

NEW SUPERVISOR SURVIVAL GUIDE

**Simple and Proven Leadership
Practices to Help New -and Not So
New - Bosses Thrive**

JOHN SCHUHART

*The 30-minute guide to read until you can:
Afford \$10,000 for world-class training
Read dozens of leadership books
Get approval to hire an executive coach*

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– and Not So New – Bosses Thrive

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Preface

Being an effective leader whom people want to work for and with is not rocket science. It's just that most people spend little time or have the support they need to learn how to lead and - perhaps more importantly - think about how they want to lead before they become supervisors.

This New Supervisor Survival Guide offers simple and proven practices to help new - and not so new - leaders thrive. If you have 30 minutes to read this book and adapt some or all of the practices to your personality, you'll be on the path to being the leader you want to be - and your team needs you to be. This guide can get you started and help you develop your authentic leadership style until you can afford \$10,000 to attend a week of world-class leadership training, read several dozen articles and books, or get approval to hire an executive coach.

Please pass this book along to a colleague or friend who might find it useful and consider donating to:

World Central Kitchen (<https://wck.org>). "Food is national security. Food is economy. It is employment, energy, history. Food is everything." ~ José Andrés (He knows a thing or two about leadership.) No one can learn without food.

The Mico Scholarship Fund of the State University of New York (<https://suny.oneonta.edu>), which helps first generation college students afford a college education. Employees of the Mountain Ice Company were promised a college scholarship if they named their child after the company. After naming their son Mico, his parents saw the Mountain Ice Company go bankrupt with the advent of refrigeration. Mico could not afford college but was gifted with a unique name.

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Foreword

Why should anyone under 40 care what an old retired guy writes about leadership? To quote my friend Mike, another old retired guy and former city manager of a city with half a million citizens, "Us old guys, we know a few things".

This book distills 50 years of observing good and bad leaders, making mistakes, reading books and articles, attending leadership development programs, training & working as an executive coach, and leading teams ranging from 6 Boy Scouts to serving as the CFO of a multi-billion-dollar organization.

This is the book I wish someone gave me when I was a new supervisor. My hope is that supervisors find it useful toward speeding their leadership development journey and avoiding at least a few of the mistakes I made along the way.

This book is possible due to what I've learned from my great coaching clients.

To learn more about executive coaching or the author please visit www.graybeardcoaching.com

Introduction

I met “Matt” for our first coaching conversation on his second day as the newly promoted supervisor of a team of 10 analysts. Every day hundreds of great individual contributors are promoted to supervisor or team leader and many, like “Matt”, are very excited, a bit stressed, unsure they want the extra responsibility, and slightly overwhelmed. Like most leaders at this level, Matt earned promotion because he was the best individual contributor on his team. The same selection process happens in most fields – private or public sector – the best accountant is promoted to lead the other accountants, the best programmer is promoted to lead the other programmers, the best salesperson is promoted to lead the other salespeople, etc.

So, if you’re like “Matt”, congratulations on promotion to supervisor. Now what? If you are like most first-time bosses, you have little or no formal leadership training and minimal guidance from your employer as to how you should lead and the type of work environment you should create. A few new bosses thrive in their new role, some survive, and many struggle to keep their heads above water. In nearly two decades as an executive and eight years as an executive coach, I’ve noticed common threads – and some particularly effective practices – that help new bosses thrive in their new leadership roles.

A big challenge for many first-time bosses is recognizing that the knowledge, skills, and abilities that earned promotion are only part of what they need to succeed in their new role. Yes, individual contributor excellence is important, but continuing being the best analyst, accountant, programmer, or salesperson does not make one a good leader. Successful leadership requires a new way of thinking about yourself.

Shift To Developing Great Individual Contributors

Successful first-time bosses quickly learn they need to build a strong team by developing their team members to be more effective - rather than making themselves more effective - and by creating a healthy work environment. The question is how do you do this and thrive in your first year as a boss or until you can attend formal leadership training?

Shifting your mindset from being a great individual contributor to developing great individual contributors and a strong team can be a real challenge. Your knowledge, expertise and drive earned pay raises, bonuses, recognition, and promotion. But ask yourself, which will be more effective in the future - increasing your personal productivity by ten percent or increasing the productivity of each of your team members by ten percent? There are many ways to develop team members: teaching, training, challenging assignments, mentoring, coaching, education, etc., and the personal involvement of the supervisor is essential to help each reach their potential.

Leaders are paid to have conversations. Lots of them. Conversations are how we:

- Create relationships.
- Build trust.
- Share information.
- Assign work.
- Teach.
- Set accountability standards.
- Shape culture.
- Learn from our team members.

As Chalmers Brothers and Vinay Kumar make clear in Language and the Pursuit of Leadership Excellence, nearly everything that occurs in the workplace is the result of a conversation.

In the COVID, work-from-home or hybrid work eras conversations take on additional importance – it's how we keep team members feeling connected when so many opportunities for informal conversations no longer exist. Gone are the quick chats in the hallway, by the coffee pot, or before and after in-person meetings. If your team members work from home or adopt a hybrid work schedule, it is important to make the most of every Zoom meeting or phone conversation.

In their book, [Nine Lies About Work](#), Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall posit that a manager must have at least one brief conversation per week with each direct report during which two key questions should be discussed:

- What are your priorities?
- How can I help?

They also state that if a manager does not have time to hold those conversations, they have too many direct reports! Such conversations are the bare minimum to keep employees engaged, build trust, and create opportunities for their development. So how do we make our conversations as productive as possible?

I tell every one of the hundreds of clients I've coached that I don't have a pre-conceived plan to make them an amazing leader. There is no one size fits all path to great leadership and there is no single set of skills that are "best". Every leader possesses their own unique strengths, weaknesses, and personality traits and must determine what will work best for themselves. The most successful new leaders, however, use some or all the following skills to improve the conversations that are vital for helping their team members reach their full potential and building strong teams:

- Listen to understand
- Ask questions to encourage thoughtful discussion
- Emphasize positive feedback
- Delegate challenging work
- Establish clear accountability standards
- Overcome fear of tough conversations
- Drive innovation
- Inspire commitment
- Articulate your authentic leadership philosophy
- Foster a healthy work environment

Listen Deeply

Although it may seem counterintuitive, good listening is essential to productive conversations and good leadership. A Google search reveals numerous definitions of effective listening and techniques for improving. At the simplest level, we listen to respond or understand. The vast majority of the time, the vast majority of us are formulating what we want to say while our conversation partner speaks. This is listening to respond. The press of business tempts us to convey information quickly, advocate for our priorities, or persuade others how right we are or how wrong they are. Typically, we impatiently wait for others to stop talking before agreeing, disagreeing, or telling. While this may be efficient in the moment, we miss so much. We often fail to understand fully what the other person says, and more importantly, why they say it. Jason Headley's video, "It's Not About The Nail", is a great example of listening to respond when listening to understand is what his conversation partner needs to feel heard.

Listening to understand requires that we silence the soundtrack in our mind while the other person is speaking and recognize we don't need to spring-load a response to launch the instant the other person pauses for breath or finishes speaking. We'll think of something to say and what's the big deal if there's a few seconds of silence before we speak? When we talk less and listen more, we learn more information from the other person and more about the emotion and the reasoning behind what they say. The old saying, "There's a reason we have two ears and one mouth" comes to mind. We don't learn when we speak.

In addition to learning more, good listening builds relationships. Being fully present and giving another person our full attention is a great gift and meets a deep, universal human need to be heard and feel valued. It strengthens relationships and builds trust. The stronger our relationships and the more team members trust us, the more they will let us lead them. A colleague of mine in the 1990's is the most striking example of great listening to understand I've witnessed. Phoebe's deep listening – giving her full attention, asking inviting questions, maintaining eye contact, relaxed

posture, and letting her conversational partner finish their thoughts – bathed people in a warm glow that made them feel truly heard and valued. While she was smart, hard-working, and persuasive, her listening created remarkable executive presence, built strong relationships, and was likely a key element in her rise to be CEO of a corporation with annual revenue of \$38 billion.

One simple way to practice listening to understand is to gather data on yourself. For several days, reflect briefly after each conversation and note if you were listening to respond or listening to understand. You can collect data simply by making a check mark on a Post-it note stuck on your computer monitor or recording more detail to discern patterns in what helps or hinders your listening or even with whom you succeed or struggle in listening to understand. You also may want to observe and record how people respond when you listen to understand.

Ask Questions That Encourage Thoughtful Discussion

Asking questions becomes increasingly more important the higher one climbs the organizational ladder. Questions are how we gather information to help make better decisions, uncover alternative courses of action, encourage innovation, and challenge team members to think for themselves. Given the importance of asking questions, it is surprising how few new leaders - and experienced leaders - think intentionally about how they ask questions and do it well.

Humans are stubborn. We are more likely to respond positively and productively when we get to decide what we want to do instead of being told what to do. When I ask my three-year-old granddaughter if she needs to go the bathroom, she invariably says, "No", even when she shows clear signs that she is ready for a bathroom visit. If, however, I ask her which bathroom she wants to use, she will make her choice and visit the bathroom with minimal fuss. Adult team members aren't much different than three year-olds when it comes to their desire to make choices for themselves.

The most effective questions invite thoughtful responses. Many of us unwittingly ask "close-ended" questions that can be answered with "Yes", "No", or other one-word answers. Open-ended questions elicit longer responses and encourage more thought from the person we are questioning. If we ask a team member, "Are you making good progress on your project?", they easily could answer, "Yes" or "No". Asking questions such as, "What progress are you making on your project?", "What challenges are you facing?", or saying, "Tell me about your project", invites more thoughtful and informative responses.

The most effective questions tend to be brief, non-judgmental, and require significant thought to answer. They usually begin with "How" or "What". Be on alert when asking a question starting with "Why", which can be perceived as accusatory or judgmental, particularly in an email or text where the reader can't hear the tone of our voice or see non-verbal cues. Examples of simple, effective questions, include:

- What options are you considering?
- How should we proceed?
- What's on your mind?
- What led to that conclusion? (Much more inviting and less judgmental than "Why did you do that?")

You are most likely on the wrong track if your questioning resembles a Congressional hearing where a Senator takes five minutes to make a statement and concludes with a question such as, "Why did you do that?", or "Do you still kick your dog?".

It is very easy to fall into the "expertise trap", which occurs when a team member asks a question that tempts you to show how much you know. Although you truly may be the expert, it is often more important to develop other experts or draw out your team members' expertise than demonstrate your own brilliance. Rather than answering the question, consider asking questions to challenge your team members to think of answers themselves. When team members ask you to make a decision consider suggesting they decide or, at a minimum, make a recommendation and articulate the pros and cons.

One way to find out if you ask effective questions is to gather data on yourself for several days. Possibilities include noting the number of open-ended and closed-ended questions you ask. Or making a list of every question you ask or have a trusted colleague track the number and type of questions you ask. You may be surprised how quickly such simple observations build new, productive habits for you and bring out the best from team members.

One senior attorney – a nationally recognized expert at a federal regulatory agency – tired of seemingly endless debates with fellow attorneys. He decided to experiment by asking open-ended questions instead of trying to persuade other attorneys to adopt his point of view. He found that the more open-ended questions he asked, the more other lawyers spoke. And the more they spoke, the more likely they were to talk themselves into adopting his point of view. The senior attorney said, "I love it. I talk less and I win more debates."

The book [Change Your Questions, Change Your Life](#) by Marilee Adams is a great resource to learn more about how to ask effective, non-judgmental questions. And [The Coaching Habit](#) by Michael Bungay Stanier is a superb guide to asking questions that lead team members to think for themselves. Both books are quick and easy to read and full of practical suggestions.

Emphasize Positive Feedback

Ask yourself, what got you promoted? Maybe it's because you're pretty good at a lot of things. There's nothing wrong with employees who are average or above average at a wide variety of skills. Every organization depends on them to make products, deliver services, satisfy customers, keep the lights and IT on, and get everyone paid. But who moves the needle? Who invents new products, develops new business lines, supersedes productivity, or slashes costs? It's the team members who do at least a few things extremely well. More than likely, you got noticed and promoted because you do a few important things extremely well. Providing lots of positive feedback to help team members turn strengths into super strengths is a great way to move the needle and build strong teams.

You may have read about the ongoing debate concerning whether people really want feedback and if feedback works. What do I know? People want to know when they perform well so they can do more. And they want to know when they perform below expectations or poorly so they can do something about it. Ideally, we give more positive than negative feedback. How much more? Various experts say that positive feedback should be given three, five or even ten times more frequently than negative feedback. I don't know what the perfect ratio is, but I do know that honey catches more flies than vinegar!

Feedback is how we learn and improve and is most effective when it reinforces positive actions – and in the case of negative feedback – does not make us defensive. It should be clear, specific, concise, factual, and delivered in a way that sparks a conversation to help the person create their own ideas about how to grow and to improve. It should never be judgmental or accusatory. Because humans can be stubborn, team members are much more likely to implement plans they make instead of plans imposed on them, so we need to give feedback in a way that helps them plan how they want to develop further. Feedback also needs to be frequent, particularly positive feedback. It is very frustrating, and downright unfair, to learn you've been doing great work – or even worse,

that you've been performing poorly – at your semi-annual or annual performance review. If a team member performed poorly for six months and you gave them no feedback, who's responsible? You are!

The Situation, Behavior, Impact (SBI) technique, popularized by the Center for Creative Leadership, is perfect for quick, informal, and effective feedback. A great way to start is to say, "May I offer an observation?," instead of, "I want to give you some feedback.," which can make people defensive. The goal is to keep it brief, simple, factual, and as neutral as possible, by describing the:

- **Situation:** Time, place, and context. Stick to facts.
- **Behavior:** The actions you observed. Again, just the facts.
- **Impact:** The emotional impact the observed behavior made on you.
- Follow with a question to get your team member thinking about what they can learn and how they can grow.

Giving SBI observations becomes easy with practice so it's best to start positive. For example: "May I offer an observation? About 10 minutes into the team meeting this morning, when Tom asked you a pointed question (**S**ituation), you paused, took a deep breath, and quietly answered Tom's question (**B**ehavior). That made me relax (**I**mpact). How did you do that?" Such feedback expresses appreciation and prompts team members to think about how to build on positive behavior.

In addition to encouraging team members to build on their strengths, expressing appreciation for good work – catching someone doing well – makes it easier for team members to hear negative feedback and start a discussion. Don't overdo negative feedback but don't shy away from it when a team member does something to derail their development, degrade another teammate's performance or development, or impact the team negatively.

Lack of time is no excuse for avoiding feedback. With a bit of practice, you can give effective feedback – positive or negative – in 30 seconds or less. It is particularly important to be objective and non-judgmental when offering negative, or "developmental" observations, such as: "May I offer an observation? About 10 minutes into the team meeting this morning, when Tom asked you a pointed question (**S**ituation), you raised your voice, stood up and gestured with your finger while answering Tom (**B**ehavior). That made me nervous (**I**mpact). What happened?" Notice there is nothing with which the team member can reasonably disagree. Everything offered is a fact or your emotion. The team member is not described as mad, mean, upset, or any other assumed emotion or motive, minimizing defensiveness. Again, the key is to invite a conversation that prompts the team member to consider how they can improve.

The best feedback I ever received was in 1998. I was a newly promoted executive. Averill, who was on my team, walked into my office one afternoon (**S**ituation) and said, "You cut me off when I'm talking (**B**ehavior), and it frustrates me" (**I**mpact). She was correct. I felt like a butterfly in a collector's display case with a big pin right through the middle. I replied I usually was agreeing with her, and she said, "I know, and it still frustrates me." Her comments were powerful because she was accurate, direct, and described how my actions made her feel – no opinion concerning my motive and no beating around the bush. That conversation started an ongoing 20-plus year effort to listen to understand.

Don't mix the message when offering negative feedback. My family dog refused to take medicine unless we squished a pill between two layers of cheese. Early in my career as a supervisor, I often delivered many such "feedback sandwiches", where a bit of negative feedback was sandwiched between tasty, positive tidbits.... "Joe, you are such a great briefer, but you should not have thrown the dry erase marker and yelled at Jeff when he asked you that pointed question. Otherwise, your briefing was great". Such "feedback sandwiches" may make you feel like a nice boss, and may be effective for administering medication to pets, but are confusing to humans. Joe could easily ignore the feedback concerning his outburst since he was told twice he's a great briefer.

Another great practice to get team members thinking about their development is Employee Performance Solution's 10 Minute Conversation framework, consisting of six questions:

You ask your team member:

- What is something positive you achieved that you want to highlight?
- What is one area for development, coaching, learning a new skill, etc.?

The team member asks you:

- What's one thing I'm doing well and should continue?
- What's one thing I could do to be even more effective?

You ask your team member:

- What's one thing I'm doing to support you that's working?
- What's one way I could work better with you?

Offering frequent SBI observations and/or conducting 10-minute performance conversations encourages introspection and self-development by your team members and eliminates or greatly minimizes surprises at semi-annual and annual performance reviews. You'll sleep

better before such reviews and can focus on future development possibilities instead of debating how well or poorly your team members did their jobs.

A simple way to hold yourself accountable is to observe yourself for a week or two and count how many times you offer feedback observations. One new supervisor knew she needed to give more feedback – her team requested it – so she rewarded herself with a chocolate each time she gave an SBI. By the end of the week, the candy dish on her conference table was empty and her staff commented how much they appreciated all the feedback.

Another idea is to count how many times in a week you say “thank you” or express appreciation for team members’ good work. Or keep a spreadsheet to track to whom you give feedback and the content of the feedback you give. Although simple, such tracking mechanisms collect useful information and serve as effective reminders to let team members know how they are performing. As a bonus, you’ll have information to make formal performance management evaluations and conversations a breeze. Simple actions build new, productive habits. The key is to determine what will work best for you.

A great resource is [Feedback that Works – How to Build and Deliver Your Message](#) by Sloan R. Weitzel. This 30-page booklet published by the Center for Creative Leadership is loaded with practical, simple techniques to create effective learning opportunities.

Delegate Challenging Work

Many new – and experienced – bosses get caught in the trap of, “I can do this better and/or faster”, so they’ll help a customer, gather data, answer an email, revise a document, or attend an important meeting. Of course you can do it better! You were probably promoted to lead the team because you were the most productive team member. The question is, should you do it? To decide, whenever you are about to tackle an assignment or attend a meeting, have a conversation with yourself. Ask:

- Am I the only person who can do this?
- Whom am I robbing of an opportunity to learn and grow if I do?

Usually, the answers are someone else is capable and they could learn by doing it. A good guideline is described in Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger’s book, The Leadership Machine, where they write, “One of the truths of the human psyche is people try hardest when there is between one-half and two-thirds chance of success.” In other words, people best acquire knowledge and develop new skills when they are challenged and have a reasonable chance of success. If a team member has a 100 percent chance of success, they may be doing vital work, but they are not learning.

Some supervisors find themselves spending too much time editing or correcting team members’ work. In the near term, it may be quicker to fix errors and strengthen content than to return something to a team member and coach them to improve it. In the long term, however, the supervisor’s editing reinforces that it’s ok to delegate upward by submitting low quality work because the boss will fix it. Instead of providing “track change” type edits, point out where work is unclear or additional information is needed and ask questions such as:

- How could you make this clearer and more concise?
- How could you strengthen your analysis or recommendation?

- What additional information would you want to know if you were the audience or decision maker?

“Delegate til it hurts” is the philosophy I adopted to remind myself to give team members as much freedom and flexibility to accomplish work, interfering only when the stakes were high and risking disappointing a customer or preventing other colleagues’ success. To hold yourself accountable and get in the habit of delegating, keep track of whether you ask yourself who could and should tackle each task on your to-do list. Delegating creates win-win situations – team members receive opportunities to develop new skills and you get time to tackle higher priority work. Consider encouraging delegation by tracking what you delegate and don’t delegate for a week and/or recording how much time you free for yourself to do higher priority work.

Establish Clear Accountability Standards

In Language and the Pursuit of Leadership Excellence, Chalmers Brothers and Vinay Kumar posit that almost everything that gets done at work results from a request and most breakdowns occur due to insufficient conversation about how to define success. "I need the quarterly sales data as soon as possible", may sound like a clear request. However, when is as soon as possible? What sales data? How much detail? The chances of providing untimely, inadequate information grow with each unanswered question. Some is not a number and soon is not a time!

As an executive, I found many of my team members' "failures" were at least partly my fault for not setting clear accountability standards. While both sides should ensure there is sufficient conversation to clarify what success looks like, ultimately, it is the supervisor's responsibility to make sure everyone is clear. It is hard to hold team members accountable when success is not clearly defined.

Accountability is strongest when team members set their own standards. Instead of dictating when an assignment is due, when possible, ask the team member to set what they believe is a reasonable deadline. Allow the team member to decide when to review progress on a project. Ask team members what quality and quantity measures they recommend and adopt them to the extent possible. Although I'd never thought of it this way, one recent coaching client said, "This will show my team members that I trust them". All I could say was, "Amen".

Hold yourself accountable by observing how clearly you articulate accountability standards and track whether you ask team members questions such as:

- How clear is my guidance?
- What questions do you have about this assignment?
- How do you want to tackle this project?
- How will we measure success?

- When should we conduct progress reviews?

Although asking lots of questions and holding thorough accountability discussions up front takes extra effort, it saves time and minimizes frustration in the long run.

Overcome Fear of Tough Conversations

When accountability breaks down, supervisors need to hold tough conversations - it comes with the territory. Team member poor performance, failure to meet accountability standards, unprofessional or unproductive behavior, personal quirks, intra-team disputes, breakdowns in relationships, and other situations require action. Many new - and experienced - supervisors find such conversations particularly challenging and hold back, hoping things will improve without their intervention. Dream on! This rarely occurs. Rather, if left unaddressed, such issues usually fester into bigger problems that disrupt team performance and increase your stress.

I learned the hard way that the dread of - and stress created by - worrying about a difficult conversation is almost always worse than the actual conversation. Procrastinating leads to stress, lost sleep and reduced team performance as more people notice or are affected by the situation. So, what to do?

- Decide what outcome you want from the conversation.
- Put yourself in your team member's shoes...what's their perspective?
- Determine the key points you want to make.
- Follow the SBI model to deliver key points. Be factual and non-judgmental.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage conversation and prompt the team member to create their own path toward resolution.
- Listen to understand their concerns.
- Be flexible. Team members will be more invested with solutions they've created than ones you impose. And their solutions may be as good or better than yours.
- Be firm. Obtain agreement on accountability standards and schedule a follow-on conversation(s) to review the team member's progress.

The more challenging the situation, the more important it is to prepare and hold practice conversations with a trusted partner or colleague. Start by describing the situation and the team member to your practice partner, conduct the practice conversation, and ask your partner for feedback. Then repeat the practice conversation. You may be surprised how much smoother the second conversation goes as you refine your message and delivery. Video recording a practice conversation is very helpful in preparing for the most stressful conversations. Seeing and hearing yourself reveals lots of information to refine further your delivery, increase your confidence, reduce your stress, and increase the probability of a productive conversation.

You also may want to observe and record the type of situations, what topics, or which people lead to the most stressful conversations. The more you know what triggers you, the better you can prepare.

Two great resources on managing conflict are [Managing Conflict with Direct Reports](#) (Barbara Popejoy and Brenda J. McManigle) and [Managing Conflict with Peers](#) (Talula Cartwright). Each 30-page booklet offers practical advice for making challenging conversations as productive as possible.

Encourage Innovation

Asking lots of open-ended questions and constantly emphasizing the importance of innovation are great starting points for drawing out ideas, but it takes much more to build an innovative team. Three keys are:

Make it safe to propose new ideas: Nothing squelches innovation faster than casting blame. Creating an innovative environment requires emphasizing it is ok to fail **if** we learn from it. Talking about times you failed and what you learned from the experience indicates your openness to experimenting. Holding “lessons learned” meetings reinforces that failure should be discussed and the lessons shared. When something goes wrong, figure out what happened, determine how to do it better, and share that knowledge widely. This is one of the reasons commercial aviation is so safe. After every accident there’s an investigation and the causes and how to prevent future accidents are widely disseminated.

Diversity of thought: It’s no coincidence that the most diverse organization I led was the most innovative. Our approximately one hundred staff members were different races, genders, ages, sexual orientations, military & civilian, government & contractor, covering multiple professional disciplines. Team members with such differing backgrounds, expertise, and experiences approach business problems from angles that might not occur to most leaders. In meetings, ask for information and recommendations from the most junior team member first and the most senior team member last. That way junior team members won’t need to worry about contradicting more experienced colleagues. Plus, the closer a team member is to a challenge, the more likely they are to know how to address it.

Implement and reward good ideas: You’ll never know how good an idea is until it’s tried. For example, several members of the above diverse team proposed revising our quarterly awards process. Instead of the managers selecting the employee of the quarter, best analysis, etc., they suggested a panel of the previous quarter’s awardees select the next quarter’s awardees and present to me for approval. This worked splendidly – peer

nominations surged, team member engagement increased, and my workload decreased.

To hold yourself accountable, ask yourself, and keep track of questions such as:

- What am I doing to encourage my team's creativity?
- How often do I conduct "lessons learned" conversations?
- How often do I ask team members for recommendations or alternatives?

If you want to learn more, [Black Box Thinking](#) by Matthew Syed and [The Upside of Down – Why Failing Well is The Key to Success](#) by Megan McArdle are great resources regarding the importance of – and how to – learn from failure.

Inspire Commitment

What gets you out of bed in the morning? It's probably not increasing shareholder value, meeting Lean Six Sigma goals, or living up to your company's core values. Salary increases, bonuses, stock options, extra time off, and special recognition awards are valuable tools to motivate team members to work harder and smarter. However, such managerial tools often fall short of creating the kind of lasting excitement that inspires teams and team members to perform consistently at their best.

Fear of punishment can temporarily motivate people to work harder – I'll certainly work faster if someone is behind me with a cattle prod – and I'll also start looking for another job! There's nothing wrong with well applied motivation, but how can we tap into team members' innate desires to help others or contribute to the greater good?

Leading by inspiring is a great way to increase long term performance, creativity, and loyalty. Connecting team members to goals that are bigger than themselves leads to dedication, innovation, and increased performance. Highlighting the connection to a greater good is straight forward in fields such as health care, public safety, national security, teaching, social work, or non-profits. It can be challenging, however, to help people in financial management, building maintenance, HR, IT, or sales connect their work to a greater good. A great example is the legendary story of John F. Kennedy asking a janitor cleaning the floor at NASA what he was doing. ... "Mr. President," the janitor responded, "I'm helping put a man on the moon." Clearly this janitor believed – either convincing himself and/or being convinced by leadership – that his work was vital to achieving an audacious goal.

As leaders, we need to reinforce frequently how our teams and team members contribute to the big picture. Take advantage of every opportunity to:

- Remind IT folks that engineers can't design safer, more fuel-efficient airplanes if computer systems don't work.

- Tell mechanics that police officers and firefighters can't respond to emergencies if their vehicles don't work.
- Emphasize to HR staff that doctors and nurses would not be in the hospital saving lives if they didn't get their salaries and benefits.
- Point out to accountants that the company's health depends on investors' perceptions that financial statements are accurate.

Ways to hold yourself accountable or find your own inspiration include:

- Track how many times in a week you connect something a team member or your team does to a greater good.
- Ask team members what inspires them.
- Think about what inspires you.
- Keep a record of actions that contribute to something bigger than yourself or your team.

Simon Sinek's TED Talks, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action", and "How To Discover Your 'Why'" are good ways to spend a quarter hour sparking your thinking about how to inspire your team.

Articulate Your Authentic Leadership Philosophy

A wise Yogi Berra said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up somewhere else.” The same applies to leading. If you don’t know how you want to lead you are unlikely to get the results you want. I often ask supervisors to describe their leadership style. Few have given it serious thought and many answer, “I lead by example”. There is nothing wrong with leading by example – it’s a prerequisite for successful leadership. Just as poker players must throw the ante in the pot before they can play the hand, supervisors must set a good example before they can expect their team to follow. However, if leading by example is the extent of your plan, you might not like where you and your team end up!

A great way to start thinking about how you want to lead is to recall the best boss, or bosses, for whom you ever worked:

- What made working for them so great?
- How did they treat you?
- How did they make you feel?
- What behaviors of theirs do you want to emulate?

A good second step is to think about the worst boss, or bosses, for whom you ever worked and ask yourself:

- What made working for them so miserable?
- How did they treat you?
- How did they make you feel?
- What behaviors of theirs do you want to avoid?

Donna was one of my best bosses. When I asked her a question, she’d ask where I’d looked for the answer. I was a bit slow to catch on, but she taught me to find answers and solve problems on my own and she was always willing to discuss potential solutions. She also taught me the power of good relationships. I recall impatiently waiting for her to finish what I

thought were time wasting conversations on the many days we made the rounds among various offices in the Pentagon. Those “time wasting” conversations led people to trust her deeply and confide “close-hold” information that fostered better analysis because they knew she would protect the source.

My worst boss was “Rob”, a PhD. physicist with a high IQ, low emotional intelligence, and no filter between his brain and mouth. He had a habit of looking over my shoulder while I worked and urging me to hurry. My telling him the sooner he left me alone, the sooner I could finish usually elicited a grunt as he exited my office. He yelled. He complained. He bad-mouthed absent colleagues without realizing (or maybe he didn't care!) how that might make me think about how he spoke of me when I was not present. He amplified stress in an already stressful environment. “Rob” unwittingly taught valuable lessons about how not to lead and I vowed to insulate my future teams from stress while communicating the excitement of our mission.

It's okay to copy attributes from those you admire – good leadership behaviors are not copyrighted! The key is to take the best examples and figure out how to combine them with your own strengths and personality traits and make them work for you. Emulate your boss if you like how she conducts meetings. Listen like a colleague who builds great relationships. Ask questions like your favorite pod cast host. Channel your favorite TED Talk presenter. The key is to implement these practices in the way that is authentic to you. Most folks possess unfailingly good BS detectors. They'll know if you are trying something trendy or if you're leading in a way that you truly believe.

Reading books or articles on leadership or watching TED Talks and other videos – YouTube is loaded with them – are great ways to stimulate thinking about how you want to lead and find techniques to incorporate into your leadership style. One of my favorites is Daniel Goleman's book, Leadership That Gets Results, an 87-page, double spaced, large font book that's small enough for your pocket. Goleman describes 6 leadership styles:

- Coercive – demands immediate compliance.
- Authoritative – mobilizes people toward a vision and gives them freedom to innovate, experiment, and take calculated risks.
- Affiliative – creates harmony, builds emotional bonds, and gives people freedom with how to do their jobs.
- Democratic –Forges consensus through participation to build trust, respect, and commitment.
- Pacesetter – sets high standards for performance and exemplifies them.

- Coaching – helps people identify and develop their unique strengths and weaknesses and tie them to their personal and career aspirations.

Goleman suggests that leaders become comfortable with several as the most effective style often depends on the demands of the moment. If you're hemorrhaging from a bad accident, do you want the attending physician in the emergency room to lead collaboratively and ask each team member for their treatment recommendations and conduct a thorough discussion to reach a consensus on a treatment plan? Or do you want an authoritative doctor to direct the team's treatment actions? While collaborative leadership can be very effective, it may not be the best style in every situation.

Servant leadership – where the leader serves the team rather than the team serving the leader— is another style worth investigating. Servant leaders turn the traditional hierarchy upside down. They share power, put team and team member needs first, and help team members develop and perform as highly as possible. Servant leadership combines elements of Goleman's Democratic and Coaching styles and can be very effective if applied authentically. Even servant leaders, however, may need occasionally to direct their team authoritatively or act as pace setters because no single leadership style fits every situation.

You can refine your leadership style like poet Amanda Gorman, as described in a New York Times article, refined her writing style, "I woke up early every day and I'd wear another writer's voice like clothing and move onto the next one, until I'd gone through a stack of 10 different books. I wore ephemeral versions, copying their sentence constructions, verbiage, and tones. Then I'd step out of them and choose the best characteristics of those styles, until I created a voice that was mine."

Regardless of how they develop their leadership style, I urge my clients to commit to four steps:

- Put it in writing. This forces clarity of thought and we are more likely to follow through on actions we commit to paper.
- Share it with your team so they know what to expect. This further increases accountability since we are much more likely to do the things we tell others we'll do.
- Ask your team for feedback on specific behaviors. The more specific your feedback request, the more likely team members will provide useful insight.
- Consider it a work in progress and refine as you discover what works – and what doesn't work – for you.

The above progression...committing to paper, telling others, and knowing we'll get feedback or asked if we honored our commitment is powerful and backed-up by Edwin A. Locke and Gary Latham's study on goal setting that found our probability of following through on a goal is:

- 6-8% if we just think about it.
- 25-30 % if we write it.
- 55-60% if we write it and share it with others.
- 85% or more if we write it, share it, and know someone will ask if we honored our intentions.

Great leaders continuously refine their leadership style over the course of their careers. They constantly observe themselves because they know the environment is always changing and they must evolve with it – such as with a promotion, new assignment, or change in business conditions – or they learn the hard way that what worked in the past may not work in the future. What worked to lead a team of 10 people must evolve to lead and manage 5 teams and 50 people. And what worked to lead 50 people must evolve further to lead and manage hundreds of people, major functional areas, or entire organizations.

As a new supervisor, I thought it was more important to be respected than liked by my team members. As I became more experienced, I realized that if my team members liked me they were more likely to let me lead them. Although a leader does not need to be friends with team members, leaders should strive to be friendly with team members. For many new supervisors, especially those promoted from among their peers, it can be tricky to find the balance between holding team members accountable while maintaining friendships. If you listen to your gut, you will probably find that balance.

In summary, think about how you want to lead, put it in writing, share it as much and as often as is authentic to you, and revise your leadership style as you and your leadership responsibilities grow.

Foster a Healthy Work Environment

Once you decide how you want to lead, you'll be well along toward imagining your desired team work environment. You can't expect team members to know if you don't tell them. You also can't expect team members to buy in to your desired environment without asking them how they want to work together. When you have a good idea of what you want, ask about their expectations regarding:

- Guidelines for team behavior.
- Amount of supervision and support they want from you.
- How to set priorities for individual vice team projects.
- Importance of individual goals vs. team goals.
- Structure, frequency, and timing for team meetings.
- Expectations for flexibility of hours and physical workplace.
- Anything else that you and team members deem important.

After thorough discussion and agreement (to the extent possible) write (or better, ask a team member to write) the key points and share with the team. You must talk about it – a lot – to make it a reality. In fact, when you are sick of talking about it you are probably about halfway toward bringing it to fruition. The more you reinforce it by expressing appreciation when team members act in accordance with the team's expectations, the sooner you'll see results. To hold yourself and the team accountable, meet several times annually to review (and adjust if necessary) the team's expectations and how well you and the team are living up to them.

What's Next?

After several months and half a dozen coaching sessions “Matt” was enjoying deeper and more meaningful conversations, delegating key assignments, seeing more engaged team members, and feeling positive about their work environment and his nascent leadership style. He was learning to use his organization’s formal performance management system and looking forward to attending leadership training. And like many of his fellow new supervisors, he realized that while challenging, leading a team is very satisfying and started thinking maybe he could lead larger teams in the future.

It can be daunting – and invigorating – to realize that leadership development is a life-long journey. In his outstanding speech titled, "Personal Renewal", John Gardner, made a strong case for the importance of lifelong learning, epitomized by his quote, "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts." In case you don't know it all, good ways to sustain personal renewal over the course of your career and prepare for bigger leadership opportunities include:

- Read articles and books. The list in the Bibliography is a great starting place.
- Watch TED Talks on leadership and related topics.
- Find a mentor in your organization whose advice you respect.
- Attend a leadership development program.

Many individuals and organizations find hiring an executive coach particularly helpful for leaders as they transition from individual contributor to supervisor, from supervisor to manager, or from manager to executive. Coaches partner with leaders in conversations to help them:

- Decide what competencies they should learn or develop more fully.
- Create a personal development plan to enhance their innate gifts.
- Support them as they implement their plan.

- Adjust their plan as necessary.
- Hold them accountable, in a nice way, for implementing their plan.

No matter how you intend to smooth your transition to successful supervision, you'll be off to a good start if you think deeply and often about how you want to lead and create a plan to bring those intentions to fruition. Whether you use some or all the techniques mentioned here, or other ideas, the key is to lead in a way that's authentic to you. Try, learn, and adjust. Keep what works and discard what doesn't. You'll be amazed how your leadership capabilities and style mature over the course of your career if you think and act intentionally. And I predict that if you shift your priority from improving your personal performance to developing your team members and building a strong team, you'll soon need to start thinking about how to prepare to lead multiple teams.

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About Author

John Schuhart serves as an adjunct staff member and executive coach for the Center for Creative Leadership (since 2015) and conducts a private practice – Graybeard Leadership and Executive Coaching, LLC. He helps leaders gain self-awareness, think strategically, refine their leadership style, strengthen communication skills, and realize their personal development goals via compassionate and humorous coaching. The Center for Creative Leadership says its coaches are in the top one percent in the world. While the author's wife is skeptical, the author chooses to not dispute the claim!

From 1998 to 2015, he served in Senior Executive positions at the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, where he developed a passion and expertise for helping leaders develop diverse, high-performing teams in healthy office environments that encouraged innovation and transformational change.

John earned a Leadership Coaching Certificate from Georgetown University's Institute for Transformational Leadership in addition to a B.A. in Political Science and an M.P.A. in Public Affairs from the University of Texas. He is an International Coach Federation – Professional Certified Coach (PCC) with 8 years, hundreds of clients, and thousands of hours of coaching experience.