

How To Scratch Leadership Off Your “Bucket List”

So, You Want To Lead...Get To It!

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The Bucket List. If you've seen it, you're probably smiling right now. The film, directed by Rob Reiner, and starring Morgan Freeman along with Jack Nicholson, is an authentic call to action. The story stresses the need to do the things you dream of, and to do them before it's everlasting too late.

If there were a real “bucket list” for the corporate citizen, somewhere on that list, perhaps, even prominently positioned near the top, would be the desire to lead. Granted, the desire may not be to lead a Fortune 100 enterprise or an international humanitarian operation, yet it still remains, that the desire to be seen as an effective, proactive, and competent leader is secretly harbored by persons at all levels of an organization.

Almost everyone has some idea or opinion about leadership, how a leader ought to comport himself or herself, and the course of action the leader should follow. Let it be known, that there is no shortage of opinions, points and counterpoints regarding the topic of leadership. Clearly, the practice of leader-bashing has become the official corporate pastime. The caustic commentary will center on leaders in the boardroom, the White House, and all the way down to the leader of the local PTA. No leader is free from the often myopic and anonymous opinions of the general public.

Many of those individuals engaging in the most scathing and salty critiques are also convinced that they could do that leader's job. But not just do that job, but do it better by grand orders of magnitude. The problem is, the overwhelming majority of those complaining, end up doing nothing to test their theories. Call them armchair quarterbacks or revisionists, the fact is, because they have done nothing, attempted nothing, accomplished nothing, they are left only to tell their great stories of woulda, coulda, and shoulda.

As illustrated by the stars of the Bucket List, if you really want to check an item off your list, you have to do more than just talk about – you have to do it. Here are 5 ways to make sure you check leading off your bucket list:

Seek Additional Responsibility At Work – As the old HR adage goes, “Bloom where you're planted.” Seeking additional responsibilities at work will eventually land you a role as a committee member, project lead, or task force chairperson. In those roles, you'll have the opportunity to showcase you current skill set and develop new leadership skills. The result is that you will gain exposure and credibility in the workplace.

Get Involved In The Professional Associations Within Your Industry – These organizations are usually starved for someone to embrace the role of leader. Make no mistake, it will be a true test of your leadership ability, as the staff, committee members, and board members are usually volunteers. You'll have to work on your influence, consensus building, and collaboration skills to be effective in that type of role.

Become More Active In Your Worship/Faith Community – Ask anyone involved in the process of leading people of faith, and you will find it presents its own unique challenges, dynamics, and rewards. The opportunities are often there for the asking. Leading a small study group, prayer group, or “willing workers” auxiliary is sure to help you develop your leadership chops (and your faith).

Start A Business – This is really more about self-leadership than most people would think. As an entrepreneur, your success is based on your discipline. If you don't network, make the sales calls, follow up, and get your invoices out in a timely fashion, you will soon experience serious cash flow challenges. For many people, self-leadership is the first and greatest barrier to developing into an effective leader of a team, unit, or department.

Volunteer To Serve On A Not-For-Profit Board – The dynamics of board membership are a true proving ground for leadership development. Legacy practices and personalities often present themselves as obstacles to progress. There will be no shortage of opportunities for you to test your leadership approach and evaluate its effectiveness. Equally beneficial, you'll have access to other leaders and can learn by observing how they get things done.

While I'm not sure you'll have a chance encounter with a terminally ill roommate who will guide you through the items on your bucket list. But what I do know for sure is if you want to check an item off the list you have to get to it, do it, and do it now! These five strategies mentioned above have proven to be a springboard to gaining sound leadership experience and enhanced development. So, stop waiting and get to it!

Leadership Lesson: Leadership is about doing – that is doing what needs to be done to facilitate maximum productivity, profitability, and efficiency. It takes more than your callous critiques of others to make you an effective leader. Stop complaining and start contributing. Now is the time to scratch leadership off your bucket list.

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