

The Duplication Effect of Leadership

by Todd Smith

Whether or not you hold the formal title of “leader,” there are people around you looking for someone from whom to take their cues in any number of situations. By the end of this post, you’ll realize that your role in leading others is much more significant than you currently believe.

We have all heard about the importance of leading by example, but the benefits are more than meet the eye. Albert Einstein spoke to this: *“Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means.”*

Who Set the Best Example?

Imagine a company where employees are expected to be at their desks by 8 a.m., yet their manager often strolls in around 8:15 a.m. It doesn’t take long for the staff to follow suit, regardless of the official start time.

Here’s another illustration. I have two close friends who are CEOs of large companies. CEO #1 takes pride in his emails. They include a friendly greeting, are properly formatted, and deliver well-written messages. CEO #2 sends one-line emails that look like text messages.

What’s been interesting to watch over the last ten years is that most of the people at CEO #1’s company send friendly emails that are well formatted and convey a professional brand, while most of the people at CEO #2’s company send one-line emails.

My guess is that neither of these two CEOs knows the impact that their personal emails are having on the way their employees are branding their companies through their email communications.

Leading by Example

It’s critical to recognize that in any leadership position, every LITTLE thing you do or don’t do is noticed and, in most cases, duplicated. This duplication effect can influence every person who falls directly or indirectly under your leadership, and it can continue for future generations.

Other leadership qualities are vital, but none compare to the example we set. This holds true in marriage, in parenting, and in the workplace. It applies to everything you do—being a good listener, responding positively to problems, conducting yourself professionally in meetings, and greeting people cordially in public.

Where Does It Start?

It starts at the top! Families, community groups, and corporations all take on the characteristics of their leaders. When leaders set high performance standards for

themselves, others will strive to do the same. Therefore, if you want the people around you to step up their game, you must do it first.

Here are a few tips to help you remember the importance of leading by example:

- The next time you are faced with a decision, ask: *What would I want my people doing if they were faced with this same situation?* Your answer will tell you which direction you should go.
- As you work on your own personal and professional development, make a point of sharing what you learn with the people in your circle of influence. Many times we can use our errors as examples in teaching others. Help them discover the little things they can do to perform at a higher level.
- The next time you need to counsel someone who made an error, look for any connections that may exist between their misstep and your leadership.

Let me also suggest that you begin to look at ALL the little things you are doing and look for areas where you can be a better example.

Every little thing you do to get better will have a positive influence on the lives of everyone who looks up to you.

What is your experience with leaders who lead by example? Post a comment and let us know your thoughts or lessons learned.

About the Author: [Todd Smith](#) is a successful entrepreneur of 29 years and founder of [Little Things Matter](#). To receive Todd's lessons, [subscribe here](#). All Todd's lessons are also available on iTunes as [downloadable podcasts](#). (Todd's podcasts are listed #35 in [America's top 100 podcasts](#).)