

Application Guide

WHY THE BEST LEADERS NEVER STOP LEARNING



BOTTOM LINE:

Great leaders never stop learning. They choose curiosity over criticism, becoming students of new ideas rather than protectors of the status quo.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- I. It's natural to resist ideas we don't understand or can't control.
 - A. Innovation, while it moves us forward, often feels like interruptions or threats to the system in place.
 - B. The temptation is to dismiss or critique new ideas because they are disruptive, but doing so will lead to irrelevance.
- II. New ideas rarely come from the person in charge.
 - A. Fresh eyes often see something we miss.
 - B. We are all comfortable with the systems we've built, but we can get so comfortable that we hang on even when they stop working.
 - C. By becoming a student we will create more space for new ideas to flourish.
- III. Why it can be so hard for leaders to embrace new ideas:
 - A. PRIDE
 1. When something new is introduced, we feel out of control, so we resist.
 2. When our reputation is built around a product or service, it's hard to let go.
 3. When we invest time in something, it's hard to let go.
 4. Pride is not a winning strategy anywhere, so remember that pride is the true enemy you must fight, not the other people at your decision-making table.
 - B. INSECURITY
 1. When we allow our identity to be defined by anything other than our values, we set ourselves up to be unduly impacted by insecurity.
 2. When our worth is tied to a product, reputation, or idea, anything that threatens those things will feel like a personal attack.
- IV. Great leaders respond internally before they respond externally.
 - A. We all carry things like fear, pride, and insecurity with us, but we can be disciplined enough to deal with these things internally before we respond verbally.
 - B. Externally we need to ask questions of curiosity and affirm creativity and innovation, rather than critique it.
- V. Practical ways to shift our thinking toward being a student:
 - A. **Decide.** It's a choice to be a student before being a critic.
 1. Commit to understand.
 2. Ask questions that express curiosity.
 3. When you don't understand something, don't dismiss it, study it.

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B. Learn from the next generation.

1. Invite the younger employees into the conversation.
2. Invite people on the “edges” of the organization into the conversation.
3. Provide space for experimentation and don't punish failure.

C. Don't avoid the Contrarians. (The people who see the world differently and ask hard questions.)

1. They bring value to decision-making because they tend to punch holes in our complacency and see the things we miss.
2. These people are barometers not limiters.

VI. Organizations that reward curiosity and fund experimentation outperform those that don't.

A. Failure is not the enemy; it's part of the learning process.

B. Having the space and backing to experiment fuels the excitement and creativity needed to achieve greater success in the organization.

VII. As a leader, innovation starts with your *response* to new ideas.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. How do you typically respond to new ideas or innovations?
2. What systems or routines in your organization feel comfortable but may no longer be effective?
2. How can you create space within your team or organization to experiment with new ideas?
4. Who in your organization is on the “edges,” and how can you invite them into key conversations?
5. Are there voices in your organization that challenge the status quo? How can you better listen to them?

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