals a new vision for your future self.

5. Build leadership confidence

Leadership confidence is not built on appeasing others, avoiding conflict, or using aggression to get your way. Leadership confidence is built on integrity, experience, and trust. Integrity is about living in alignment with your values. Experience is about the small wins that tell you you're growing. Trust is not as much about trusting others as it is about trusting yourself. Self-trust promotes trust in the workplace. Trusting yourself grows as you face reality, tell yourself the truth, keep promises and make decisions in alignment with your organization and with your own values. Leadership Confidence is an internal compass that never lets you down.

If you're struggling with your new leadership role, it's likely because you haven't formed a leadership identity. Even if your organization doesn't offer leadership development, you can still intentionally create your own identity for the purpose of increasing your capabilities.

<https://corp.smartbrief.com/original/2022/08/5-steps-to-building-a-new-leadership-identity>