



## Learn effectively by understanding your learning preferences

Have you ever tried to learn something fairly simple, yet failed to grasp the key ideas? Or tried to teach people and found that some were overwhelmed or confused by something quite basic?

If so, you may have experienced a clash of learning styles: Your learning preferences and those of your instructor or audience may not have been aligned. When this occurs, not only is it frustrating for everyone, the communication process breaks down and learning fails.

Once you know your own natural learning preference, you can work on expanding the way you learn, so that you can learn in other ways, not just in your preferred style.

And, by understanding learning styles, you can learn to create an environment in which everyone can learn from you, not just those who use your preferred style.

Whenever you are training or communicating with others, you have information and ideas that you want them to understand and learn effectively and efficiently. Your audience is likely to demonstrate a wide range of learning preferences, and your challenge is to provide variety that helps them learn quickly and well.

Your preferred teaching and communication methods may in fact be influenced by your own learning preferences. For example, if you prefer visual rather than verbal learning, you may in turn tend to provide a visual learning experience for your audience.

Be aware of your preferences

and the range of preference of your audiences. Provide a balanced learning experience by:

**Sensory - Intuitive:** Provide both hard facts and general concepts.

**Visual - Verbal:** Incorporate both visual and verbal cues.

**Active - Reflective:** Allow both experiential learning and time for evaluation and analysis.

**Sequential - Global:** Provide detail in a structured way, as well as the big picture.

### Key Points

Learning styles and preferences vary for each of us and in different situations.

By understanding this, and developing the skills that help you learn in a variety of ways, you make the most of your learning potential. And because you're better able to learn and gather information, you'll make better decisions and choose better courses of action.

And by understanding that other people can have quite different learning preferences, you can learn to communicate your message effectively in a way that many more people can understand. This is fundamentally important, particularly if you're a professional for whom communication is an important part of your job.

Take time to identify how you prefer to learn and then force yourself to break out of your comfort zone. Once you start learning in new ways you'll be amazed at how much more you catch and how much easier it is to assimilate information and make sense of what is going on.

# Leading from the front

There are many different power bases that a leader can develop and use.

These include problematic ones such as the power of position, the power to give rewards, the power to punish and the power to control information. While these types of power do have some strength, they put the person being led in an unhealthy position of weakness, and can leave leaders using these power bases looking autocratic and out of touch.

More than this, society has changed hugely over the last 50 years. Citizens are individually more powerful, and employees are more able to shift jobs. Few of us enjoy having power exerted over us, and many will do what they can to undermine people who use these sorts of power.

However there are three types of positive power that effective leaders use: charismatic power, expert power and referent power.

This article teaches you how to build expert power.

Expert power is essential because as a leader, your team looks to you for direction and guidance. Team members need to believe in your ability to set a worthwhile direction, give sound guidance and co-ordinate a good result.

If your team perceives you as a true expert, they will be much more receptive when you try to exercise influence tactics such as rational persuasion and inspirational appeal.

What's more, if members of your team see you as an expert, you will find it much easier to guide them in such a way as to create high motivation:

If team members respect your expertise, they'll know that you can show them how to work effectively;

If members of your team trust your judgment, they'll trust you to guide their good efforts in such a way that you'll make the most of their hard work; and

If they can see your expertise, team members are more likely to believe that you have the wisdom to direct their efforts towards a goal that is genuinely worthwhile.

Taken together, if your team sees you as an expert, you will find it much easier to motivate team members to perform at their best.

### So how do you build expert power?

But just being an expert isn't enough, it is also necessary for your team members to recognize your expertise and see you to be a credible source of information and advice. Gary A. Yukl, in his book "Leadership in Organizations," details some steps to build expert power. A summary of these steps follows:

**Promote an image of expertise:** Since perceived expertise in many occupations is associated with a person's education and experience, a leader should - in a low key way - make sure that subordinates, peers, and superiors are aware of his or her formal education, relevant work experience, and significant accomplishments.

One common tactic to make this information known is to display diplomas, licenses, awards, and other evidence of expertise in a prominent location in one's office - after all, if you've worked hard to gain knowledge, it's fair that you get credit for it.



Another tactic is to make subtle references to prior education or experience (for example, "When I was chief engineer at GE, we had a problem similar to this one"). Beware, however, this tactic can easily be overdone.

**Keep informed:** Expert power is exercised through rational persuasion and demonstration of expertise. Rational persuasion depends on a firm grasp of up-to-date facts. It is therefore essential for a leader to keep well-informed of developments within the team, within the organization, and in the outside world.

**Recognize subordinate concerns:** Use of rational persuasion should not be seen as a form of one-way communication from the leader to subordinates. Effective leaders listen carefully to the concerns and uncertainties of their team members, and make sure that they address these in making a persuasive appeal.

**Avoid threatening the self-esteem of subordinates:** Expert power is based on a knowledge differential between leader and team members. Unfortunately, the very existence of such a differential can cause problems if the leader is not careful about the way he exercises expert power.

Team members can dislike unfavorable status comparisons where the gap is very large and obvious. They are likely to be upset by a leader who acts in a superior way, and arrogantly flaunts his greater expertise.

In the process of presenting rational arguments, some leaders lecture their team members in a condescending manner and convey the impression that the other team members are "ignorant." Guard against this - it can make you look very arrogant.

Act confidently and decisively in a crisis: In a cri-

sis or emergency, subordinates prefer a "take charge" leader who appears to know how to direct the group in coping with the problem. In this kind of situation, subordinates tend to associate confident, firm leadership with expert knowledge. Even if the leader is not sure of the best way to deal with a crisis, to express doubts or appear confused risks the loss of influence over subordinates.

**Maintain credibility:** Once established, one's image of expertise should be carefully protected. The leader should avoid making careless comments about subjects on which he or she is poorly informed, and should avoid being associated with projects with a low likelihood of success.

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## Harness..

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### Appoint a Cross-functional Suggestion Review Team

A cross-functional team must review the suggestions which must be acknowledged within 48 hours. If this team is all managers, or all directors, it can be perceived as out of touch or blocking change. It will, however, have the power to implement the suggestions it receives. If it involves other employees, the process can be time-consuming and perceived to serve self-interests. Senior management agreement and ownership become a second step in the approval process. People on the team must be willing to change and willing to ask "why not" rather than "why?"

Finance, especially, and all other departments must be represented on the suggestion review team. If the managers or directors review suggestions, the review must be part of a regularly scheduled meeting, with suggestions distributed and considered in advance. If the team meets more often than monthly, it becomes more work than people are usually willing to do. Rotate members of this team 4-6 times a year, but not all members at once, if a cross-functional employee team is your selected suggestion review vehicle. The choice of team members for the suggestion review team should reflect how business is generally accomplished in your culture.

Here are more ideas for designing and administering an effective employee suggestion programme - beyond the suggestion box.

The process decided upon for the submission and review of suggestions in the employee suggestion programme should be publicly communicated. Share all of the guidelines and especially, the goals that you are trying to accomplish, by starting an employee suggestion programme.

### Establish Guidelines for Your Employee Suggestion Programme

You'll need to set guidelines such as which topics are open to suggestions. These will likely include ideas that affect cost savings, quality, productivity, process improvements, revenue-generation and morale-enhancement.

Otherwise, as a client in Florida discovered when he promised \$25 per employee suggestion; he received a series of employee suggestions such as: put an ice cream machine in the lunch room, put a corn popping machine in the lunch room and any employee who meets their daily production numbers should be able to go home no matter the time of day.

An employee suggestion needs to be more than a suggestion. It must provide some detail about how the proposer thinks the suggestion should be implemented. It is easy to dash off an idea, I would require that additional detail accompany the idea - not a full blown action plan - but at least more detail than an idea. Definitely require the "why" and "how" the idea will impact the company, including a cost savings analysis. At the same time, within these parameters, the suggestion process should be simple. I once knew a company that had a three page employee suggestion form whose managers wondered why they didn't receive any employee suggestions.

Ideas that are integrally connected to a person's job should not be considered, or should be dealt with differently. At Toyota, millions of suggestions are generated each year.

It is my understanding that the reason they have so many employee suggestions is that the employees are closely focused on improving their own jobs. The employee thinks of an improvement idea, shares it with his or her supervisor and then, if warranted, the idea is implemented immediately. There is no time-consuming process or group of managers that must consider most ideas. In this scenario, managers must be able to reward people who come up with ideas that fit the parameters of the programme.

### More Guidelines for Your Successful Employee Suggestion Program

You need to designate an administrator for the employee suggestion programme who will make sure the process moves as promised.

A mid-sized Michigan manufacturing firm found itself with a list of over a hundred suggestions that were bogged down in a review committee that kept postponing meetings. What a morale buster for the people who had so hopefully turned those suggestions in for consideration!

The process decided upon should be publicly communicated with all of the guidelines and especially, the goals that you are trying to accomplish, by starting an employee suggestion programme. Set guidelines such as the topics open to suggestions: cost savings, quality, productivity, process improvements, revenue-generating ideas and improved employee motivation and positive morale.

A senior manager needs to champion the employee suggestion programme and sit on the evaluation committee. This lends credibility to the employee suggestion programme and makes suggesters feel important.

- [humanresources.about.com](http://humanresources.about.com)

## Three key office systems you need to manage your business

These days we are so overloaded with information that it's easy to lose sight of the basics of running a business, and you very quickly become overwhelmed and suffer from information overload! Just take a look at some of the ebooks, products, courses etc. you have stored on your PC - I bet they all relate to marketing your business, getting more clients, increasing your income etc. but I bet NONE of them tell you how to manage your business!

Building a successful long-term profitable business isn't about "marketing" your business, it's about "managing" your business - the marketing comes once you have

your management systems in place.

You cannot begin to market your business if you can't find the information you need, don't know who you are marketing to, and don't know where you are in your business.

So, let's go back to basics and take a look at the 3 key office systems you need to "manage" your business before you can start to "market" your business.

### Filing Management System

Creating and maintaining a filing system is the very foundation that your business is built on, so this is the very first system you

need to put in place - an efficient and effective filing system.

With a proper filing system in place you will very quickly and easily be able to find the information you need, when you need it.

### Contact Management System

After you've got your filing system all straightened out, you then need to set about organizing your contacts. This is another crucial area of managing your business. If set up correctly your contact management system allows you to:

- ▶ Keep a note of clients, potential clients, and colleagues contact information.
- ▶ Easily and effectively follow-up with a prospect.
- ▶ Locate critical client contact information quickly and easily.
- ▶ Build your business.

### Financial Management System

This is the final key office management system you need to put in place for managing your business. Once you know where you are in your business financially, you will be able to much more effectively market your business.

Having up-to-date, critical, financial information available at your fingertips allows you to efficiently manage cashflow and be able to know straightaway if you can take advantage of opportunities that come your way.

So remember, go back to basics and first "manage" your business before you "market" your business.

