

# How to Be a More Effective Team Leader in 2021

There is no secret sauce or silver bullet for being a good leader. Every employee, every team, every work environment, and every business is going to be different. Being an effective leader takes time, effort, and a willingness to learn from your mistakes. You won't be a perfect leader, but you can become a better one every day.

It's an understatement to say that 2020 was an unprecedented year. Some businesses responded better than others. There were stories of success and failure. So, as we go into 2021, what have we learned and what lessons can we take into the future? As I said, there's no magic trick to being a good leader, but there are strategies we can implement to increase our chances of becoming more effective.

## Pay Attention to Context

“The leaders who get the most out of their people are the leaders who care most about their people.” -[Simon Sinek](#)

In most organizations, no matter what the work focuses on, it is easy to get lost in thinking only about the results. What did your employees accomplish today? Typically, those with the best results are rewarded and lauded the most. Making results your only metrics for success or judgement of performance turns people into numbers. It's certainly easier to do that math rather than invest your time in learning more about someone, but it's not better in the long run.

Getting to know another human being is all about context. Let's say a once high-performing employee is now coming in late, lacks excitement for the work, and seems altogether detached from the work environment. Math would say their metrics have dropped, and they need to be put under corrective action to remediate their actions. But, an effective leader would know that perhaps this person has had a history of depression or is suffering under the stress of an outside influence.

Context goes the opposite direction as well. Perhaps you have an employee who is a rising star. They get more work done than anyone else and the quality of that work is exceptional. A leader who is paying attention would know to watch out for signs of burnout or overexertion from the employee. Recognizing effort and context is just as vital as recognizing outcomes or results. Managing people is not math.

Once you see the context of a problematic situation, you are already much closer to helping resolve it. Sometimes all it takes is pointing out the situation to your employee and asking how they're feeling about it.

## Be Clear on Procedures and Processes, not Just Responsibilities and Goals

“It is not enough to do your best; you must know what to do, then do your best.” -[W. Edwards Deming](#)

You cannot just assign people their roles, set their goals, and expect them to thrive. If you only give people responsibilities and a goal, you'll occasionally find those who can set their own course and get there all on their own. However, you're much more likely to discourage your people this way. A destination without a map is a good way to get people lost. This is especially true in the world of virtual teamwork and remote work that many industries are still operating in.

It's crucial that you spend time and effort on making sure the details of their tasks and processes are fully explained and understood. Simplify the work as best you can and break it down into digestible steps. There needs to be a clear sense of who is doing what and when they will do it.

After the process has been performed and you've seen the results, your work is not done. You need to conduct after-action reviews. Identify opportunities for improvement and areas where there were problems or miscommunications. Implement your improvements, resolve those problems, and find ways to enhance communication. Then, you can do it all again. After all, perfection is a race you run without ever really crossing the finish line.

## Build an Environment of Trust and Mutual Respect

“Without trust we don't truly collaborate; we merely coordinate or, at best, cooperate. It is trust that transforms a group of people into a team.” -  
[Stephen M.R. Covey](#)

Trust and mutual respect are some of the first building blocks of an effective team. When you trust your people and show them respect, you are creating an environment of safety for them to operate in. They feel more free to be vulnerable and admit when they need help or don't know something.

It also opens you to growth as a leader when your employees feel safe to challenge old processes or the way you used to do things. As the world realizes the lessons of 2020 and sees value in virtual work and remote positions, trust is going to be extremely valuable. You can't watch everyone's work over their shoulders all day, especially if they're on the other end of a video call.

Give your team the benefit of doubt and trust that they have everyone's best interest in mind. Those new perspectives and ideas could be the foundation for future growth and success in your business. Those new ideas could also fail, but that's not necessarily a bad thing either. We don't always learn very much from success, but mistakes are some of the best teachers available.

No matter how you slice it, 2020 was an interesting year. It's up to all of us to decide how we head into 2021.