



THE STUDENT LEADER

“You already know everything you need to know to be a leader.”

What leadership challenges and strengths do people experience early in their careers, or soon after making a career transition?

THE CHALLENGE

“Everyone else thinks they can lead this team better than you can.”

Leading when we’re young or light on industry experience can bring us face-to-face with the concerns of industry veterans who doubt our chops. Instead of letting naysayers unsettle your confidence, give yourself permission to do something different than what all those smarter, better-qualified people have always “known” will work.¹

“You’re a great worker, but not yet a leader.”

This message may come from the outside — or from our inner critic. In both cases, it’s motivated by a lagging perception of who we are, and who we’ve become. Early-career leaders often identify with their technical skills and expertise, failing to see the ways in which they are already leading.²

STRENGTHS



Beginner’s Mind

When you approach a day’s work with “beginner’s mind,” you have an open perspective, free from preconceptions. A concept from Zen Buddhism, “beginner’s mind” is one of the most valuable tools for early career leaders. Some of the world’s thorniest problems have been solved by beginners — people who looked at situations with fresh eyes, without the baggage of previous failed attempts.



Curiosity

Experienced colleagues bring expertise and mastery of craft to the table — but may miss what’s new or next. You won’t. Your natural curiosity can deepen your understanding of each new situation.



Dependence on Others

We are always dependent on our teachers, collaborators, and predecessors for success; we just tend to forget it. As a new leader, you don’t have that luxury (ahem, pitfall). As a result, you see clearly how much you need your team. Let that knowledge inspire a sense of gratitude — and a habit of expressing it.

LIFELONG LEADERSHIP

Great leaders are made at every stage of life. Whether just getting started or planning our legacies, we can integrate the challenges and benefits of each life chapter into powerful leadership approaches.



¹ Brandt, John. *Nincompoopery: Why Your Customers Hate You – and How to Fix It*. Harper Collins, 2019.

² Ibarra, Herminia. *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2015.