
Leadership is complex and is not simply achieved by time served or being competent in your role.

Sometimes it can feel like there are born leaders. And, that leadership must involve 'great things' or orchestrating the efforts of throngs of people.

The truth of the matter is that, whether you are just getting started in your career or are a seasoned professional, leadership competency is something that needs to be nurtured, demonstrated and developed at each phase of your career development.

Take a moment to consider leaders that you admire – both those you have worked alongside with personally and those you have come to know from further afield (e.g. business leaders, heads of state/politicians, inspirational figures, thought leaders, etc.)

What are the traits you admire most? How do you define their leadership style? What are some of the ways you emulate or live out their leadership philosophy in your work?

These are some questions that can be helpful in starting to identify and better understand how you can build your own leadership competency.

Remember, at its core, leadership comes in many forms and leadership competency is defined by a collection of personal and professional attitudes/core values, behaviours, and characteristics.

Below are some tips and recommendations for ways to shape and define your own notion of leadership at various phases of your career:

Foundation

Key Behaviours and Characteristics: Listening, Reliability, Respect, Curiosity, Engagement

Actions you can take at this phase of developing your leadership competency:

- Assuming an active posture when others are speaking (e.g. leaning slightly forward, nodding, taking notes, using minimal encouragers) and reflect back what others are saying (e.g. "What I think you are saying is", "To summarize what I am hearing") in meetings
- Asking questions that are purposeful, timely, and help you gather the information that you need to carry out your responsibilities more effectively
- Taking an active interest into how your work intersects and supports other work being carried out in your department or organization
- Collecting and synthesizing information in a report/summary of your findings
- Committing to on-going learning and development (e.g. reading articles in trade publications, enrolling in courses/training programs, etc.)

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- Making connections to other ideas/concepts that might be relevant or impactful to a topic being discussed, project, or aspect of your work
 - Not over-promising , making commitments that are reasonable for you to deliver on, and following through on things when and how you say you will
 - Arriving on time and coming to meetings prepared to discuss the issues on the agenda
 - Being mindful of others time, responsibilities and commitments when making requests or booking time for meetings/conversations
 - Modeling behaviour that is polite, courteous, and that shows you value those you work with

Building

Key Behaviours and Characteristics: Relationship Building, Teamwork, Ethics, Insurance Acumen, Business Communications, Negotiations

Actions you can take at this phase of developing your leadership competency:

- Making connections with colleagues (both in and out of your department) to discuss work related issues and leverage one another's expertise to achieve the best result possible (e.g. right product/approach for a customer, accurate policy wordings or coverages, etc.)
- Finding trusted mentors and advisors to support your on-going development and learning
- Behaving with integrity and demonstrating professionalism in each of your interactions with colleagues and customers
- Pursuing professional designations and training to help you continue to build your insurance knowledge and expertise
- Asking pointed and detailed questions of your manager or technical experts within your organization to inform your approach in new situations or in a subject area you do not fully understand
- Reading the Professional Ethics columns published by the CIP Society in Canadian Underwriter (or available at www.insuranceinstitute.ca/cipsociety) to better understand ethical dilemmas currently being faced by the industry
- Ensuring your work is as accurate (e.g. information has been verified, is within the parameters provided, error free) and impactful (e.g. meets or exceeds expectations, well written/presented, achieves desired outcomes) as possible
- Volunteering to draft documentation, send a memo/e-mail, prepare a report, develop a presentation, or be the team spokesperson
- Treating others fairly and equitably while working to achieve the best possible business outcome
- Keeping a level head and thinking things through before making a decision, offering a compromise in a business negotiation, or identifying a potential problem (and possible solution(s)) that might require consultation with your manager

Enhancing

Key Behaviours and Characteristics: Conflict Management, Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making, Industry & Community Engagement, Scope of Authority

Actions you can take at this phase of developing your leadership competency:

- Responding to differing ideas and opinions with an open mind and asking questions to better understand where the difference, concern, or disconnect is stemming from
- Collaborating and/or offering a compromise position where possible in situations where there are different ideas or approaches being presented
- Consulting multiple sources and authorities before reaching a conclusion or decision; involves sifting through/eliminating information which is not factual, being aware of potential bias, and identifying trusted sources of information (which may or may not support your own position)
- Developing and communicating a clear rationale for a decision you have made; this rationale should not just consider the impact to yourself – but to the team, your manager, the customer and potentially, the organization
- Presenting multiple ideas and potential solutions to a business problem clearly and concisely; this involves thoughtful consideration of the pros/cons to each approach and the impact on the business, team, etc.
- Volunteering your time and lending expertise to associations and events within the insurance industry (e.g. sitting on a committee/council, serving as an Ambassador with the Insurance Institute's Career Connections program, leading a seminar/workshop or participating as a part of an industry panel, etc.)
- Considering ways to increase the scope and breadth of your work (e.g. diversifying your product knowledge, working in a different segment/department, making a move to a regional or head office, deepening your expertise/specialty, etc.)
- Being open to and stepping up for opportunities for 'stretch' assignments, taking on additional responsibility, and identifying business process improvements

Mastery

Key Behaviours and Characteristics: Innovation, Change Management, Cross-Functional Experience, Financial Acumen, Strategic Thinking

Actions you can take at this phase of developing your leadership competency:

- Deepening your awareness and understanding of emerging issues within the industry through participation in seminars/forums, consulting with thought leaders, reading research reports, and authoring briefing notes for your colleagues
- Generating solutions to business problems that leverage creativity, are cognizant of the 'bigger picture' (e.g. involve consideration of the precedent being set and broader impact on the work of the team/organization), and are forward thinking/anticipatory (i.e. not just reactive in the moment)
- Offering ideas and approaches that are rooted in thinking that explores 'what if possibilities...'; 'what's next', or assume a future forward perspective
- Being mindful of change within your department/organization; involves considering how you will communicate about it, understanding its potential impacts on your colleagues/department, and your role in its implementation
- Responding to proposed changes/new approaches with an open mind, seeking to clarify and understand rationale, and embracing the opportunity to evolve your work or business
- Seeking out projects that involve working or consulting with multiple departments and subject matter experts (e.g. policy wordings review, identifying business requirements for new systems, process improvement, etc.)
- Considering and being mindful of the financial implications of your work and decisions
- Taking an active interest in the financial drivers impacting and broader decisions being made within your department/organization; involves asking questions about resourcing/budgeting, clarifying rationale for decisions made based on financial considerations, participating in the financial decision-making/budgetary process where appropriate, etc.
- Laying out a comprehensive plan to carry out a piece of work or project; this involves identifying alignment to departmental/organizational priorities, naming key contributors and factors influencing success, anticipating commitments of time and resources, reasonable timelines for each deliverable, milestones/checkpoints to validate and ensure work is on track, financial resourcing/planning, and developing a framework to evaluate success and impact
- Taking time to step out of the day-to-day to consider how your work, department, or perhaps even organization could be continuously improved, understanding how your work is impactful and feeds into the broader business strategy, and contributing to projects which explore how things might be done differently or in the future

What's Comes Next?

Hopefully, you are seeing that you are able to embody and demonstrate leadership principles regardless of your role or position in an organization. That being said, as you enter the Enhancing and Mastery stages of your career, you may also be contemplating whether you might like to lead a technical/operational function or a team of people.

Conversations with mentors, your manager, and HR team may also provide greater insight into leadership and how you see it being played out over the course of your career.

You may find it helpful to consult the People Management and Technical Management career maps on the **mycareer** website to help you get a better sense of what each of these might entail. You might also consider completing the My Leadership Skills assessment to help you reflect on what types of leadership opportunities you might be seeking.