

Chapter Three: The Leadership Lifestyle

In agreeing that leadership isn't a nine-to-five title within the corporate world only due to the nature of managing people or projects, it's important to know that leadership and being a leader is a lifestyle.

Leadership is a way of living that we establish and guide through our decisions and the creation and basis of our leadership brand and mission.

The leadership lifestyle is a phrase that we will now integrate into thinking about our leadership decisions as we prepare to discuss the APE Model in the next section.

As leaders, we should lead by example meaning that we need to understand and internalize how this trickles into all aspects of our lives.

It creates the foundation on how people define us and how we define others as leaders.

It's the foundation of our definition and how we derive value. It's what our brand becomes. I've witnessed people in leadership roles within organizations who weren't cut out for it.

The skills weren't there, the aptitude towards working with other people wasn't there, and it made me wonder, "Who saw what in this person that enabled them to move up the corporate chain into a "leadership" role?"

That's a scary thought.

Some of these people were lackluster in the workplace and would then come in and talk about their lives outside which reflected poor choices that impacted their lives overall and their ability to lead.

This, in thinking about leadership as an affair, is a huge turnoff. There'd be no second date if this were banter over dinner as this reflects nothing about a person except about their character and poor decisions.

Who wants to follow someone like that?

I worked with a VP once who fell into all these categories: terrible person and a terrible leader.

This person caused issue after issue with clients, turned people against each other, was a poor communicator and just overall, not that intelligent or self-aware.

However, the CEO of this organization thought this person was amazing. Those whom she led, knew she wasn't.

In coming to work, this person always told some story about their bad behavior outside of the office.

Stories were unrealistic and made many of us question their life decisions and overall ability to lead.

We didn't respect this person as a leader based on their lifestyle choices that they choose to share with us.

That coupled with her being an a-hole (which we will address further in regards to leadership later on), made her un-followable.

As a team, we complained, the clients complained, and the CEO finally changed his perceptions about her, and she was out the door soon after.

We judge each other on behaviors and stories like this. We judge, and then we question the individual and their decisions whether we realize it or not.

We determine if we are going to follow these people or whether we are going to make jokes about them in hushed corners of the office with our most trusted colleagues.

We make our own decisions if we are going to respect these people and their leadership. People who live lives like this are frustrating when it comes to defining leadership as the choices outside don't align.

This is what makes leadership a lifestyle and not merely a title within a job role or function.

Earlier, we talked about politicians — a perfect example in understanding the leadership lifestyle and how we determine value in those who lead. We judge politicians on their life choices all the time.

Think of scandals like with Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky and John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe. Affairs happen. Lies happen. Drugs happen. Booze happens. It all happens.

We know this happens between people all the time, why does it matter when we are defining leaders and leadership?

Because we want our leaders to be role models, we want our leaders to be perfect both in thinking about the professional world, the political world, and the personal world.

In knowing that, are you a role model with your brand and mission when it comes to your leadership?

We all make mistakes. We're all human. We all can be vulnerable and sometimes we're going to make bad decisions.

But, as leaders, we need to have more self-awareness about every word, every behavior, every promise, every action and every step that we take.

Why? Because we're leaders. And, leadership is hard. We become and stop being leaders with our decisions as simple or as complex or as ethical or not as they may be.

You don't need to be perfect, but you do need to realize that this is a reality in how we judge ourselves and those around us when we define leadership.

The challenge is trying to be human and vulnerable while also being a role model and making decisions that are reflective of who we are.

I've heard plenty of stories of simple mistakes that people in formal leadership roles made that triggered those they led to think differently about them.

Things that could have been avoided that would have kept their leadership brand and mission strong and trustworthy.

Give this story consideration.

A co-worker of mine, Suzie, was tall and voluptuous. Her outfits, although professional, were on the sexy side. Now, I don't want to paint her out to be a bad person. She wasn't.

Susie was a hard worker, and she was a great friend, too. She had a presence about her, in any case. Men ogled her even when she wore Victoria Secret PINK sweatpants and hoodies.

Later on, we'll address some of this further when thinking about TOLL concerning leadership.

The president of the company that Suzie worked for appreciated her hard work.

At one point, she and the president went on a trip for a board meeting. To reduce your level of suspense, no, as far as I know, they didn't have an affair.

However, after the board meeting, Suzie was going to stay another day to enjoy the area.

In knowing that, the president bought Suzie a massage package at the hotel and spa that the board meeting was held at and where they were staying.

He wanted her to relax and enjoy herself and asked her not to tell anyone about this lavish and, somewhat, intimate gift.

Reading this, you may have one of two reactions. First being how inappropriate this is mainly at the level of secrecy in the situation.

You, or someone else, is paying someone to rub your naked body. In this case, your boss is picking up the tab.

Second is this is not a big deal at all and how sweet it was for a boss to buy a subordinate a gift like this to thank them for their hard work.

When Suzie told me this story, the first thing that ran through my head is that they were having an affair hence the prior warning.

The second was a level of uneasy about the situation. After hearing that story, I felt angry and uncomfortable.

Those feelings made me think differently about that leader who had been a person whom I admired for a long time.

That, coupled with other female employees who mentioned that they were keeping records of what this person said to them, was disconcerting. People talk.

From that talk, we create our perceptions, assumptions, and ideas about the storyteller and the person being discussed.

It all stems from someone deciding to act or behave in a certain way that may be questionable from a leadership perspective.

After hearing this, when I was alone with this man, regardless of how much I had initially respected his leadership ability, I felt myself being scared and shy in trying to avoid any possible issue.

I lost trust and began to doubt.

Susie and the president of the company were a bit too close. And, due to their relationship, he bought her a somewhat special gift - a massage.

She accepted and then relayed on to other people even though she was asked to keep it a secret. Those people talk. Perceptions based on those decisions are changed, and those perceptions may be irreversible.

This is an authentic situation. Moreover, it demonstrates a common issue - leadership is not a moral card that abstains people from their human nature and wants and needs.

Leaders are people after all (Heck, even people who can get diarrhea).

And, when being a leader in the formal sense or wanting to improve yourself as a leader, it's important to be aware of actions like this.

Decisions are like dominos.

Leaders should show thanks to those around them. But, there is a line. We value people and leaders who show appreciation.

We appreciate people who treat others in a way that is respectable and honest.

When we see people doing things like this, we begin to develop opinions about them as a person that goes beyond their role within an organization.

As people, we then develop opinions about those people that, regardless of their role, impede the way that we view them and if we decide to follow them or not.

Moreover, in thinking about following them, it hampers on our own decisions if we will or not. It hinders how much we are willing to give and to engage under someone like that.

This is why thinking about leadership in regards to a lifestyle and decisions is essential.

In section four as we begin to conclude, we'll examine everyday decisions that each one of us makes and how even the simplest of decisions can impact our ability to lead.

Give thought to this as we move forward to your leadership lifestyle. Are you making decisions each day that support it?

Are there areas for improvement that can make a more significant impact on your life and path overall?