How to become a transformational leader

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for Women with Disabilities
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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

The stock photography used in this guide is courtesy of Getty Images.
Member updates

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

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

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?
Activity 1: Handling mistakes 15 mins

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 theirs is essential to transformational leadership.

- Break into groups of two or three.
- Each person should share a mistake they made at work (up to 2 minutes each).
- Then, discuss ways that a transformational leader would respond to this mistake.
  - They might ask, what is the lesson that could come out of this mistake? What could the individual who made the mistake do from here to learn and improve?

“One of my best managers showed me that he truly believed I had potential by throwing me into the fire. The confidence that he displayed in me gave me confidence to take additional steps of independence. He understood that sometimes I may need more time or other accommodations, but he saw my intelligence and my skill, and looked beyond my disability.”

Nadia Mossburg, senior manager, public sector, Florida, 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, connect your personal story and passions with that of your company and role, and 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?

“In terms of sharing power, I would say that I definitely had a supervisor who allowed me to be present and who recognized that I was definitely a subject-matter expert, that I needed a seat at the table. When we went places, and people directed their questions towards him, he would say, ‘Oh no, you need to ask Kristen. She's the one who knows what we're here for.’”

Kristen Dietz, JD, policy analyst, Washington, USA (she/her)
As women with disabilities, we’re more likely to encounter biased assumptions about our capabilities as workers and leaders. Less than half of women with disabilities feel they have equal opportunity for advancement, and almost a quarter say their disability has led to missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead.¹

- As a group, form a circle. Go around the circle and have each person share one strategy they’ve found effective in responding to biased assumptions that women with disabilities are less capable of leadership and advancement.

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

“I had one supervisor who was a pretty hard boss. He pushed me really hard, but he always stuck with me. He told me he believed in me and the power of my impact. There were times when I was shrinking back and not pushing myself as hard because I was nervous. He would call me out and say, ‘I know that you can do more. You can be more.’ He was more than just a boss, even in the hard moments. He was a mentor.”

Andraéa LaVant, president and founder, consulting firm (she/her)
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!