



# LEADERSHIP: LESSON ONE

MASTERING  
THE FUNDAMENTALS  
OF LEADERSHIP

MORTEN HEEDEGAARD

LEADERSHIP:  
LESSON ONE

Leadership: Lesson One  
Morten Heedegaard

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# LEADERSHIP: LESSON ONE

The right results tomorrow require  
effective leadership today.

Effective leadership requires the right skills.

LEADERSHIP: LESSON ONE provides the  
foundation for building effective  
leadership skills.

**Morten Heedegaard**



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# **PREFACE**

Here you are—sitting in a leadership position because someone has great confidence in you—your manager.

Promoting you into that leadership position—whether it is your first leadership position or a more senior position—comes with an obligation on the part of your manager to offer you the support you need to grow and become a successful leader. And, likewise, you have the same responsibility for your team.

Most leaders are appointed into their first leadership roles based on their technical expertise. And, in many cases, this happens suddenly, and implies a massive change for new leaders.



While LEADERSHIP: LESSON ONE is a useful guide for freshly minted leaders, it can also provide value to more seasoned leaders. When you get bogged down in complex projects, the simple framework in LEADERSHIP: LESSON ONE will help you get things back on track. And if you have just appointed new leaders to your team, it is a useful guide to help you coach them and increase their competencies so that they too can lead with confidence.

The objective of the framework is to help you produce results, as that is ultimately what matters. I am not a proponent of results at any expense, and the framework takes that into account by integrating the importance of developing people's capabilities along the way.

In the game of tennis, you have to have the right grip on the racket before you can go on to master the game. Much like tennis, leaders need to grasp some core concepts before they can master the subtle nuances of leadership. The core concepts are the foundation upon which they can add more complex layers. But the core remains the same, and they can return

to it time and time again to set them on the right path.

Leaders are an essential part of any organization; they set direction, motivate others and shape results. Whether they are senior leaders in a large multinational, team leaders or junior project managers, they have all been new to leadership at some point, and they all need to grasp some core concepts in order to lead with confidence.

During my first appointment to a leadership role more than 15 years ago, I was feeling frustrated and had a lot of questions: What is leadership all about? Where is the instruction manual? How do I lead? And, how is my success as a leader measured? Overnight, I made the transition from being an “expert in my field” to suddenly being thrust into a leadership role. I was no longer required to complete tasks and projects; instead, I had to lead others. This was a completely new game, and it shook my self-confidence.

Several years later, I came to realize that my continuous search for *the right way to lead*

was a never-ending journey. So I redirected my energy into finding the simple, core components that could apply to any leadership situation.

Since I have always enjoyed understanding how things work and condensing problems down to their essence, I decided to set my sights on unravelling the leadership puzzle.

When I stand back and look at the various projects and tasks I have been responsible for over the past 10+ years, I see that I had some hits and some misses along the way.

The interesting thing is that the misses offered the most learning. As I dug deeper into the reasons why my objectives were not met, it came down to one or some combination of four root causes. Nothing more, nothing less. Just four.

When I turned this around, and looked at my hits, it appeared that all four of these components were in good shape.

Once you condense it down to the four powerful, yet simple components that are at the core of leadership, you can then begin to add more

complex layers, but the four core components remain the same.

The simple framework outlined in this book serves as a solid base for continuous growth. When things feel out of control, you can always return to the core components. They will help you shape your day-to-day interactions with both your superiors and your team.

LEADERSHIP: LESSON ONE is dedicated to leaders and managers who dare to look in the mirror and reflect on ways in which they can improve their leadership skills to produce better results.

And therefore it only adds value when you start practicing—and thereby grow your leadership in a direction that also includes the continuous development of your team or the people you are working with.

As long as you can identify with the belief that continuously strengthening the basics is a great way for you to grow, I hope you will benefit from this simple, yet powerful framework.



# INTRODUCTION: THE FOOTPRINT OF A LEADER

The terms management and leadership are often used interchangeably. While they are related, they are very different.

*Leadership* is the role of defining a vision or future direction, while *Management* implies steering within a given set of frameworks, objectives, processes or structures. In other words, the leader sets the destination; the manager makes sure you arrive.

Oftentimes, the leader and manager roles are held by the same person. And this book takes that into account because you cannot manage without leadership, and if you try to lead without managing, your impact will be limited.

To avoid confusion, I generally use leadership when referring to these roles.

Eventually, as a leader, we all leave our positions. When that happens, there are two types of footprints in the sand that we can make before we leave: big, bold and long lasting or small, weak and quickly gone.

Ultimately, you want your footprint to contain two elements:

1. Achieve results today to leave a big, bold footprint.
2. Develop people to take on tomorrow and leave a long-lasting footprint.

Together, these two achievements are the ultimate characteristics of a good leader. If you can develop people to continue achieving solid results even after you are gone, you have done your job.

Achieving solid results needs no further explanation—it is mandatory. However, ensuring that people develop and grow is also vital, though it is easily overlooked in the day-to-day quest for short-term results.

The rate of change has accelerated to the point where the competencies required five years ago are no longer enough today. As a result, it is critical to continuously develop the relevant skills and competencies that will be required not only today, but also in the future.

**Today's results arose  
from yesterday's competencies.**

**And tomorrow's results will depend on your  
ability to grow competencies today.**

If you fail to achieve results, you typically will not last long in your job. However, achieving results without developing people often goes unnoticed in the short term, but it results in an unsustainable situation for the organization. Without a competent workforce, an organization cannot survive.

If, however, you have focused on developing people and growing their competencies, but you are not achieving results in the short or medium term, you will not last long either.



Great leaders do not result from a single event or leadership program; they evolve over time, and their skill level is the culmination of a variety of events and experiences.

If you look at an organization today, you see a *current state* that reflects the past decisions leaders have made, or not made, within the organization to optimize the future. It also reflects the competencies within the organization, and to some extent, those external factors that have come into play that were beyond anyone's control.

And in all cases, the fact remains that without the combination of strong leadership and a competent team, even the best leaders will have difficulty driving results. Both are essential. And, it will take time for both to grow and evolve. As Vincent van Gogh once said:

**Great things are not done by impulse,  
but by a series  
of small things brought together.**

Random courses and seminars every now and then are not enough to develop the competencies required across an entire organization; nor are they enough to develop a strong leader. Like exercise, a couple of weeks a year does not make you physically fit.

Training needs to be integrated into regular work. You do not need to tack it onto your already busy workweek. Instead, you need to integrate what you know into *how* you lead and practice it every day. And growing competencies is a big part of the leadership DNA.

This requires you, as the leader, to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your team members on an ongoing basis. Rather than waiting for their annual or semi-annual performance reviews, you must provide them with more timely feedback. Next, you need to work with them to find ways to grow their competencies.

Training sessions can play a role, but they provide the most value when they are linked back to their daily tasks, which again are linked

to the overall goals and future requirements of your team and the entire organization.

LEADERSHIP: LESSON ONE views both strong results and the development of competencies as an integrated whole—they are both equally important.

### **What then are the limits of a leader's responsibility?**

Ultimately, there are no limits. In the end, the leader remains responsible.

The leader has a mandate to not only hire people, but also fire them, or propose organizational changes to a superior, if their performance is not good enough. Furthermore, the leader has the right as well as the obligation to anchor areas of responsibility within the team.

Accountability for results ultimately rests on the shoulders of the leader. When the progress of a project team or direct report is poor, it is ultimately the responsibility of the leader. And when results are delivered, or if they exceed

expectations, the true leader directs the gratitude and applause towards the team.

**True leaders take the blame;  
the team takes the fame.**

When an organizational initiative fails to achieve its objective, you can usually link it back to the decisions that were made, or not made, the execution or external factors that were not addressed. At the end of the day, it is the leader who is responsible for the decisions that were made, or perhaps more importantly, the decisions that were *not* made.

Mistakes can be a fantastic source of learning, when used constructively to consider what went wrong, what could have been done differently and—ultimately—what was learned.

Daring to discuss failure through a learning lens is a crucial step in adopting better ways of working and ultimately growing the leader and team's ability to be more proactive when necessary. Often, with just a slight shift by the leader at an earlier stage, the team can make

more progress. If we admit that the leader is not always right, we give ourselves an excellent opportunity to learn!

Some cultures have little tolerance for failures, which, in turn, may stifle creativity and encourage risk avoidance. Yet in other cultures, people are tolerant of mistakes.

**The best culture is a culture where people are *obliged to learn* from the mistakes that undoubtedly will happen.**

A true leader never lets the learning stop, whether it is his or her learning or the team's learning.

Thank you for reading the first part of LEADERSHIP:  
LESSON ONE.

In the next chapter, you start working to sharpen  
WHAT you want to achieve.

This is not only about what YOU want to achieve,  
but equally important getting you and the team  
aligned on WHAT you aim to achieve together.

*If you don't know where you want to go,  
you can never convince a team  
to join you on the journey.*

Buy the book at our [webshop](#):

