



Emerging Leaders: Part 2

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From my point of view, there's nothing more rewarding than being conscious while learning and growing. To me, that is why adult learning has so much potential for impact.

Emerging leaders begin the life-long task of building a strengths-based, learning organization, which accentuates leadership development for all who participate. They see themselves and others as a "work in progress." Mentoring is a process of developing others with the side benefit of you learning best by engaging others in learning.

One of the challenges the teacher faces in helping others learn is being open to learning, as well. You need to identify and claim your own unique gifts or talents in the process. Have you identified your unique strengths and talents to apply and leverage as you develop your emerging leadership tasks? Do you acknowledge that we are never done?

Knowledge and skill are important but only talent recognized, claimed, and intentionally applied becomes a strength. It is no different than exercising your muscles. "Use them or lose them."

Leaders have learned to leverage their strengths to maximize team and organizational performance. Strengths can be classified into four broad conceptual categories (Relating, Impacting, Striving, and Thinking). The task of the role model is to recognize his/her unique strengths and those of others within these broad categories.

What are your strengths in relating? How do you develop your relationships intentionally? What strength do you use to effectively create, develop and sustain relationships?

What gifts do you use to impact others? How do you leverage those gifts into strengths, to influence others in a positive way ... to motivate them to action?

What strengths do you use to get things done, as well as help others achieve their goals, including the energy to push toward results?

How do you conceptualize your organization, your field of endeavor, or interest? What gifts, in thinking, help you gather, process, and make decisions with information and mental images?

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There are many ways to get this work (relating, impacting, striving, and thinking) done within your own practice, as well as help others, whom you are mentoring, do it in their practices. While you can set the climate or environment within your organization for learning and growing with a bias toward group experiential learning, I have found that high-impact-learning is stimulated when the leader is committed to one-on-one discovery with others. By far, the leader's own behavior is most important in encouraging growth, development, and change.

“Walking the talk” has special significance in creating, embedding, and modeling leadership in self and others. Staff members pay far more attention to the walk than the talk. They do notice what the leader attends to, measures, gets upset about, and chooses to reward and/or punish in developing the vision and direction of an organization.

And by the way, don't be too hard on yourself as you work at becoming a leader. No one is more qualified than you to work out your new ideas. You have all that you need. Trust in the fact that you can discover your way. The key is to throw a Leadership Task in your crucible. Rub it around. When you like the results, clean out your crucible, and throw in a new task. Transforming a practice takes patience and time! Hopefully, trying out

new behaviors and outcomes, and then refining them will become a comfortable lifetime habit. Remember, the message is simple but the learning takes time!

As a small boy, I was hesitant to swing a bat. I kept waiting and watching for the perfect pitch. My father encouraged me to step into the batter's box, saying, “It doesn't matter if you miss. By swinging you'll get the feel of it and after a lot of swings, you'll experience the moves it takes to put the bat on the ball.” How many of you are hesitant to step into the batter's box as you consider your emerging leadership role? Taking swings without contact isn't exactly what you had in mind but, unless you are unusual, that's exactly what you need to do to reduce your learning anxiety. So you experience a “strikeout” or two or three... what of it? We learn from it. That's tough. Life's tough. How about dusting yourself off and getting back in the Emerging Leadership game?

Dentistry needs emerging leaders, your staff needs you to be an emerging leader, your patients need you to be an emerging leader, and so does your family. Look into that mirror; I believe you will see a leader ready to emerge!

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