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DEAR CHIEF: I’ve just been put in charge of my struggling work center. I’ve never really been a leader before but my boss said it’ll be no problem and that he’s expecting me to turn things around quickly--talk about pressure! How long does it normally take for someone to become an effective leader?

FIRST-TIME LEADER



DEAR FIRST-TIME LEADER: Congratulations on your opportunity! First of all, though, it’s not really your first time being a leader. We’ve all led someone at some point in our lives whether we realized it or not. You demonstrated leadership any time you’ve done one or more of the following: 1) Influenced someone to take some kind of action. 2) Convinced someone about a point of view. 3) Inspired someone to think about or believe in something.

A truly effective leader, though, KEEPS people influenced, convinced, and inspired, and that requires gradual leadership development on behalf of that leader. And it doesn’t happen overnight either. Whether someone develops

Leadership development: Am I there yet?

effective leadership skills at a young age or later in life, it still involves a growth process requiring patience and lots of learning.

According to leadership expert John Maxwell, your timeline for leadership development will conform to the speed with which you move through the following phases of realization:

Phase 1: You Don’t Know What You Don’t Know. (As long as a person doesn’t know what he or she doesn’t know, he or she isn’t going to grow.)

Phase 2: You Know That You Need to Know. (Many people find themselves placed in a leadership position only to look around and discover that no one is following them. When that happens, they realize they need to learn how to lead.)

Phase 3: You Know What You Don’t Know. (To grow as a leader, you have to realize you don’t have all the answers or the skills as a leader. You need others on your journey of growth.)

Phase 4: You Know and Grow, and It Starts to Show. (When you recognize your lack of skill and begin the daily discipline of personal growth, exciting things start to happen.)

Phase 5: You Simply Go Because

of What You Know. (Your ability to lead becomes almost automatic. You develop great instincts. And that’s when the payoff is incredible.)

Getting through these phases will require you to learn as much as you can about leadership. A great way to start your learning path is by reading a few books, then eventually enrolling in some seminars, training courses, or educational retreats. To get started, I recommend you read the following John Maxwell book first: *Developing the Leader Within You*. It contains timeless wisdom that gives readers a tremendous and fundamental understanding of what it takes to lead. That book, in itself, will then guide you to the next steps to take in your leadership development.

Leadership develops daily, not in a day. And growth as a leader never stops. Good luck and stay the course. In no time you’ll become an effective leader people will want to follow.



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