

Everything DiSC Work of Leaders®: Ideas for Development

This document contains ideas for developing each of the nine drivers in the *Work of Leaders*® model. You can use these tips in combination with your *Work of Leaders Profile* to stretch beyond your comfort zone.

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TIPS FOR EXPLORATION

We cannot lead anyone farther than we have been ourselves. –John C. Maxwell

Benefits of exploration

- Uncover new possibilities
- Better understand the fundamentals beneath your work
- Clarify and prioritize goals
- Identify self-imposed limitations that no longer apply
- Better understand how trends in your field apply to your work

Tips for staying open to diverse ideas

- Set aside specific time for open-ended “what if” exploration.
- Give ideas a chance to percolate instead of pushing ahead with your initial thoughts.
- Create a list of potential problems and concerns, and then set it aside and know you’ll have a chance to fix the particulars later.
- Resist the temptation to run with the first acceptable idea you generate.
- Make a conscious effort to come up with at least five different ways to achieve the same goal.
- Allow yourself an adequate amount of time to brainstorm, and don’t expect an immediate pay-off.

Tips for focusing on the big picture

- Step back and ask yourself what problem you’re really trying to solve.
- Invite others with strong conceptual thinking skills into your exploration process.
- Don’t reject an idea because you aren’t sure how it will be implemented.
- Make a habit of noting trends in your industry and trends in customer feedback. Then, when brainstorming, ask how that information could inform the direction of your work.
- Write down the broad purpose of your work and physically post it in a place that’s easy to reference.
- Don’t be too narrow or specific in your thinking. Step back and consider all the different ways an objective could be accomplished.

TIPS FOR BOLDNESS

It's uncomfortable to stand up in front of strangers. It's uncomfortable to propose an idea that might fail. It's uncomfortable to challenge the status quo. When you identify the discomfort, you've found the place where a leader is needed. –Seth Godin

Benefits of boldness

- Stay relevant
- Keep ahead of competition
- Tackle problems at their core
- Take advantage of untapped potential
- Get others to rethink what is possible and necessary

Tips for being more adventurous

- Recognize that even the boldest of visions can be broken into smaller steps so that feasibility can be gauged along the way.
- Enlist others in the bold vision so that it doesn't feel as though the entire weight of success rides on you.
- When you encounter a knee-jerk reason why a vision is impossible, set that reason aside and continue to flesh out the vision. This may lead to a modified vision that you would have never come up with otherwise.
- Make a list that compares the risks with the potential benefits of a bold idea.
- Remind yourself that there is nothing dangerous about merely entertaining a risky idea.
- Identify your biggest fear or avoidance, and then challenge yourself to confront it.

Tips for speaking out with bold ideas

- Gain confidence by first proposing your idea to people you feel more comfortable with.
- Don't second-guess yourself or back down too quickly.
- Make a plan for how you will handle resistance.
- Before presenting your idea to a group, choose a couple of people you feel comfortable with and run the idea by them. This will give you a platform to practice and refine your delivery, and it might end up boosting your confidence.
- Confront your fears by imagining the worst-case scenario.
- Establish a safe context for generating out-of-the-box ideas, like scheduling a brainstorming session with specific ground rules.

TIPS FOR TESTING ASSUMPTIONS

Most companies use research like a drunkard uses a lamppost: for support, not illumination. –David Ogilvy

Benefits of testing assumptions

- Anticipate mistakes and complications
- Understand the ripple effects of changes
- See the issue from another perspective
- Learn from people who have direct experience with the issue
- Set the stage for later alignment

Tips for seeking counsel on your ideas

- Collect a group of people you trust to consult with on a regular basis, making sure to reciprocate.
- Approach people individually rather than as a group.
- Look outside your group or organization to find fresh perspectives.
- Make a list of all the people your decision will affect, soliciting feedback from as many of these people as possible.
- Remember that people are usually flattered when asked for an opinion, so your colleagues will probably appreciate it when you seek their advice.
- Establish a minimum number of people to run decisions by, and be sure to abide by your rule.

Tips for exploring the implications of your ideas

- Research ideas on a small scale with prototypes.
- Ask a group that will be affected by the idea to generate a list of implications.
- Do your homework to thoroughly understand potential outcomes.
- Conduct a pilot study or a beta test.
- View the research process as a required step rather than a delay.
- Find people in your industry or organization who have pursued similar goals.

TIPS TO IMPROVE CLARITY

By clearly stating and restating the goal, the leader gives certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving it for themselves. –Robert K. Greenleaf

Benefits of communicating with clarity

- Create a common language so everyone is on the same page
- Minimize confusion and frustration
- Ensure everyone knows what part they play in the vision
- Make sure people have the big picture and the details they need
- Ensure everyone knows why the group is headed in the direction it is

Tips for explaining the rationale behind your ideas

- Be straightforward with your reasoning. When people understand how your decisions are made, they're more likely to trust what you're saying.
- Be succinct when appropriate. Think about which details are and are not important.
- Test out your messaging with people you trust and ask them what aspects of your explanation don't make sense.
- Look at it from the listeners' point of view. What do they care most about in this situation? How will their lives be disrupted? Address those points.
- When you're communicating important information to a group, monitor people's reactions for comprehension. If you sense confusion, take time to ask about any areas of misunderstanding or uncertainty.
- Be ready with data to back up your intuition. You might be inherently drawn to an idea, but you need to substantiate it with more than gut feelings if you want your team to rally behind you.

Tips for structuring your message

- Find the "headline" of your message—you should be able to boil it down to eight words or fewer.
- Make your main point obvious by referring back to it frequently. This will help your listeners understand the focus of your message.
- Avoid talking off the top of your head. If you think through the entire message before you begin speaking, you'll improve your chances of communicating with clarity.
- Before you begin, write down and organize your main talking points. Use these key messages to structure a clear delivery of your message.
- Be deliberate about when you will deliver the message. How distracted are people? Emotionally speaking, is one time better than another?
- Repeat your main message at multiple times and in multiple formats.

TIPS TO IMPROVE DIALOGUE

Dialogue is the core of culture and the basic unit of work. How people talk to each other absolutely determines how well the organization will function. –Bossidy & Charan

Benefits of creating dialogue

- Ensure people are able to air their concerns
- Encourage ownership of new ideas within the group
- Hear ideas and insights that would not have occurred to you otherwise
- Promote a culture of trust
- Encourage people to process your message on a deeper level

Tips for exchanging perspectives

- Have one-on-one conversations with people.
- Don't question people to a point that it feels like an interrogation.
- Even if your first instinct is to dismiss an opinion, encourage a discussion so you can understand what's behind it. Not only will this help people feel that they are being heard, it might give you fresh insights as well.
- Highlight great ideas that people bring to the table, even if they don't end up being implemented. If you show your appreciation when people weigh in, they'll feel more comfortable participating in the discussion.
- Be open with your own thoughts and concerns; this in turn can encourage openness from others.
- Ask questions when someone raises a point, helping people explore their processing of an idea.

Tips for being more receptive

- Be careful not to debate or battle for your own side.
- Look for signs of people just telling you what you want to hear; then encourage more honest feedback.
- Remember that you may have to give up some control in order to facilitate discussions along the way. If new information arises, be flexible to changing directions.
- Avoid completely dismissing other people's comments. Find some value or legitimacy to the question, idea, or concern they raised.
- Be proactive about thanking people for their feedback, even if you don't agree with what was said. This will help people feel that it's worth their efforts to be a part of the dialogue.
- Make sure your tone of voice and your body language signal your receptiveness. It's not always what you say but how you say it that will have the biggest impact.

TIPS TO IMPROVE INSPIRATION

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea. –Antoine de Sainte-Exupery

Benefits of providing inspiration

- Ensure that people connect with a vision on an emotional level
- Get more effort and creativity out of people without more oversight
- Help people see the meaning and big picture behind their work
- Get in touch with your own core motivation and passion for the vision
- Give people the stamina to keep moving forward when the work gets hard

Tips for being more expressive

- Identify what you are most passionate about in your vision for the future, so you can come back to that point when discussing the vision.
- Find three dynamic adjectives that describe the good that will come out of your vision (e.g., exciting, revolutionizing, indispensable) and use those words when you discuss the future.
- Before you express your thoughts to a group, think about what you're feeling and put a label on it. If you're connected to your emotions, it will be easier for you to detail your optimism about a project or idea.
- Ensure that your body language complements what you're feeling. People are unlikely to be inspired by what looks like indifference or a lack of energy.
- If you are less comfortable being expressive in front of a group, be deliberate about communicating your enthusiasm in one-to-one conversations.
- Smile. Not only does this communicate warmth, but it also sends a signal to your brain that you are enjoying yourself, which, in turn, can help you feel freer to speak openly.

Tips for being more encouraging

- Come up with a rallying cry. That is, create a simple phrase that encapsulates the promise of your vision.
- Take some time to think about the potential within a group. Be deliberate about pointing this potential out at both an individual and group level.
- Be specific about the importance of people's contributions.
- Be specific about how working toward the vision is going to lead to positive outcomes for a group. Highlight achievements and celebrate accomplishments before you move on.
- Show people you have a genuine interest in their welfare. Listen to their concerns and acknowledge what is most important to them.
- Demonstrate confidence in your team. Invite the people in your group to try new things and articulate your faith in their abilities.
- Consider what the people in a group care most about and tie your message into those priorities.

TIPS FOR MOMENTUM

The speed of the leader determines the pace of the pack. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Benefits of creating momentum

- Ensure that opportunities are seized before it's too late
- Make sure that problems get addressed proactively
- Create a self-sustaining culture of hard work
- Get superior results and avoid stagnation
- Create a greater sense of achievement within the group

Tips for increasing the sense of drive in the group culture

- Set an aggressive but achievable goal that involves external commitments (i.e., commitments to people outside your group, to ensure the group feels pressure to hit the target).
- Set the example by picking up your pace and pushing yourself beyond your own comfort zone. People are likely to detect your sense of momentum and follow suit.
- Gradually raise the bar on your expectations. People will become accustomed to an environment where there is a push for rapid progress and better results.
- Do the necessary legwork to keep things moving at a fast pace—if you finish the first step early, move the next step up.
- Publicly recognize people who are pushing themselves.

Tips for initiating more proactively

- Partner with someone who is good at taking on new initiatives.
- Set aside time for organizing your thoughts around new opportunities and action plan how you are going to ensure they are addressed.
- Keep a list of needs in your group—things that hold the group back. Then make time to bring these needs up with diverse people, asking for ideas on how to address them.
- Avoid focusing all of your attention on the day-to-day demands. Remind yourself that part of your role as a leader is making sure new initiatives get acted on.
- If initiating new directions seems overly demanding, work on reframing the role as an exciting challenge rather than as a burden.
- Ask yourself what single accomplishment would make the biggest difference for your group, and then line up your team to tackle it.

TIPS FOR STRUCTURE

Prepare the umbrella before it rains. –Malay proverb

Benefits of establishing structure

- Ensure efficiency
- Minimize confusion and frustration
- Create smoother communication
- Anticipate problems before they occur
- Understand the core variables that drive your eventual success

Tips for getting better at ensuring planning

- Recruit people who are good at planning to help you put together a blueprint for successful execution. Use the resources available to you, including colleagues, to ensure a solid system is in place.
- Even if you aren't in charge of the schedule, make sure you stay up-to-date on progress and problems.
- Work with your team to identify all of the details that need to be addressed. Write them down on slips of paper and place them in a proposed sequence. This will give you an outline for your plan.
- Don't expect the design to suddenly fall into place. Set some time aside each week for planning.
- Remind yourself that even if you don't need much structure, many of the people you lead may feel lost and stressed without it.
- Periodically ask people where they feel there is a lack of structure during execution and address accordingly.

Tips for getting better at in-depth analysis

- Continually ask yourself, "What problem are we really trying to solve here?" This can help ensure plans and processes are in line with the core goals.
- Work to identify potential problems before they arise. If you do hit a snag, make sure you fully understand the problem before you move on.
- Devote time to think through all of the implications and contingencies associated with your decisions.
- Make sure people are talking to one another and keeping one another informed.
- Run new plans and processes by a diverse group of people who will be affected to catch implications or details you may have missed.
- Solicit help from a colleague who thrives on analysis and problem solving. Together you can work to devise a solid system that will lead to efficiency and success.
- Conduct a hypothetical premortem analysis, imagining, "Suppose something went wrong. What was it and how could it have been avoided?"

TIPS FOR FEEDBACK

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place. –George Bernard Shaw

Benefits of giving feedback

- Anticipate mistakes and complications
- Recognize problems before they become too big
- Make sure that course corrections can be made before the group gets too off track
- Ensure that people feel appreciated for their work
- Make sure the group becomes more effective over time

Tips for more actively addressing problems

- Create a culture of candor and trust by thanking people when they have given you (or another team member) straightforward feedback.
- Set aside time in meetings for people to bring up what's not working. This normalizes the process, making it less threatening, and gives you an opening to address problems.
- Make sure you have a solid understanding of how smoothly things are going or get regular updates from those who know.
- Address problems in a timely manner. If you avoid the issue, the situation might get worse and cause frustration and conflict on your team.
- Focus on the performance, not the person, and reaffirm your faith in their abilities. It's okay to soften the blow as long as the problem has been addressed.
- Be consistent with your feedback. If people aren't performing to the set standard, it's important to let them know. Giving inconsistent or erratic feedback will discourage the team and result in sub-par performances.

Tips for more actively giving praise

- Compliments should be individualized, so have familiarity with what people actually do. This can help ensure that your praise is genuine.
- Build recognition into your plans. Placing praise on your to-do list might prevent you from overlooking it. Similarly, get in the habit of having a celebration to mark the successful completion of a major goal.
- When you notice that improvements have been made, commend the people responsible for a job well done. If an accomplishment is significant enough to be noticed, then it's significant enough to be applauded.
- Work to understand your discomfort with praise (if that's the case) and remind yourself that this discomfort should not be taken as a sign that giving praise is inappropriate, unneeded, or unwanted.
- If you are uncomfortable with praise, experiment with different ways you can let someone know they've done a good job. Just make sure it's not too subtle.
- Set aside weekly time to consider the people on your team and what you appreciate about their contributions. This will make you more likely to express your appreciation.

APPENDIX

You're busy. We get it. Below is a guide for helping you focus your leadership development efforts. Browse through the tasks on the left to find one or two that you would like to improve and then read up on the corresponding pages.

If you want to get better at...	Read up on...
taking risks	being adventurous (page 3) and speaking out (page 3)
expressing passion	being expressive (page 7)
spreading optimism	being expressive (page 7) and being encouraging (page 7)
being encouraging	being encouraging (page 7) and giving praise (page 10)
including everyone	exchanging perspectives (page 6) and seeking counsel (page 4)
giving praise	giving praise (page 10)
providing support	being encouraging (page 7) and giving praise (page 10)
listening actively	exchanging perspectives (page 6) and being receptive (page 6)
managing risks	seeking counsel (page 4) and exploring implications (page 4)
communicating systematically	explaining rationale (page 5) and structuring your message (page 5)
analyzing in-depth	analyzing in-depth (page 9)
spotting problems	exploring implications (page 4) and addressing problems (page 10)
insisting on high standards	increasing drive (page 8) and addressing problems (page 10)
speaking up about problems	addressing problems (page 10)
spurring urgency	increasing drive (page 8)
initiating projects	initiating proactively (page 8) and focusing on the big picture (page 2)