

# The Art of Supportive Leadership

“Genuine leadership is of only one type: supportive. It leads people; it doesn’t drive them. It involves them; it doesn’t coerce them. It never loses sight of the most important principle governing any project involving human beings: namely, *that people are more important than things.*”

—J. Donald Walters, *The Art of Supportive Leadership*

Study these ideas and apply them to your own leadership experience. Ask yourself “Am I actually doing the things listed below or do I simply think, Yes, I know that. Good idea,” when reading them. Knowing and agreeing are not acting.

## The Art of Leadership

1. Genuine leadership is supportive, not coercive.
2. The true leader tries to lead others, not to drive them.
3. Leadership means vision first and above everything; action, secondarily.
4. Always remember that people are more important than things.
5. Leadership is not to be confused with mere position.

## Leadership Means Responsibility

1. Be not so much concerned with the opinions of others as with the truth.
2. Be concerned not with praise or blame, nor with your personal reactions, but with action, with getting the job done.
3. Concentrate on the longer rhythms, not on temporary ups and downs.
4. Be as ready to accept responsibility for failure as for success.
5. Acceptance of responsibility means accepting the duty to find creative answers even when convention says there are none.

## Leadership Means Setting Aside Personal Desires

1. The true leader puts his personal wishes last, not first.
2. A leader should ask himself in every circumstance, not, “What would I like?” but rather, “What do I feel is needed?” and, “What is right?”
3. A good approach to every problem is to ask oneself, “What is trying to happen here?”
4. Leadership requires openness to the feelings of others, and not insensitivity to them in the name of “getting on with the job.”

## Leadership Means Service

1. Leadership means giving service, not receiving it.
2. Humility is more important in a leader than any medal for achievement.
3. Your primary job as leader is to serve those under you.

## Leadership Means Loyalty

1. Work with people and things as they are, not as you would like them to be.
2. Be patient. It takes time to bring people to new points of view.
3. To win loyalty, be loyal yourself first.
4. In correcting someone, consider first his readiness to hear what you have to say.

### **The Importance of Flexibility**

1. Be willing to admit your mistakes. Truth alone wins out in the end.
2. Keep your ideas of perfection fluid. Remember that perfection in human is not a thing, but a direction.
3. Adapt your actions to reality rather than your preferences.
4. Deal afresh with each situation as it arises. See it as a thing in itself.
5. Making too many rules will destroy the spirit of your enterprise.
6. Be open to other points of view; they might prove better than your own.

### **The Need for Action, Not Talk**

1. Leadership means action, not merely good ideas *for* action.
2. Don't waste so much energy in planning that you have none left over for acting on your plans.
3. Action generates creativity.
4. Almost any action is preferable to prolonged inaction, born of indecision.

### **Giving Support**

1. Try always to strengthen your subordinates in their work, in their creativity, and in their qualities of leadership.
2. Encourage them in their projects.
3. Allow them to learn by their mistakes.
4. Be willing to compromise. Don't ask more of people than they are able to deliver; or, if you do so, stretch their horizons gradually.
5. Invite their support; don't command it.
6. Accept only as much authority as they are willing to give you.
7. Never assign any job that you wouldn't be willing to do yourself.

### **Work With People's Strengths**

1. Work to strengthen a subordinate's best qualities, rather than harping on his worst. You will accomplish far more by encouraging others than by belittling them.
2. Direct more energy to those people in it who are in tune with what you are doing than to those whose tendency is to resist you.
3. Don't invest a disproportionate amount of energy in addressing negative situations. Strengthen the positive side, rather, and negative situations will tend either to dissipate or to resolve.
4. Don't allow subordinates to offer merely negative criticisms. Teach them that they must earn the right to speak by offering solutions when they want to point out problems.
5. Encourage the doers under you, not the mere talkers.
6. Never court popularity for yourself. Be concerned with issues, with principles.
7. Never speak from your own emotions or private prejudices, but always from a sense of justice, fairness, and truth.