

Seven Leadership Habits

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How would you like to harness the power of Google to improve your leadership abilities and the performance of your practice team? A little known project recently completed by Google could provide you with some helpful insights. The undertaking was code-named Project Oxygen. The mission inside the Googleplex was far more important to the future of the company than to discover the latest search algorithm. The mission was to build better leaders and stronger teams.

Using the best data-mining skills in the world, the Project Oxygen team analyzed feedback surveys, performance reviews and nominations for top manager awards. They looked for patterns of words among the thousands of data points of praise and complaints. The result is a set of successful leadership habits, so seemingly obvious, that you might find it hard to believe it took Google so long to figure them out.

Successful Leadership

"Have a clear vision and strategy for the team." "Listen to your team." "Be results-oriented." The list goes on, reading like what could be called Google's Seven Habits for Highly Effective Leaders. Things got really interesting when the Project Oxygen team ranked the list of leadership habits by their level of importance. For much of the company's history, the Google approach to management was to have leaders leave their team of software developers alone. If they got stuck, the team members could call upon their leaders, whose superior technical expertise qualified them for management positions in the first place. This "leave them alone unless they need me" approach may sound familiar to many practice owners.

Google discovered that technical expertise ranked at the bottom of the list of successful leadership habits. What employees valued highest was a even-keeled leaders, who made time in their schedules for one-on-one meetings, who helped the people they manage work through problems by asking questions and not by dictating answers, and who took an interest in their employees careers and lives. This is a valuable lesson for chiropractic leaders. Your practice team members place a high value on your ability to be accessible and to make connections with them as individuals. Make sure that you are there for your team.

Project Oxygen also examined how leadership affected employee retention. Google found that their employees typically quit their jobs for one of three reasons. First, they didn't feel connected to the company's mission or that the work that they did mattered. Second, they didn't respect or like their co-workers. Third, they had a bad leader. Project Oxygen found that a bad leader had a greater impact on an employee's performance and how they felt about their job than any other factor. This underscores the impact your leadership skills have on the strength of your practice team.

According to Google, the best leaders had teams that performed better, were retained better, were happier — and who did everything better as a team. They learned that the biggest controllable factor was the quality of the leader. The questions they then asked was: How could they make every leader better?

Google began coaching its leaders using the results of Project Oxygen. Since the coaching began, the company has seen significant improvement in even its worst performing leaders. One of Google's leaders managed a team of employees who seemed to despise him. He was driving them too hard. They found him bossy, arrogant, and secretive. They wanted to quit his team. Because of his heavy hand, the leader was denied a promotion he wanted, and was told that his style was the reason. Google gave him one-on-one coaching in the Project Oxygen principles and six months later, his team members acknowledged in surveys that the manager had improved significantly.

The Seven Effective Habits

Project Oxygen revealed seven habits that are essential to the success of team leaders. Take these lessons and apply them to your leadership skills in your practice.

The first habit is to be a good coach. This includes providing specific, constructive feedback to your team members and balancing negative with positive feedback. Successful leaders hold regular one-on-one coaching sessions with their team members and present solutions to problems that are tailored to each team member's specific strengths.

The second habit is to empower your team without micromanaging them. This means creating a balance between the freedom you give your team members and your availability to provide advice and guidance to them. This includes giving your team members responsibility for assignments that stretch their capabilities and employing a team approach to tackling bigger problems.

The third habit is to express a sincere interest in your team members' success and personal well being. Get to know your team members as people with lives outside of your practice. This will also make new members of your team feel welcome and help them to ease their transition on to the team.

The fourth habit is to be productive and results-oriented. Focus on what you want the team to achieve and how you can help them achieve it. Help your team prioritize their tasks and work with them to remove roadblocks.

The fifth habit is to be a good communicator and to listen to your team. Good communication is a two-way street. It requires you to both listen to and share information. You can improve communication by holding meetings that include your entire team. This helps team members connect the dots between their role on the team and the overall goals of your practice. When holding team meetings, encourage open dialogue and listen to the issues and concerns of your team members.

The sixth habit is to have a clear vision and strategy for your team. This means that even in the midst of turmoil, you keep the team focused on your goals and strategy to achieve them. Involve your team in setting and evolving your team vision and in making progress toward it.

The seventh habit is to be sure that you have the skills you need to advise your team. This includes rolling up your sleeves, leaving the ivory tower, and working side by side with your team members when needed. This will enable you to appreciate the specific challenges that come with each team member's role in your practice.

Simplicity

What is striking is the simplicity of these seven habits and the fact that applying them doesn't require a personality transplant. What it means is, if you want to get better as a leader, and you want more out of your team and you want them to be happier, make sure you have time for them

and be consistent. Rate your leadership skills against those valued by Google. Practice them on a regular basis until they become habits—they are as important as oxygen to the health of your practice team!