



Ways to Develop Your Leadership Skills

The prospect of advancing to the top of one's field is what makes it possible for many people to keep plugging away at their jobs, honing their skills, and taking on new projects. But after a certain point, career development depends on more than technical skills and a willingness to work hard. You also need a few soft skills, not the least of which is the ability to take on a leadership role.

[Some people are natural leaders](#), but anyone can develop the skill set needed with some practice. If you want to take your career as far as possible, you have to be willing to put in the work. Here are nine strategies to help you [develop your leadership skills](#) and advance your career.

Find out your ideal leadership style based on your personality here: [Which of These Leadership Styles Is Right For You? \(Decision Tree\)](#)

1. Practice discipline

A good leader needs discipline. Developing discipline in your professional (and personal) life is a must to be an effective leader and to inspire others to be disciplined as well. People will judge your capacity to lead by the amount of discipline you display at work.

Demonstrate discipline at work by always meeting deadlines, keeping appointments, and ending meetings on time. If you are naturally disorganized, then you may have your work cut out for you, but you can always start small. Try implementing good habits at home, like [waking up early and getting daily exercise](#), and work your way up from there.

Remove barriers, find clarity, exceed goals

Anything is possible with the most powerful work management software at your fingertips.

2. Take on more projects

A great way to develop your leadership skills is to take on more responsibility. You don't have to take on more than you can handle, but you do need to do more than simply what's covered in your job description if you want to grow. Stepping out of your comfort zone is the only way you will learn anything new, and doing so will get you noticed by executives as someone who takes initiative.

3. Learn to follow

A true leader has no problem yielding control to another person when appropriate. You should not feel threatened when someone disagrees with you, questions your thinking, or puts forth their own ideas. Keep an open mind and give merit where merit is due. It won't always be easy, but if you learn to value and respect others on your team, they'll be more likely to step up to the plate for you.

4. Develop situational awareness

A mark of a good leader is someone who can see the bigger picture and anticipate problems before they occur. This is a valuable skill to have when handling complex projects with tight deadlines. The ability to foresee and provide suggestions for avoiding potential problems is invaluable for a leader. This ability also helps you recognize opportunities that others overlook, which will certainly earn you recognition. This can be especially difficult to develop when [leading remote teams](#) but with practice, you can become more attuned to your teams and projects.

5. Inspire others

Being a leader means you are part of a team, and as a leader, you should be able to motivate and inspire those you work with to collaborate as best they can. When a team member needs encouragement or guidance, offer it. Sometimes, all a person needs is someone to listen and be sympathetic.

6. Keep learning

The best path to becoming a good leader is to be open to learning new things. It keeps your mind sharp and your skills fresh. It primes you for new challenges that may come your way, which is always a good thing for a leader.

7. Empower your teammates

No one is the best at everything, and the sooner you realize that the sooner you can learn to be a good leader. Delegating tasks to others not only frees you up for things you do well, but it also empowers other people on your team.

8. Resolve conflicts

Don't be a [manager from hell](#)! Not everyone will get along all the time. Instead of ignoring interpersonal conflicts and hoping they will go away, address them by talking to those involved privately. Also, be open to reassigning team members if the conflict can't be resolved.

9. Be a discerning listener

Becoming a leader doesn't mean you always have to be in the spotlight. An important trait of a good leader is someone who listens to suggestions, ideas, and feedback from other people and builds on them. Good listeners know that communication is not only about words, but picking up on non-verbal cues, such as eye contact and body language.

[Good leadership skills](#) are essential to advancing your career, but as you can see, leadership is much more than simply being in charge. As American statesman John Quincy Adams said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader."

Best leadership books: 21 of the most impactful reads

By Ian Munro

October 21, 2021 - 29 MIN READ



Jump to section

Leading yourself

1. *The Gifts of Imperfection*
2. *The Art of Possibility*
3. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*
4. *The Untethered Soul*
5. *Immunity to Change*
6. *Man's Search for Meaning*
7. *Rising Strong*
8. *GO: Put Your Strengths To Work*
9. *The Five Thieves of Happiness*
10. *The Power of Meaning*

Leading people

11. *True North*
12. *The Truth About Employee Engagement*
13. *Crucial Conversations*
14. *Beyond the Wall of Resistance*
15. *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*
16. *The 11 Laws of Likability*

Leading organizations

17. *Conscious Business*
18. *Good to Great*
19. *Dealing with Darwin*
20. *How to Be an Anti-Racist*
21. *Moneyball*

Great leaders must lead themselves, lead other people, and lead organizations. These skills may come more naturally to some, but there is always an opportunity for additional development. Books are a wonderful way to expand your horizons, learn something new, and become a better leader.

There is certainly no shortage of great leadership and management books, especially when you consider all the reads that aren't necessarily *about* leadership, but can still make an impact on leaders. This includes books on topics like management, self-improvement, strategy, and organizational development. Search "leadership books" on Amazon and you'll get back over 50,000 titles. It would be quite a feat to read them all, and be able to delineate which are truly the best leadership books of all time.



Instead, this article will focus on great leadership and [career books](#) that can make a significant impact on your career.

"Self-awareness and self-love matter. Who we are is how we lead"

Brené Brown

Leading yourself

The platform for good leadership begins with a good leader. That platform is built on a foundation of psychological strength, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness.

We often think of leadership in terms of how we outwardly engage others. But there are two halves to every relationship, and many of us do not tend to our half enough. Effective leadership means taking the time to develop self-awareness so you can manage yourself as well as others. Having a strong sense of who we are, who we *are not*, our strengths, and where we need help can make us more authentic, relatable, consistent people to follow. This is especially important for entrepreneurs, whose businesses are largely dependent on their leadership skills.

The following books can help you create a greater sense of leadership style, so you can apply them inwardly, or to those around you.

1. *The Gifts of Imperfection*, by Brené Brown

The Gifts of Imperfection is about practicing self-compassion and self-love. It asks us to embrace our own imperfections as we would anyone else's and to accept our talents and gifts less as gifts for ourselves, and more as a gift to give to others. Once we know who we are and love who we are, we can engage others at that same level.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

2. *The Art of Possibility*, by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander

The Art of Possibility provides insight into how to shift from converging on problems, to instead thinking divergently about the possibilities in front of us. The 12 practices for this pursuit can open new avenues of thought and self-image.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

3. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey

A timeless read, this book dives into what Covey refers to as "character ethic," based on principles of fairness, integrity, honesty, and human dignity. So many of us are outwardly successful, but still

find ourselves wrestling with our inner habits. Enter bestselling author Covey’s seven habits to help us become more productive, build stronger relationships, and focus on priorities.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

4. *The Untethered Soul*, by Michael Singer

The Untethered Soul is one of the most philosophical, even spiritual, leadership books available. It helps us pursue our inward journey by observing our ego self more objectively and dispassionately, and by untethering ourselves from automatic thoughts and emotions that limit our conscious awareness.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

5. *Immunity to Change*, by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey

Life continuously presents us with new realities, new opportunities, and new chapters in life, yet we can find ourselves stuck in our old behaviors no matter how much we try to change.

This book offers an approach to change. We must understand our goals and associated benefits, and the behaviors that get in the way. And we must understand hidden internal commitments we have made to ourselves, and the big assumptions that support these commitments. These practices allow us to move forward.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

6. *Man’s Search for Meaning*, by Victor Frankl

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” This quote from the author sums up the essence of this book quite nicely.

Frankl was the father of a branch of psychology called logotherapy, which espouses that a person’s main motivation is to find a meaning in life. This book describes the principles of logotherapy, and how he applied them in order to survive Nazi concentration camps.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

7. *Rising Strong*, by Brené Brown

Failure is hard and we each deal with it differently. In *Rising Strong*, Brown teaches us to understand our subconscious story that creates our reactions, walk it back to the root cause, and then guide us to rewrite the ending. Doing so allows us to alter how we engage. The concepts from this book drive the roots of our resilience that allows us to keep going back to the big challenges.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

8. *GO: Put Your Strengths To Work*, by Marcus Buckingham

We all are most effective and happy when working to our strengths, which isn't revolutionary. What is revolutionary is that perhaps we have been defining strengths and weaknesses incorrectly. Buckingham proposes that our strengths are those things that energize us (and make us stronger) and weaknesses are those things that drain our energy. Through that lens we can look past our learned skills to our authentic talents.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

9. *The Five Thieves of Happiness*, by John Izzo

Izzo's main premise in this book is that our natural state is happiness, yet there are forces at work to steal it from us. He names the five thieves as control, conceit, coveting, consumption, and comfort. Each of these has a countervailing force and a way forward. For example, the opposite of control is surrender, and it can allow us to focus on our intention instead of worrying about controlling the outcome. Understanding the thieves lays a path back to happiness, or at least contentedness.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

10. *The Power of Meaning*, by Emily Esfahani Smith

In *The Power of Meaning*, Smith teaches that 'meaning' and 'purpose' are not synonymous. Instead, purpose is but one of four pillars of meaning. The other three are belonging, storytelling, and transcendence. Each of us has a unique mix of these pillars that create meaning in our lives. Knowing that allows us to apply ourselves more consciously to increase our sense of meaning, and thus increase engagement in our work. As leaders, we may also try to understand what gives our team members meaning.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

"Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice."

Jim Collins

Leading people

Once you learn to lead yourself, you will own a more diverse and resilient toolset from which you can lead and develop others. At times you will use these skills with the team you lead directly. At other times you will use them situationally with others outside of your team.

The following books are focused on the relational aspects of leadership.

11. *True North*, by Bill George

True North is about the art of leading others. According to George, True North is “the internal compass that guides you successfully through life. It represents who you are as a human being at your deepest level. It is your orientation point that helps you stay on track as a leader.” In short, this is a guidebook for authenticity in leadership.

[Hardcopy](#) | [Audiobook](#)

12. *The Truth About Employee Engagement*, by Patrick Lencioni

Originally titled *Three Signs of a Miserable Job*, this book explores three things that make employees hate their jobs. They are: a lack of understanding around how they are measured, not knowing to whom their work matters, and feeling like nobody knows who they are. Lencioni also discusses what managers can do to overcome these challenges and create employee engagement.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

13. *Crucial Conversations*, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

Hard conversations are ... hard. So, we avoid them or we allow emotions to reign. This book offers suggestions around how to navigate these challenging moments. The authors define crucial conversations as having three preconditions—opinions vary, stakes are high, and emotions run strong. The authors then walk us through a framework for resolving issues.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#)

14. *Beyond the Wall of Resistance*, by Rick Maurer

Maurer is a change management advisor who understands that you have to overcome inevitable resistance in order for change to happen. He provides a compelling description of three levels of resistance: “I don’t understand it” (a knowledge gap); “I don’t like it” (an emotional gap); and “I don’t like you” (a trust gap). Then he explores strategies to make successful changes more often.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#)

15. *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, by Patrick Lencioni

This book is important for teams looking to “up their game” and overcome common self-created obstacles. Notably, absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. When leaders carry a clear understanding of these five behaviors and how to remedy them, they are more likely to identify and correct them.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

16. *The 11 Laws of Likability*, by Michelle Lederman

As the author relates, people do business with people they like. This book explores the 11 laws that contribute to how likeable someone is, and the success they will have networking and building relationships. The power in the laws is to find the ones most authentic to each of us, and use those to tailor our engagement with others.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

"Consciousness is the main source of organizational greatness."

Fred Kofman

Leading organizations

Leadership has many roles, some of which are dependent upon our position within an organization. The most senior business leaders in an organization are responsible for defining company mission, values, culture, and strategy, and the following books address many of these topics.

For those at lower levels of leadership in an organization, these business books can serve a couple of purposes. First, they are key to leadership development and give tools to begin to sharpen your saw. Second, they give you a better understanding of what your top table is trying to do and how best to support them.

17. *Conscious Business*, by Fred Kofman

The by-line of this bestseller is "building value through values," encouraging leadership teams to build their company culture around core values. Conscious business, as a principle, can be described as transferring our conscious values as individuals into our work, and even better, into the company values. It explores expressing values, understanding boundaries, communicating constructively, effective negotiations, and more. The world needs more "Conscious Businesses."

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

18. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap*, by Jim Collins

Good to Great outlines the principles that separate consistent market segment outperformers from other companies with equal opportunity to do the same. They are research-based, and still applicable today, making this a classic, must-read leadership book. It provides insights into what makes a successful leadership team, how to build a culture of discipline, and how technology and analytics can make a difference in an organizations growth – when used correctly.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

19. *Dealing with Darwin*, by Geoffrey Moore

The core of this book is about understanding what gives organizations market power, and why it is difficult to find the resources to exploit those traits. The “core vs. context” framework of this book is brilliant in its ability to define the true power of your company, how to release resources for pursuing that advantage, and the implications for managing the strengths of your organizational talent pool.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

20. *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, by Ibram Kendi

When social injustices exist at the levels they do today, simply not being racist isn’t enough—one must be anti-racist. Kendi has a great knack of reducing this charged topic to a set of definitions and dimensions surrounding racism. This allows for more rational, and less emotional, discussions about dealing with racist policies and ideas rather than racists. There is a blueprint here for organizations that want to re-examine their approach to [inclusion](#) and unconscious bias.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

21. *Moneyball*, by Michael Lewis

Moneyball is a book about market disruption and competitive strategy. It chronicles the low-budget 2002 Oakland Athletics team and how they disrupted their industry with new approaches that gave them a distinct competitive advantage. That is, until the industry changed to catch up. Disruption sounds harsh, and it can be, both to your competitors and to your team who may be stuck in “old ways.” Doing it well and combining good change management creates an opportunity for added market power.

[Hardcopy](#) | [eBook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

[LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT](#)

Published October 21, 2021

Ian Munro

BetterUp Fellow Coach, PCC

Read Next

Situational leadership: What it is and how to build it

Situational leadership helps you handle situations with the right approach. Improve your management skills with these situational leadership examples.



7 key leadership behaviors you must have

If you want to be this type of leader (and cultivate this type of transformational leadership in your organization), here are the 7 leadership traits our research has shown...

What is servant leadership and how can it empower you team?

Servant leadership is all about prioritizing the greater good over your agenda. Learn how this style of leadership can help you empower your team.

What is organizational leadership and why is it important?

Curious about what organizational leadership is? This complete guide will help you learn more about this effective form of leadership.

How to tap into heart and soul to lead with more charisma

The charismatic leadership style can be extremely influential. Learn about what charismatic leadership is and how it's different from other leadership styles.

The transactional leadership style still has a place

What is a transactional leader? Learn about the transactional leadership style, its pros and cons, and whether or not this style of leadership is for you.