



8 Strategies for Rising Leaders

BY JIM BOUCHARD

It's OK to admit you're unmercifully critical of any "X Steps" advice when it comes to leadership. You undoubtedly have an infinite supply of books and programs that identify the five characteristics, ten traits of great leaders, or claim to know the nine steps to effective leadership.

The fact is that leadership is as much art as it is science. You've got to take in all this advice, shape your technique, and practice to suit your style, personality, and the ever-changing circumstances and conditions you face.

Now that the disclaimer is out of the way, here are eight strategies that will help you prepare for your first—or next—leadership position.

#1

Work on being a good follower.

Without exception, the best leaders you'll meet and work with are also terrific followers. Even more important, they understand that "leader" and "follower" are not fixed positions. They're interchangeable roles. In some situations, a subordinate will have more skill, knowledge, experience, or insight. Can you step back and follow when necessary?

The practice of being a good follower also means committing yourself to the process of learning. What can you learn from the people around you? Above you? Below you?

#2

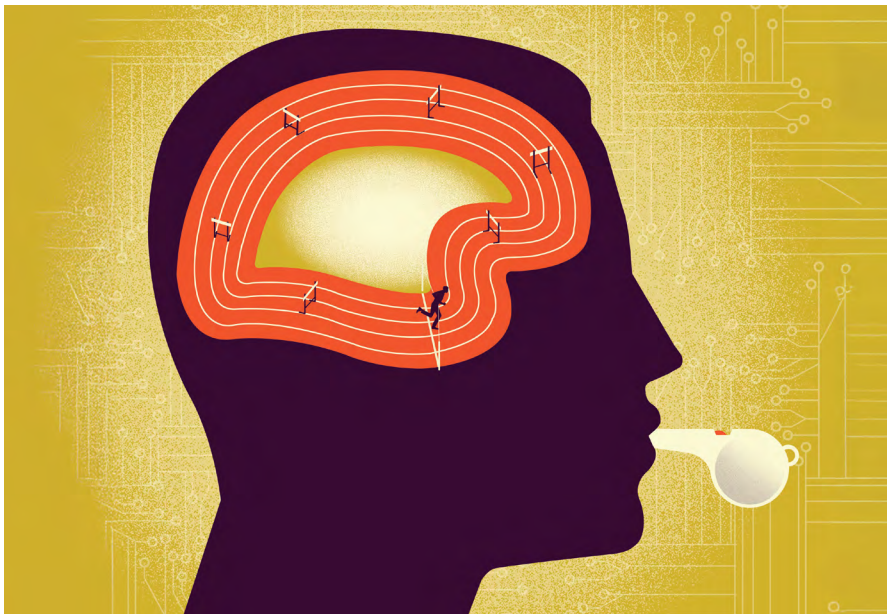
Find the right guru.

Expanding on the importance of learning—do you have a mentor? If not, get one. As soon as possible.

#3

Commit yourself to personal and professional mastery.

Do you see a theme developing here? One of the greatest lessons you can learn is this: "Perfection is not a destination. It's a never-ending process." Mastery is not just a level of achievement. It's a perpetual commitment to the process of learning, growing, and developing. Start now, and never stop.



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#8

Lead by sharing.

Summarizing leadership isn't easy. Here's my definition: "Leadership is sharing. A leader shares." The rest of the conversation is about exactly what leaders should share and how. And that can be a lengthy conversation! But it's one of the most important conversations you'll have as a leader. Ultimately, the main point of the discussion is the fact that your success as a leader is ultimately measured by one thing: the success of the people you serve.

One of the things we talk about here is "power"—your ability to get things done. Power only expands through sharing. You simply cannot do it alone, as much as some might try. If you want to do more—to be more powerful—make others powerful. As a leader, you get things done when you inspire, empower, and guide others. When they succeed, you succeed. And any failure is ultimately your failure as a leader.

The time is right now.

No matter where you are in your leadership journey, the time to start practicing these strategies is right now. The more sincerely you embrace these strategies, the more likely it is that you'll be noticed by the people who can offer you your next leadership opportunity. Remember strategy #4: Act before you're asked.

What's stopping you? 🚫

Jim Bouchard is a leadership activist and hosts *Walking the Walk*, a podcast highlighting compassionate, engaged leaders from all areas of business, cultures, and experiences.

#4

Ask before you're asked. Act before you're asked.

This one can trigger a great deal of debate. You certainly don't want to step on toes or show disrespect to those who have more experience; however, the greater problem is saying, "Not my job." Or worse, "They don't pay me enough to..." If you see something that needs doing, do it! And if you're not sure if you're staying in bounds—ask if you can have a shot at it.

#5

Learn to deal with uncertainty.

Someone wise once said, "The only certainty is uncertainty." Life is change. Our lives, our society, and our business environment are changing at an unprecedented and ever-accelerating rate. No honest leader can tell you with certainty what's going to happen tomorrow.

One thing that never changes, though, is that the greatest opportunities come from the greatest level of uncertainty. Learn to be flexible, adaptable, and comfortable with uncertainty and you'll be much better positioned to seize these opportunities when others run for cover.

#6

Learn to talk and write good.

If you don't get the joke, you have serious work to do.

You need to simplify complex ideas and problems. You need to express your mission clearly and help people understand decisions and strategies. Most of all, you need to inspire people and unite them behind a strong and meaningful vision. To do this, you must practice your communication skills—and stay up to date on new methods to deliver your message effectively.

#7

Focus on experience over rewards.

It's tempting and sometimes understandable to grab the fast money—but with any investment, those who are willing to sacrifice immediate gratification usually enjoy exponential long-term rewards. An opportunity to accept more leadership responsibility or meaningful leadership experience will pay much higher dividends over time.