



MODULE 1
Introduction

CORE PHILOSOPHY OF THE STUDENT LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

We have found that students struggle with thinking of themselves as leaders. What do you think? Are you a leader? We believe the answer is a resounding “Yes!” Think back to one of your own personal-best leadership experiences. We believe you will see that you already know what it takes to lead others. But knowing is not enough; to become the best leader you can be, you need to practice deliberately and often. Here are eight key concepts that The Leadership Challenge research reveals are true about leadership.

1. Leadership Is Everyone’s Business

Being an effective leader is not limited to a few charismatic young people. It is not a gene or an inheritance. The theory that only a select few can lead others to greatness is just plain wrong. Leadership is not a position or rank, but a responsibility people choose to embrace throughout their lives.

One question that frequently comes up from students is: “If everyone is a leader, then how can everyone be a leader at once? Shouldn’t there be just one leader?” We believe that everyone can be a leader, but that people will make a choice about when they step up to lead based on the values they hold. Commonly there is only one positional leader at a time, but this doesn’t prevent others from taking a leadership role within their area of influence. For example, you might not be the president of your fraternity or sorority, but you certainly can choose to demonstrate leadership behaviors on the committees and groups that are part of that larger organization. You may not be an officer in student government or the captain of a team, but you can take the initiative to start a campaign that will improve the quality of student life. There are also many facets of your life. Your position as head of an organization is not the only place where you can act as a leader. You have opportunities to lead in many different situations: in your home, your school, and your community.

2. Leadership Is Learned

Leadership is a process that ordinary people use when they are bringing out the best in themselves and others. It is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that is available to everyone.

3. Leadership Is a Relationship

At the heart of leadership is the ability to connect with others, understand their hopes and dreams, and engage them in pulling together for a shared dream of the future. Leaders understand that every relationship contributes to their ability to be successful.

4. Leadership Development Is Self-Development

Engineers have computers, painters have brushes and paints, musicians have instruments. Leaders have only themselves: that is their instrument. Committing to liberating the leader within is a personal commitment. The journey begins with an exploration of who you are from the inside out.

5. Learning to Lead Is an Ongoing Process

Learning to lead is a journey, not a single event or destination. You may occupy many leadership roles throughout your life. Each will deepen your understanding of what it takes to engage others and what it takes to inspire others to make extraordinary things happen with people in your life. The context in which you lead will change, and with each change comes deeper learning. The best leaders are the best learners.

6. Leadership Requires Deliberate Practice

Excellence in anything—whether it’s music, sports, or academics—requires deliberate practice. Leadership is no exception. You will need to devote time every day to becoming the best leader you can be.

7. Leadership Is an Aspiration and a Choice

Leaders have countless chances to make a difference. If a person wants to lead others and is willing to do the work, he or she can lead. It is a deeply personal choice and a lifetime commitment.

8. Leadership Makes a Difference

All leadership is based on one fundamental assumption: that *you* matter. We know from The Leadership Challenge research that every leader can make a profound difference in the lives of others. To do that, you have to believe in yourself and in your capacity to have a positive influence on others. And we also know that to those who are following you, *you* are the most important leader to them at that moment. It’s not some other leader. It’s you. You are the person whom group members will most likely go to for examples of how to tackle challenging goals, respond to difficult situations, handle crises, or deal with setbacks. We say a little more about this in the final section of this workbook “Onward!”

A Definition of Leadership

Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.

In the academic literature, there are hundreds of different definitions of leadership. The research that resulted in *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* led to the following definition of leadership, which incorporates what the evidence revealed:

What words stand out to you in this definition?

ACTIVITY 1.1

Your Personal-Best Leadership Experience

The research to discover what exemplary leaders do when they are at their personal best began by collecting thousands of stories from ordinary people—from students to executives in all types of organizations around the globe—about the experiences they recalled when asked to think of a peak leadership experience, that is, what they did when they were at their personal best as a leader. The collection effort continues, and the stories continue to offer compelling examples of what leaders do when making extraordinary things happen. As you begin to explore *The Student Leadership Challenge* and *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*, we ask you to respond to some of the same questions asked of those involved in the original research. It's called the *personal-best leadership experience*, and we believe it will provide you with an inspiring view of the leader within you.

Begin by thinking about a time when you performed at your very best as a leader. A personal-best experience is an event (or a series of events) that you believe to be your individual standard of excellence. It's your own record-setting performance—a time when you achieved significant success while working with others. It is something against which you can measure yourself to determine whether you are performing as a leader at levels you know to be possible.

Your personal-best experience may have happened when you had no official authority but chose to play a leadership role within a group, organization, class project, or even a family situation. Focus on one specific experience.

Step 1

On a separate sheet of paper, describe this leadership experience by answering the following questions:

- When did it happen? How long did it last?
- What was your role? Who else was involved?

- What feelings did you have prior to and during the experience?
- Did you initiate the experience? If someone else initiated it, how did you emerge as the leader?
- What were the results of the experience?

Step 2

With relation to this experience, on a separate sheet of paper, list the actions you took as a leader that made a difference, and answer the following questions:

- What actions did you take?
- How did you get others to go beyond the ordinary levels of performance?
- What did you do to demonstrate your own commitment to the project or undertaking?
- What did you do to make sure everyone understood the purpose or goal?
- What did you or others do to overcome any major challenges or setbacks?
- What did you do to engage others and get them to participate fully?
- Based on what you did or said, what other extraordinary actions did your team or group members take?
- Summarize what you consider to be the five to seven most important actions you took as a leader who made a difference.

Step 3

Review the responses from the questions in steps 1 and 2. What three to five major lessons did you learn about leadership from this experience? (These are lessons you might share as advice to others about them being or becoming a great leader.) Write them here:

Lesson 1:

Lesson 2:

Lesson 3:

Lesson 4:

Lesson 5:

Step 4

From the lessons you identified in step 3:

- What single piece of advice would you give to another individual on how to make extraordinary things happen in their organization based on your experience?

Step 5

Follow your instructor's directions on how to share your story with others (using the notes you took here). Hearing other personal-best experiences will deepen your perspective on the limitless opportunities for demonstrating excellence in leadership. As you listen to others' stories, look for common qualities you see in the stories—for example, excellent communication, focus, or doing more than what was expected.

THE FIVE PRACTICES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP MODEL

This workbook has its origins in a research project begun more than thirty years ago. To learn what people did when they were at their personal best in leading others, we interviewed hundreds of people using the same types of questions you used to reflect on your personal-best leadership experience. The starting assumption was that asking regular people to describe extraordinary leadership experiences would reveal patterns of success. We believed we didn't need to interview and survey star performers or top executives in excellent companies to discover best practices. The majority of leaders in the world are not in senior positions, don't make the covers of magazines, and aren't in the daily news. To determine exemplary leadership practices, you have to ask leaders at all levels, in all endeavors, and of all ages.

Analyzing thousands of students' responses to the personal-best leadership experience—the kinds of responses you've heard from your colleagues—showed that despite differences in culture, gender, or age these personal-best stories revealed similar patterns of behavior. No matter where a personal-best experience took place—whether it was in a classroom, a student club or organization, a sports team, a community service project, a part-time job, a religious or spiritual organization, or on a school field trip—when leaders were at their personal best, there were then, and are today, five core leadership practices common to all these examples: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart.

Model the Way: Clarify Values and Set the Example

Leaders clarify values by finding their voice and affirming shared values, and they set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

The most important personal quality people look for and admire in a leader is personal credibility. Credibility is the foundation of leadership. If people don't believe in the messenger, they won't believe the message.

Leaders clarify values and establish guiding principles concerning the way people (fellow students, student groups, teachers, and advisors) should be treated and the way goals should be pursued. They create standards of excellence and then set an example for others to follow.

Titles may be granted, but leadership is earned. Leaders earn credibility by putting their values into action and living by the same standards and principles they expect of others. Leaders not only talk about the way things should be done; they show the way they should be done.

Figure 1.1 The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership



Inspire a Shared Vision: Envision the Future and Enlist Others

Leaders envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities, and they enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

Leaders are driven by their clear image of possibility and what their organization could become. They passionately believe that they can make a difference. They envision the future, creating an ideal and unique image of what the group, team, or organization can be. Leaders enlist others in their dreams. They breathe life into their visions and get people to see exciting possibilities for the future.

Challenge the Process: Search for Opportunities and Experiment and Take Risks

Leaders search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. They experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

Leaders are pioneers—they are willing to step out into the unknown. The work of leaders is change, and the status quo is unacceptable to them. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve. In doing so, they experiment and take risks. Because leaders know that risk taking involves mistakes and failures, they accept the inevitable disappointments as learning opportunities. Leaders constantly ask, “What can we learn when things don’t go as planned?”

Enable Others to Act: Foster Collaboration and Strengthen Others

Leaders foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. They strengthen others by enhancing self-determination and developing competence.

Leaders know they can’t do it alone. Leadership involves building relationships and is a group effort. Leaders foster collaboration and create spirited groups. They actively involve others. Leaders understand that they have a responsibility to bring others along.

Collaboration is the master skill that enables groups, partnerships, and other alliances to function effectively. The work of leaders is making people feel strong, capable, informed, and connected.

Encourage the Heart: Recognize Contributions and Celebrate the Values and Victories

Leaders recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. They celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Accomplishing extraordinary things in groups and organizations is hard work. The climb to the top is arduous and long; people can become exhausted, frustrated, and disenchanted. They're often tempted to give up. Genuine acts of caring uplift the spirit and draw people forward. To keep hope and determination alive, leaders recognize the contributions that individuals make. In every winning team, the members need to share in the rewards of their efforts, so leaders celebrate accomplishments. They make people feel like heroes.

Embedded within these Five Practices are thirty essential leadership behaviors that are the basis for The Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Student LPI) and are described in the next module. To get the most out of your leadership development opportunity, you should complete the Student LPI. The instrument provides you with a way to measure how frequently you are currently engaging in each of the thirty behaviors.

