

Effective Peer Leader-shift: Thinking Critically

Leaders, by definition (if not practice) have followers. Leaders find, recruit, and train followers for specific tasks. While this is an important task in any organization, a leader who can only lead followers is limited. To make it to the next level of leadership, a leader must be able to lead other leaders – those alongside them.

Leading peers is a unique challenge, no matter what organization a leader is part of. A highly competent leader who is seen – rightly or wrongly - to have considerable influence with his boss is often at a disadvantage when it comes to peer-to-peer relationships.

To succeed at leading alongside your peers, you must work at giving your colleagues reasons to respect and follow you. You do that by helping them win, and in doing so, you will not only help your organization but you will also help yourself.

SOLUTION #1: Shift from critic to critical thinker

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [How to Lead When You're Not in Charge](#) by Clay Scroggins

Are you letting your lack of authority paralyze you?

One of the greatest myths of leadership is that you must be in charge in order to lead. Great leaders don't buy it. Great leaders lead with or without the authority and learn to unleash their influence wherever they are.

With practical wisdom and humor, Clay Scroggins will help you nurture your vision and cultivate influence, even when you lack authority in your organization. And he will free you to become the great leader you want to be so you can make a difference right where you are. Even when you're not in charge.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

As a leader, you have undoubtedly been told “no” at some point in your life. When that happens, what is your typical reaction? Do you become cynical and defensive, or do you redirect that energy into a more positive direction?

Leaders who want to become a positive influence with their peers must learn how to overcome the tendency to be critical and become a critical thinker.

Great leaders know how to listen, watch, connect the dots, and fix problems because they're able to think critically.

If you are seeking to develop the skills of a critical thinker, there are four subtle shifts you must make.

Shift #1 – Stop thinking as an employee.

Start thinking as an owner.

Owners see things others don't see.

Owners have more buy-in than others do.

Owners care more deeply because their future depends on it.

If there is trash in the hallway or in the parking lot, employees may decide to walk past it. Or worse, they call someone in facilities to pick up the trash. Owners pick up the trash because it's their reputation on the line.

Shift #2 – Stop stacking your meetings.

Start scheduling thinking meetings.

As a staff member, you often get sucked into a multitude of meetings. It's the natural gravitational pull of any organization. The worst is having a stack of meetings, back to back. While this may seem efficient, it can also be an enemy of critical thinking. You get to the end of the day and realize you've generated no new thoughts or new ideas.

Schedule space to think critically, marking it down like a meeting, at points throughout the day. The greatest enemy of thinking critically is an overcrowded schedule.

Shift #3 – Stop being critical.

Start thinking critically.

If thinking critically is a skill, being critical is a snare. Many leaders don't want to be critical. They don't sit around planning to be cynics, but they still get caught in the trap.

The key difference between someone who is critical and someone who is a critical thinker is motive. People who are critical want you to lose. They're bringing problems, not solutions.

People who are great critical thinkers want you to win. They're motivated to make something better.

Shift #4 – Stop giving others a grade.

Start lending them a hand.

No one likes the feeling of being constantly measured and monitored. If you're not careful, your critical thinking will make others feel like you're giving them grades.

This is not about *whether* you should convey the thoughts that could better those around you. It's about *how* you pass on those thoughts. When you communicate critical thoughts to others, you need to do so with a helping hand, not a grading tone.

Clay Scroggins, [How to Lead When You're Not in Charge](#)

A NEXT STEP

On a chart tablet, write each of the shifts, leaving space below each one to add comments.

Set aside time to review your actions in the last week, focusing on activities in which you were involved with one or more of your peers.

Write down, under each shift, the actions that fit the first part of the shifts – the “negatives.” For each one, write out how you can make the shift as described in the second part of the phrase.

Take the initiative to review these actions with your peers, and ask them to comment on the shift you would like to enact.

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