

Forbes – by Jeff Boss

Leadership challenges are more complex today than ever before, and one leadership challenge that I see as an executive coach is the tendency to anticipate what *might* happen tomorrow while forgetting about what *is* happening today. In other words, leaders try to outthink and overanalyze the future. They anticipate all the possibilities that *could* happen, select the outcome most likely to occur and then mold their leadership style to accommodate it, only to find that Murphy has a full-time job and is apparently dedicated solely to them — and Murphy wins.

The point is, tomorrow, next week or next year are all uncertain, so if you try to mold your leadership style to the “most likely” option to occur, then you’re not leading, you’re contingency planning.

Leaders don’t just think about the future, they think in it. Once they have a clear picture of what they want to see, where they want to be—as an individual or as a team — and why, they begin to mold the world around them to achieve it.

I learned a lot in the military about leadership and continue learning today by helping others with their “molding process” as an executive coach. Here are four more leadership lessons to share with you:

Leaders have choices, but leadership is a choice.

You can be promoted, “given” responsibility for a new project or authorized to make certain decisions, but none of that makes you a leader. These are just tools designed to test you, to be added to your arsenal of *potential* should you accept the challenge, but they don’t inspire others to follow you. You know you’re a leader when somebody follows you no matter what title you have, and they do so because you’ve made difficult choices that others have shied away from. That’s what leaders do.

Leadership isn't the problem, but it is the solution.

It's easy to blame "leadership" for the way things are because it takes the blame off oneself, but the only problem truly exists is how each person contributes to the problem. If you have a toxic leader, for example, it's not up to HR to "fix" him, it's up to every person around him to start leading! For every person who doesn't challenge the status quo but complains about it, they're contributing to the problem. For every person who wants to build more trust in their team but doesn't speak candidly in meetings, they're part of the problem. You get what you give, so speaking with candor yields trust. Asking questions calls for direct answers ("why is the sky blue?") whereas making statements generally lead to more statements and ultimately turn into dead-end conversations ("there must be a reason why the sky is blue"). Poor leadership doesn't exist because people are malicious but because nobody has taken the time to develop people *as* leaders.

Leadership is hard to measure.

One reason why leadership is hard to measure is that people have different definitions of what it means to lead. Without a shared definition of success, it's difficult to ascertain whether success was ever achieved. I found one definition of leadership as operating along a spectrum, with persuasion and influence on one end and virtue and nobility on the other. I thought this was close, but it isn't. Leadership isn't good and it isn't bad. It isn't virtuous and it isn't evil. History is full of malicious leaders. Hitler, Idi Amin, Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein were all rotten to the core, but they were leaders nonetheless. That's why leadership is neither good nor bad but a tool that serves as a guide toward intention.

[Leadership is authentic self-expression that instills value in others and compels them to act.](#)

Another reason leadership is hard to measure is that when it's going well there's nothing *to* measure. It's much easier to identify something that's not working well than something that is.

Leaders don't work alone.

As "solo" as the concept of leadership seems, leaders rarely serve as lone wolf contributors. They know that extraordinary results don't come from "*me*" but from "*we*;" from collective

effort united toward a shared purpose. When you start a new business you don't go it alone, you enlist the insight, advice and support of others. When actors receive an award they thank others for helping them make it happen (and I'm *not* saying that all actors are leaders but that their success is the result of collective effort). The point is, smart leaders are smart because of the people they surround themselves with.