

Everyone Leads
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Are you a leader? Are you a leader at work, in your community or family? Of course you are! Each of us influences and impacts those around us all the time, every day.

Every day we model optimism, or something else. We encourage others to pursue excellence, or we don't. We lead our families to stand for principle or we show our children the path of compromise.

Our every act and word provides leadership for someone. Opinions and attitudes are contagious and they infect our colleagues, our neighbors and our loved ones. Our actions teach others what we value and our daily activities show others, perhaps more clearly than we know ourselves, exactly where we are headed.

As human beings, we have no choice but to lead our own lives. We cannot live for anyone else, and we cannot avoid the obligation to choose, to act, and to live our lives to the best of our ability. Our lives are not the fault or problem or result of our bosses, our parents, or our spouses. We provide the leadership; we create our own destiny.

Day by day, we decide when to get up in the morning, what to wear, and the basic attitudes we will carry through our days. Yes, of course, we are influenced by other people, circumstances and situations. The weather impacts us, and lousy business situations or fatigue all make a difference. Of course that's true.

But it's also true that the most vital leadership in your life is based on your free choice. You choose what to read, what to think about, and how to spend your time. As Viktor Frankl wrote after surviving the atrocities of Nazi concentration camps, "The last of all human freedoms is to choose our attitudes in whatever circumstance we find ourselves."

Here are just some of the key areas in which you will surely provide leadership today:

1. You will be your own best, most powerful and most persuasive leader. You will talk to yourself throughout the day, thinking hundreds of words every MINUTE, and deciding what is important, what is pleasant, what is dangerous, and what is boring. You will choose your response to thousands of advertisements, comments, questions and opportunities. Lead yourself in the direction you want to go.
2. You will lead those closest to you. You will smile or frown, and your expression will touch all who see it. You will speak up for what is right and good, or you will quietly wait for someone else, and your silence will speak volumes to those who watch. You will encourage someone who is tired, or you will complain about someone's behavior. You will lead those around you. Lead them to be the people you want to live and work with. Every day.
3. You will lead your community. You will show up for a luncheon, or not, and either way your choice is an act of leadership. If you show up, your voice, your energy and your ideas make a difference, and if you skip the meeting, your absence will, likewise, make a difference. You are a leader in your neighborhood, and your example touches your colleagues. Your words inspire those you speak with, and the bounce in your step, or your tired shoulders, will surely communicate to your family at the end of the day. Leadership is not a sometime things. It is not for others and it is not an option. Leadership is how we touch one another, it's the way we influence one another, the way we model our values in real life. People are watching, and you have influence. First, you influence yourself by your actions, choices, and attitudes, and in turn your choices lead those around you upward and forward, or in some other direction. This business of leadership is a serious thing. Every day, in big and small ways, lead yourself in the direction you want to go.