



One surprising thing effective leaders do well

By Jay Geier, DrBicuspid.com contributing writer

May 24, 2017 -- When you're a kid, you think that being a leader is all about being first. You want to be in the front of the line, at the center of attention. But, unfortunately, a lot of people never grow out of the me-first mindset. They fail to recognize one of leadership's most important lessons, and it has a startlingly negative effect on their professional careers.

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Jay Geier is the president and founder of the Scheduling Institute.

This June, roughly 800 select students will enter the grounds of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY, to begin their education as military officers. The academy's elite leader development program is one of the most renowned and rigorous programs in the U.S. But do you know what actually happens when new students arrive? Even if they are the biggest hotshot in their class (and many of them are), they are forced to swallow their pride. They will spend the next 47 months learning to follow. In fact, their ability to master this one simple lesson is what will allow their true leadership potential to be developed and realized.

Why? Because every great leader begins as an excellent follower. As a practice owner, you are a leader of your team, for your patients, and in your community.

I know from experience that this title of leader doesn't always sit comfortably on your shoulders. Probably because there is no "West Point" of dental schools churning out hard-core leaders with amazing clinical skills. But like it or not, you are a leader. So, who are you following?

Leading and following

Following is a form of leading by example. If you are not willing to follow, it means you think you know it all. If you expect your team to line up behind you like obedient ducklings, but you can't fathom taking advice or guidance from someone else -- you will never reach your full potential. There are a lot of things you don't know, and the only way to learn is through following.

And by following you get to grow and stretch your capacity. You also get to show your team what it looks like to follow direction and have discipline. If you expect your team leaders to lead your teams and follow you, you need to model both behaviors. Your people need to see you as a good leader in the office, and they need to see you following respected mentors and coaches who teach you and challenge you to improve.

When those around you (including your kids, by the way) see you willing to follow people who are pushing you to reach your full potential, they will take note. They will appreciate that you can lead them to reach their full potential if they are willing to follow and learn from you.

If you were to interview the world's most respected and impactful leaders, you'd find out that they are all following someone who knows more about something than they do. These people embrace their role as followers, so they can learn more and be the best they can possibly be.

Full potential

One of my biggest fears is not fulfilling my full potential, which is why I have always taken my role as a follower very seriously. I wouldn't be where I am today without key people who shared valuable information with me. I understand the value of being coachable, and, in turn, I am able to be a good coach to others. Once I know something has worked for me, I share it with my clients, staff, friends, and family.

Similarly, my most successful clients are the most coachable. They are able to put their pride aside, admit they don't know it all, and recognize they have a lifetime of continuous learning ahead of them. In fact, I've noted a direct correlation between each client's ability to accept guidance and the financial success of his or her practice.

So, here's the bottom line: If you have neglected your role as a leader or follower, this is a wake-up call. The earlier you learn to become an excellent follower, the more successful you'll be as a leader. It's not rocket science, but it is one of the most overlooked and underestimated practice growing techniques in the industry.

A few weeks ago, I wrote a [column](#) instructing you to turn off the radio and listen to something that will make you better. That's following. This Saturday, the U.S. Military Academy will graduate its 2017 class of leaders who will, no doubt, be consummate followers.

Jay Geier is the founder and owner of the [Scheduling Institute](#), a dental training and practice consulting company. To learn more new patient strategies that yield long-term results, register for a two-day [Ultimate New Patient Attraction Event](#) in September in Philadelphia and December in Atlanta and Phoenix.

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