



Leading without a title

No matter your role, seize opportunities to lead

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You don't have the title or the authority, but you have ideas about how things could be better. Do you sit on the sidelines and wait until you are assigned a task, or do you identify what is within your control to make things better?

During orientation in my first job after graduating college, my boss said, “It's important for you to know that I don't promote you; your peers do. When a senior leader comes to the market and rides with different people on the team, he will inevitably ask what it is like to work with you. If they say things like, ‘She's first in line to help when I need an extra hand,’ or ‘She's an avid learner – she's always asking questions about how things work or what ideas I have for how she can help the

team,’ that helps. In other words, your reputation combined with your results gets you promoted. My job is to simply help you to be and do your best.”

As I became more proficient in my position, he then took our conversation to the next level: “A title can give you authority, but true leadership is the ability to affect positive change, and anyone, at any level, can do that. What kind of leader do you want to be?”

Having served in the Marines for 10 years, he taught me that there is temptation to surrender our power when we don't have a title, but that is a mistake. Taking initiative to drive results is about owning our future versus being a victim of circumstance.

Pablo Picasso said, “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.” Leadership is about finding our gifts and sharing them with others so they find their gifts.

Every day, we have the opportunity to create something special right where we are. We don't need the big title or fancy office to influence outcomes, we simply need to have the right intention followed by the right action. Excellence is a mindset. When we strive to be and do our best, it influences how we talk to others, show up at meetings, respond to pressure and mobilize plans.

The gift my first boss gave me was teaching me that I'm always in charge ... of myself. Before I can lead others, I need to lead myself. I need to take ownership of what is within my control and make the best of every situation.

During one of our “ride-withs” he told me a story about a young man who had risen through the ranks to become an executive with our company. He said, “I hired Gary. When he was promoted to his first management position, he called me to complain about feedback that his new boss had given him. Gary had delivered a presentation that he received from marketing that wasn't quite right for this client. The result was predictable: the

client was unimpressed, and Gary's boss was disappointed. After the client meeting, Gary and his boss went to a restaurant to debrief. During the conversation, Gary got defensive, blaming marketing for not giving him what he had asked for. He was still emotional when he called to tell me the story. My response surprised him. I asked, ‘If you didn't like the presentation that marketing sent you, why didn't you change it?’ Silence. More silence. Then came the insight: ‘I didn't own it.’ From that point forward, Gary took ownership of what he could control and you can see where that mindset has landed him.”

We always have choices. In any given situation, we can sit back and wait to be assigned a task, or we can offer suggestions and identify opportunities that are within our control and take action.

Don't miss your destiny. ■



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