How to become a transformational leader

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for Asian Women
Meeting agenda  approx 90 mins

Member updates  15 mins

Watch video  8 mins

Icebreaker  10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Handling mistakes  15 mins
- Activity 2: Articulating a vision  15 mins
- Activity 3: Responding to bias  15 mins

One Action  3 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 10 mins on member updates
- Skip activity 1
Getting started

**Member updates**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time Allocate</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>2 mins or less per member</td>
<td>15–20 mins depending on group size</td>
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Go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It’s OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

**Watch video** 8 mins

Note that you don’t need to be in a leadership role to practice transformational leadership. You can use the techniques in the video to influence colleagues and bring out the best in fellow team members.

**Icebreaker** 10 mins

Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Then, go around the room and share your answers (1 minute each).

- What does an **empathetic** leader look like to you?
- How is an **empathetic** leader different from a **nice** leader?
- What does your **ideal** leader look like?
Employees perform best when they’re not afraid to mess up and when they view mistakes as growth opportunities. Sharing your own mistakes and coaching your team members on how to learn and improve from their own are essential to transformational leadership.

In smaller groups, take 15 minutes to share a mistake you made at work. Then, discuss ways that a transformational leader would respond to this mistake and also how the individual could communicate the mistake effectively. Consider questions like:

- What is the ultimate lesson that could come out of this mistake?
- What could the individual who made the mistake do from here to learn and improve?

“Leadership means always being in dialogue with your team. I ask questions. I’ve learned to ask ‘how’ questions and ‘what’ questions rather than ‘why’ questions. For example, if you ask, ‘Why would you have this step in the process?’ it immediately puts the other person on the defensive. If you use ‘what’ questions or ‘how’ questions, people feel able to share.”

Di Hu, VP, education administration, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, DC, USA (she/her)
As we heard in today's video, research shows that transformational leaders often have a unique ability to inspire their teams by articulating a strong mission and vision. This often starts with showing your own enthusiasm for the company’s mission.

In pairs, take 15 minutes to connect your personal story and passions with that of your company and role. In 2–3 minutes, share that vision with your partner. Once you have a chance to switch roles, have a conversation with the following questions in mind:

- Did your partner feel inspired by your vision?
- What was the most challenging part of articulating your vision? Why?
- How would you potentially change the vision you articulate based on who you are speaking to?
Even when our performance is strong, Asian women are less likely than other groups of women to receive positive feedback on our leadership abilities.²

- As a group, form a circle. Over the next 15 minutes, go around the circle and have each person share one strategy they’ve found effective in responding to biased assumptions that Asian women can face.

- After everyone has shared, discuss as a group what strategies you find the most effective and easiest to implement.

“We were handling an event, and my report made a major mistake in the Excel sheet. As a result, we sent the basic cost to the client without adding our markup. Instead of berating my team member, I said, ‘Fair enough. The client understands that we are here to make a profit.’ And I called up the client myself and resolved the situation. Because I supported my team member, I gave her the confidence to own up to mistakes, and for the next four years that she was on my team, she was one of my strongest performers.”

Sangita Marda Agarwal, co-founder, communications firm, Lean In Network Leader, India (she/her)
One Action 3 mins

● An important part of transformational leadership is to motivate team members with sincere, specific positive feedback.

● This week, take 2 minutes to identify one person at work to whom you’d like to give positive feedback. Think about something they did recently at work that you admired, and tell them in detail what they did well.

● Share the experience with your Circle the next time you meet.

Congratulations on a great meeting!

Endnotes