

RESOURCE

SECURING YOUR FIRST SLT ROLE:

RESOURCE PACK 1



THE SHIFT FROM MANAGEMENT TO LEADERSHIP

In the last twenty years or so, there has been a significant shift in emphasis from senior management teams (SMT) to senior leadership teams (SLT).

Is this simply a question of semantics or does the change in terminology really have any meaning?

Q. What are the essential differences between managers and leaders?

Meeting the challenge – good role models

In any unfamiliar situation, it is natural to look to others for guidance and role models to help you develop your own method of dealing with things. When training to be a teacher, you probably spent a year watching other professionals, practicing different strategies and gradually learning your own style.

When you step up to senior leadership, you will have had little or no formal training for the job – somehow you are just expected to know what to do. You will not succeed in handling every situation well.

A crucial part of being a good leader is to be constantly learning how to do things a little better next time. However, a good method of getting some clues about effective leadership is to analyse the characteristics you have already seen modelled by senior leaders you admire.

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE LEADER?

- As an Individual, think carefully about a senior leader you admire.
- Note down all the attributes of their leadership that make them good at their job:

- Now, work with the rest of the group to produce a cartoon poster on a sheet of flip-chart paper to illustrate 'The Perfect Senior Leader'
- Display it on the wall for reference throughout the day
- Finally, as a group, make a list of the characteristics that you dislike most in leaders you have worked for and display that next to the poster

DEVELOPING THE NECESSARY DISTANCE TO LEAD

One of the biggest challenges in new leadership is developing and maintaining the professional distance that is required to get the job done. It can be particularly difficult if you have been promoted within the school – your relationship with colleagues has changed.

Parts of the problem stem from feelings on both sides. Some colleagues may not take you seriously because you have always been their friend or socialised with them. One or two may even have applied for the job you got! On the other side, perhaps you do not yet have firm confidence in your own abilities as a leader, which can cause you to hesitate or seem unsure.

You can take some comfort from the fact that most new leaders feel the same:

Some of the difficulties identified by new leaders:

- Jealousy and resentment of other staff
- Trying to be 'nice' or popular
- Being seen in a stereotyped role
- Overcompensating to 'prove your point/worth'
- Being the only female or male manager
- Having difficulty supervising members of the opposite sex
- Lack of suitable role models
- Knowing how to delegate and to whom
- Having a management style which is different from that of your predecessor
- Home/work conflict
- Feeling guilty
- Knowing how to give performance appraisal
- Knowing how to deal with confrontational people

TIME MANAGEMENT

In your role as a senior leader you will have many more tasks and responsibilities to fulfil than ever before. From time to time, you will encounter crises where you have to make decisions under pressure, but this should not be a routine way of working. It is not sustainable, as it will have a negative effect on performance and on your personal health. Therefore, it is crucial that you have an efficient method of using your time well under everyday conditions so that you can deal with the additional pressures when necessary.

A major decision you will have to face is how to fit in all your additional responsibilities and still maintain the quality of your teaching. It is important to remember that, as a role model for the rest of the staff, your classroom teaching should still be a priority. It is easy for others to criticise if you are trying to lead improvements in teaching and learning without 'walking the talk' yourself. In order to still have time to devote to lesson planning and teaching, you must develop strategies to use your non-contact time as profitably as you can.

It is a common mistake to think that you can manage time. In truth, time is a finite commodity, so you have to learn to manage yourself and your actions more effectively.

Time wasters

There is a mass of literature and internet information on possible methods of time management, and there may not be one routine that is perfect for you. However, there are many common themes running through accepted research and it may be useful to try some of the following techniques.

In order for time management to improve, it is important to be aware of what exactly it is that is causing the problem. Below you will find some of the most frequently cited reasons for reducing effectiveness in the working environment:

- ♣ Interruptions from the telephone
- ♣ Interruptions from personal visitors
- ♣ Going to meetings
- ♣ Tasks you should have delegated
- ♣ Procrastination and indecision
- ♣ Acting with incomplete information
- ♣ Dealing with team members
- ♣ Crisis management (fire fighting)
- ♣ Unclear communication
- ♣ Inadequate technical knowledge
- ♣ Unclear objectives and priorities
- ♣ Lack of planning
- ♣ Stress and fatigue
- ♣ Inability to say "No"
- ♣ Poor desk management and personal disorganisation

ACTIVITY 2: REDUCING TIME WASTERS

- Scan through the list again and choose the three that have the most impact on you in your working environment. Discuss with other delegates how you might reduce their impact.
- Is there any other significant cause of problems that we have missed out from the list? If so, any ideas for addressing it?

Prioritisation skills

It is tempting to deal with tasks in the order in which they are given to you simply to maintain some sort of organisation. However, this ignores the fact that some tasks are much more important than others are. Many tasks that take up a lot of time are routine and relatively trivial. Because they are less demanding, some people make the mistake of doing them first to get them off the 'to do' list, but by doing so, they risk missing out more important matters until the very last minute when, of course, performance is then rushed and more prone to mistakes. It is also a common mistake to 'put off' the tasks that you know will be more unpleasant or more challenging whilst filling your time with the things that you enjoy doing more. Both of these approaches are natural, but misguided. The ability to prioritise effectively is a key skill in successful leadership. You need to ask yourself:

Is the task important? An important task is one that is highly valued by the organization or one that will have a long-term effect. Failure to complete it will have significant consequences.

Is the task urgent? An urgent task is something that needs to be done to meet a deadline.

There is obviously an overlap between the two sets of tasks – some can be both urgent and important. As a senior leader, you will need to assess which tasks should take highest priority. If you still find it difficult to decide based on the questions above, try asking yourself these more practical questions:

- Does this task need to be completed now?
- Does this task need to be completed by me?
- What are the consequences if it is not done/ if I do not do it?

In your day-to-day working you should give:

- Top-priority to tasks that are BOTH important and urgent
- Medium-priority to tasks that are EITHER important or urgent
- Low-priority to tasks that are NEITHER important or urgent

You may find it helpful to keep a daily plan or time log of tasks ('to do list'), but with the addition of a code (letters, numbers or colours) to identify which level of priority each task commands. Do the high priority tasks first, even if they are the least appealing – doing 'the worst first', while you are feeling less tired, can give a real sense of achievement to set you up for the rest of the day.

Try to be realistic about how many tasks you are likely to get through in a day, otherwise you may always go home feeling you have failed.

When you are in your first senior post, you may be asked quite regularly to do tasks that are beyond your knowledge or expertise. Do not be afraid to ask someone on the staff who does know the answers – it is a far better use of time than sitting at a desk trying to research it on your own and worrying about whether you can get it right! A good example of an area that may initially confuse you is finance, simply because



there is little need for teaching staff to have a deep understanding beyond departmental orders. Your Bursar or Finance Officer is the expert and should be your first port of call for information.



ACTIVITY 3: 'PRIORITIES UNDER PRESSURE' SCENARIO

You must do this task as an individual.

1) In a secondary setting-

- Your Headteacher is away for the week at a conference in London, so the Deputy Head in charge.
- It is 8.15 a.m. and the Deputy has just phoned in sick. The following items are all waiting for attention and the staff are looking to you for leadership.
- You have a maximum of five minutes to decide on your plan of action.
Item 1: A letter from a concerned parent of a Y8 pupil, requesting information on the school's Sex Education Policy and how the lessons will be taught. Item 2: There is a Year 7 assembly at 8.45 a.m.

Item 3: A member of the office staff has just taken a telephone call from the bus company complaining about the "disgusting behaviour" of your pupils on the 232 bus.

Item 4: The crossing patrol assistant ('lollipop lady') has failed to turn up at the busy crossing outside school.

Item 5: In the last 10 minutes, three more members of staff have phoned in sick.

Item 6: A parent who has just dropped off his son at school has come in and asked to see you about a "private matter".

Item 7: The Year 11 Geography fieldtrip to the Lake District is leaving at 8.30.

Item 8: You have a Year 9 lesson to teach first period.

Item 9: Two pupils from Year 10 have been brought to stand outside your office because the site supervisor has just caught them smoking behind the bike-shed.

Item 10: The Deputy Head has arranged to see the subject leaders of the Science faculty to thrash out simmering disagreements about changes to their delivery of the GCSE curriculum

The final straw... Three minutes into your consideration of these items, a telephone call is put through to you from someone who insists on speaking to the Head...

OR

2) in a Primary setting:

You must do this task as an individual.

- Your Headteacher is away for the week at a conference in London, so the Deputy Head in charge.
- It is 8.15 a.m. and the Deputy has just phoned in sick. The following items are all waiting for attention and the staff are looking to you for leadership.
- You have a maximum of five minutes to decide on your plan of action.

Item 1: A letter from a concerned parent of a Y5 pupil complaining of a bullying situation

Item 2: There is a whole school assembly (years 1-6) at 8.45 a.m.



Item 3: A member of the office staff has just taken a telephone call from a house owner living next to the school saying some of the older pupils have been throwing stones at her cat

Item 4: The crossing patrol assistant ('lollipop lady') has failed to turn up at the busy crossing outside school.

Item 5: In the last 10 minutes, three more members of staff have phoned in sick.

Item 6: A parent who has just dropped off his son at school has come in and asked to see you about a "private matter".

Item 7: The Year 6 Trip to the museum is due to leave with some parent helpers and someone comes with a concern about the risk assessment

Item 8: You have your own class to teach

Item 9: Two pupils from Year 4 have been brought you as one was accused of hitting the other

Item 10: The Deputy Head has a meeting with the Senco and a parent regarding extras support for a child in year 3

The final straw... Three minutes into your consideration of these items, a telephone call is put through to you from someone who insists on speaking to the Head...

At the end of the five minutes, discuss your action plan with a partner.

There is no one correct answer to this exercise, but it is likely that there will be broad agreement between you – explore particularly any areas on which you have differing views. Now open out the discussion to the whole group.

DELEGATION

Another key skill of a busy leader is the art of delegation.

The advantages of delegation are many:

- ♣ To make sure that all the jobs get done
- ♣ To break large tasks into smaller, more manageable jobs and share the burden
- ♣ To allow you to use your time and energies more effectively
- ♣ To motivate staff by giving them ownership in a process
- ♣ To provide opportunities for staff development

Note that 'saving time' is not on the list. Indeed, initially, delegation can appear to take more time. It is important to consider it as a short-term investment for a long-term gain. If delegation is done well, you will then have a reliable system that can be used repeatedly in the future.

The process of delegation is not haphazard – to be effective it must be planned as well as any other process.

Ten Top Tips for successful delegation

1. When you delegate a task make sure that it is something which really needs to be done, otherwise you are just wasting someone else's time
2. Give tasks to people who can actually do them. Sometimes this may be people who will be able to do them if they are given sufficient preparation and/or training
3. Make sure that tasks are clearly defined. People must know what is expected of them so that they have every chance of success.
4. Give people the necessary resources to succeed – possibly equipment, money, but often time or assistance
5. Give clear time-scales including intermediate check-points as well as final deadlines
6. Agree on how their progress during the task will be monitored
7. Make sure you are available to provide advice and support if it becomes necessary
8. Agree on success criteria
9. Give people authority to carry out the task without having to keep coming back to you for permission to proceed and let other staff know that the process has been delegated so that they are aware of the correct person to deal with
10. 10. When people do a delegated task well, don't forget to provide praise and encouragement (and a word of thanks) whenever possible

Remember:

As a senior leader, you can delegate the process for getting a task done and give the authority to do it. You cannot delegate the overall responsibility for ensuring that the job is done.



LEARNING TO SAY 'NO'

As a senior leader, you will be asked to do all sorts of tasks that may not seem to be part of your remit. Try to get used to asking yourself why you have been chosen and “Am I the right person for this job?” If you are already very busy with work priorities of your own, that are specific to your role, then you may not realistically have time to do all of these other things properly.

Before saying “yes”, ask yourself whether you really want to, or really should be involved. If you think that the answer is “No”, you need to learn to make your views known. Be assertive (but not aggressive or confrontational) and back up your refusal with a good reason why you are not able to do the extra work. Do not do extra work just because you are afraid of upsetting people, otherwise they will just keep on asking you to do more!

Dealing with unexpected interruptions

One of the things that you have undoubtedly already encountered is the rapid rise in unplanned calls upon your time. Some you will have to respond to because there is no choice, such as emergencies. Some interruptions are useful, because the conversations that result are informative, but many unscheduled interruptions are a waste of your time and stop you from doing more things that are important. It can take a determined effort on your part to reduce significantly the amount of time lost in this way. There are four main options:

- Refuse
- Postpone
- Minimize
- Prevent

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

A key skill in senior leadership is effective communication. You will be called upon frequently to deliver information, explain plans and initiatives and discuss issues with individuals from all areas of the school community and beyond. You may be required to motivate, convey a vision, 'sell' an idea or impart bad news. You have been trained to stand up and talk to people as a job and yet it all seems much more daunting when it is an adult audience of work colleagues, parents or the wider community.

As with any skill, you will gain more confidence with experience, but early impressions are also important. There are many methods of communication your ideas and instructions, but most fall into one of three categories:

Aggressive – to be avoided. Coming across as a 'bossy boots' is counter-productive and hinders the formation of good working relationships

Submissive – also to be avoided whenever possible. Used often, it erodes your professional credibility, because you appear apologetic, lacking in self-confidence and, at worst, a pushover. Some staff will exploit it as a weakness.

Assertive – this is the style to aim for. It conveys confidence, professional capability and people know where they stand and what is expected of them. It may not be easy at first, because you may not be totally comfortable in your own knowledge and experience, but it is important to work on this skill.

Being assertive works because:

- You have articulated what you want – you feel better
- People know where they are – clear about what to do
- You are more in control
- Your confidence will grow
- Their confidence in you will grow
- Future negotiations will be easier – more direct
- Relationships with others will be professional but amicable
- It avoids escalation of stress and anger
- People are more likely to work with you rather than despite you (or even against you!)

Instructions

New leaders often worry about having to tell colleagues what to do, particularly if they have been promoted within the school. Fears of unpopularity, a challenge to their authority, not being taken seriously, even being ignored are all common concerns. Once again, your basic training and experience as a teacher should stand you in good stead – very similar principles apply:

- Take your time – think before you speak!
- Never make decisions or promises 'on the run'
- Be clear and say exactly what you mean
- Keep it relevant



- If you are delivering several points in a plan, give it a clear context, do it in a logical order. Plan carefully what you are going to say. Summarise at the end to reinforce understanding and expectations
- Explaining why something needs to be done greatly improves the chance of acceptance (especially bad news!)
- Be aware of your body language – “it’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it”
As with the assertive communication style, a confident delivery instils confidence in the receiver. Respect will grow whilst maintaining the professional distance.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Of all the various aspects of effective senior leadership, the one that is perhaps most distinct from management, is securing whole-school commitment of others to follow your lead. Sound judgement is vital in choosing the most suitable leadership style for any given situation, and the best leaders are able to be adaptable, using a range of different approaches as the need arises. Researchers may use various names to describe what essentially are the same basic styles. The most important thing is recognising your own preferred style, and when you need to adapt to use other variants.

The Hay Group identifies six styles:

Visionary

The visionary leader inspires and is able to explain how and why people's efforts contribute to the 'dream'. Through empathy and clarity, they are able to move people towards shared dreams.

Affiliative

The affiliative leader creates harmony that boosts morale and solves conflicts. A very useful style for healing rifts in a team or motivating during stressful times.

Participative

A superb listener, a team worker, a collaborator, an influencer. By valuing people's input, the participative leader gets commitment through participation.

Coaching

By listening and helping people identify their own strengths and weaknesses, the coaching leader encourages, delegates and improves performance by building long-term capabilities.

Pacesetting

With a strong drive to achieve, high personal standards and initiative, pacesetters get results from a competent team. Do too much of this and your employees will feel stifled and have less room to grow.

Directive

The directive leader is too inclined to say 'do it'. It's a style that demands compliance and is most effective in a crisis situation when you need to kick-start an urgent turnaround! It is least effective when used with capable and self-motivated employees.

From: 'The Ins and Outs of Successful Leadership', The Hay Group

As an individual, you will have a tendency to work most naturally with one, or a mix of two, 'preferred' leadership styles. As you become more experienced, the key is to develop a broader range from which you can mix and match according to the demands of different situations.



ACTIVITY 4: YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

Think about situations where you have dealt with various people during the past week.

- Which of the above leadership styles did you use to deal with the situation?
- Were your actions effective?
- Could you have done anything differently to improve the outcome?

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT COLLEAGUES

ACTIVITY 5: IS IT ME?

Sometimes, our own behaviour may be responsible for causing difficult situations with colleagues. Reflecting on the previous session about communication and leadership styles:

- In your present role, which leadership style(s) do you think you respond to most enthusiastically?
- Do any approaches particularly annoy or alienate you?
- Are you very different in these respects to other colleagues?
- How will this inform your future practice as a senior leader?

Issues raised by this reflection:

What makes people difficult?

No matter how well you try to communicate with people, there will always be someone who makes your job difficult. It is important to try and understand their motivation.

The short answer is fear! Whether difficult people act passively (withdrawing co-operation, avoiding you....) or aggressively (arguing, complaining....) or swing between both, they are usually motivated by fear. They are often feeling threatened, insecure and lacking in confidence. Sometimes they feel undervalued, lacking recognition or attention. They often feel that they have little or no control. Their fears can cause them to resist change, or insist on being right all the time. When you are new in your role, they may even think they know more than you do. This can be magnified if the new senior leader is significantly younger than the difficult colleague is. They may see themselves as victims and spend a lot of energy looking for evidence to support their view or looking back with regret that they did not progress to a senior post in their career.

ACTIVITY 6: MY DIFFICULT COLLEAGUE

- Choose a partner to work with
- You have 2 minutes each to describe in as much detail as possible a difficult person at your school
- Now discuss whether the characters are similar – why are they being difficult?
- How much does their behaviour impact on your days?
- What strategies have you tried to use to improve relationships?

Some practical tips for dealing with a difficult colleague

Try the S.A.L.V.A.G.E. strategy:

- ♣ Smile
- ♣ Anticipate their anger
- ♣ Listen to them
- ♣ Verify that you understand
- ♣ Attend to their needs
- ♣ Guarantee that something will be done ♣ Encourage them to change direction

Even with these skills, some situations will still escalate from 'difficulty' into confrontation and anger. Possible strategies to try include:

- Share negative emotions.
- In your responses use phrases such as "I understand", "I see what you mean..."
- Take notice when you feel threatened by what someone is saying to you.
- When you feel you are getting angry, practice making requests e.g. "Have you thought about...?" "What if...?"
- Try repeating the exact words that someone is saying to you when they are in a lot of emotional pain or when you disagree with them completely.
- Take responsibility for your feelings to avoid blaming others.
- Learn to listen to the two sides of the conflict that you are in, as if you were a mediator or counsellor.
- Take a playful attitude towards developing the skill of emotional self-control in high conflict situations – don't over worry
- Wait a few days to cool down emotionally when a situation makes you feel wild with intense feelings, such as rage.
- Make a decision to speak with restraint whenever you are angry or frustrated.

Be prepared also for a small number of colleagues who react in a different way, by being either submissive or manipulative. This can result in actions such as bursting into tears when you try to talk through an issue, suggesting you are 'picking on them', blaming other colleagues ("it's not my fault"). Some may try to undermine you by gossiping about you – NEVER be tempted to do the same. A senior leader must use discretion at all times.

These situations can be harder to deal with than open anger, but the basic approach is similar – use the SALVAGE techniques, but anticipate their ACTIONS rather than their anger. If you feel you have really made an effort and no progress is being made, do not be afraid to refer the problem to another senior colleague – sometimes just a change of personalities can improve a situation. If there is still deadlock, it may be that the Headteacher has to consider more measures that are serious.

ACTIVITY 7: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Read the following scenario and then discuss strategies with the group

When you took over as senior leader, you 'inherited' line management of a team of admin staff, some of whom have worked at the same school for many years. The oldest team member, Mary, is in her late 50s, is well respected by other staff and has seen the school through many changes since she started there in 1988.

At first, you received great support and co-operation from the whole team, and really enjoyed your new responsibility. However, you have recently tried to introduce some organisational changes in the office and you have noticed a certain amount of reluctance to embrace the new system. You are not certain, but you have the feeling that Mary may be trying to undermine you by influencing the rest of the team, saying that things are not as good as they were "in the past" and that the new ideas are not going to work.

How are you going to deal with this situation?