



## Factsheet 32

Updated on 5 February 2021

## An Introduction to Leadership

*This factsheet has been designed for use by healthcare professionals only.*

There are numerous models and theories of leadership, and it is worth taking time to read around the subject and find those that feel most applicable to yourself and your style. However, there are some common elements, and as an introduction to leadership, it can be helpful to think about two 'Golden Rules':

1. *It's **Not** About You.* As a leader you always need to be listening to your colleagues or patients, taking on board their questions, concerns and feedback in order to provide the best guidance you can. You cannot make things happen in isolation: working in partnership towards a common goal is essential. Most importantly, as a leader your role is often to help people find their own solutions, rather than imposing your views or ideas upon them.
2. *It's **All** About You.* While it is important to listen to others and consider their perspectives, ultimately the only person whose behaviour you can change is your own. Your patients and colleagues can choose whether to follow your advice, but the responsibility lies with them to recognise where change is needed and commit to making it happen. In a leadership role, your job is to set an example for others by modelling the desired behaviour(s) and making a compelling case for change through your own practice.

### What makes an effective leader?

Great leaders exhibit a variety of characteristics that help them to effect change and it is difficult to define a core set of qualities. Usually though, the most effective leaders demonstrate some or all of the following:

- Good communication skills. These include confident body language (including making eye contact); using clear and concise language; using the appropriate tone for the subject and audience; and conveying a message clearly and with passion.
- A willingness to delegate. Effective leaders believe they can do **anything** but know they cannot do **everything** – it is important to trust your team to carry out tasks that contribute to a shared aim.

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- Creative problem-solving skills, in particular an ability to identify and implement innovative solutions where others may have struggled. We often talk about 'thinking outside the box'; in leadership, this can mean generating new ideas but also finding strategies to improve and expand existing ones.
- A positive attitude. The most successful leaders look for opportunities where others might see threats and focus on achieving a desired outcome despite the immediate obstacles that appear to be in the way (this is sometimes referred to as seeing 'the bigger picture'). A culture of positivity in the workplace is particularly important for morale and keeping individuals (including patients) motivated to succeed.

### A final thought: 'Barefoot' Leadership

In her 2009 book *The Barefoot Executive*, Education for Health Chief Executive Dr Linda Edwards discusses the importance of developing a leadership style that incorporates both your intellectual self – that is, your knowledge and understanding – and your 'true' self; that is, the essence of who you are. In this way, leadership becomes not only something that you do, but a part of who you are.

Over the coming months, Education for Health's Learning Academy will be rolling out a series of CPD learning opportunities, including Leadership courses for healthcare professionals at all levels. If you are interested in learning more, please do continue to [check the website](#) or [subscribe to our newsletter](#) for updates.