

Employee Leadership Development

By Doug Stanart, CEO of The Leader's Institute

In today's business world, conflicts are inevitable, but they don't have to be costly or time-consuming. If you manage people or projects, chances are that a majority of your day is spent resolving conflicts, in dispute resolution, or problem solving for other people. You may get to the point where you ask, "How am I supposed to get my job done, when I am constantly putting out fires."

The simple answer is, "You're not!"

This is going to really hurt, but if we are constantly putting out fires, we have our own selves to blame. I know that this phrase seems pretty harsh, but let's take a look at some simple truths about human behavior that makes this statement true. If someone comes to us with a conflict or a problem, and we solve it for that person, we will probably feel really good about ourselves. We'll feel like we've done our job. However, the next time the same person has a problem or a conflict, what have we trained the person to do? That's right. Come to us to solve it. Our job as managers and leaders is to not solve problems and put out fires. Our job is to build the self-confidence and self-esteem of our employees so they can solve the problems on their own.

Instead of spending time solving their problems for them, try asking questions and getting their opinions so they gain confidence coming up with solutions on their own. More often than not, they will surprise you with as good an answer as you would have given - sometimes even better. There may be times when you might even want to let them make small mistakes. People learn from their mistakes very quickly.

As your direct reports begin to solve problems on their own, their confidence in these areas will grow. This process is just one of many that can help us build strong leaders around us. In fact, as a speaker and trainer, I've come across a number of principles that have helped thousands of successful leaders and managers build strong people around them. The following is a summary of SEVEN of the principles that have been the most effective.

1. **Establish solid trust before offering advice.** *Trust men, and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great.* -Ralph Waldo Emerson
2. **Keep promises... even small ones.** *Character is much easier kept than recovered.* -Thomas Paine
3. **Be enthusiastic about the success of others.** *Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders.* -Tom Peters
4. **Recognize the potential in others and help them achieve it.** *Treat people as if they were what they should be, and you help them become what they are capable of becoming.* -Johann von Goethe
5. **Catch people doing things right.** *People ask for criticism, but they only want praise.* -W. Somerset Maugham

6. **Praise the baby steps.** *Praise is like sunlight to the human spirit: we cannot flower and grow without it. -Jess Lair*
7. **Go out of your way for people.** *To lead the people, walk behind them. -Lao-Tzu*

Bonus Principle: Always give something extra. Under-promise; over-deliver. -Tom Peters
Doug Stanart, doug@leaderinstitute.com, is CEO of The Leaders Institute, Leadership and Management training. His classes focus on overcoming the fear of public speaking, building confident and autonomous leaders, and improving employee morale. He can be reached toll-free at 1-800-872-7830.