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Practical Guide for New Executives

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Why a Practical Guide?

Preface



The idea for this guide has been on my mind for a while. I became an executive in the public service in 2008, and at the time I had no idea what my career aspirations were, what my leadership style was or even why I wanted to be an executive. I didn't take the time to explore some key questions, like *what value do I bring* and *what impact do I want to have?*

I learned, first and foremost, by trial and error in those first few years – sometimes making costly mistakes. Although I was fortunate to have been surrounded by amazing coaches and mentors that acted as role models for me, I wish someone would have taken the time to enlighten me about what it means to be an executive. I would have benefited from having a guide, like this one, to explain what I needed to know as a new executive – some of those “non-written” rules, the nuances, the do's and don'ts of leadership and the common pitfalls to avoid!

Every year we welcome, on average, over 730 new executives who want to make a difference. They know that despite the many challenges, it is still so rewarding and gratifying to be a leader in the public service. It offers a unique opportunity to influence and guide change, challenge the status quo, and help shape workplace culture, all the while delivering concrete results for Canadians.

Publishing this guide is a golden opportunity for me. A chance to give back to the community I have been a part of for over a decade and continue my quest to empower more people-centric leaders to take the leap to the executive ranks. This guide complements your organization's onboarding toolkit, the [Learning Pathway for Executives](#) offered by the Canada school of Public Service, and APEX leadership development programming and services to new executives.

Enjoy the journey and reach out anytime for a conversation to further discuss specific sections of the guide!

Nathalie Clément

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Senior Advisor to Executives, APEX Advisory Services

Acknowledgments

I enjoyed putting together this practical guide from various sources accumulated over the years, influenced, of course, by my own lived experiences as I progressed through my leadership journey. I get inspired daily by accessing content from trusted sources. My LinkedIn account is full of thought-provoking and insightful infographics and content from HR professional associations and firms, publishers, renown sources such as Harvard Business Review, Forbes, the Canadian HR Reporter, Les Affaires, thought leaders and influencers, accredited coaches and research firms like McKinsey & Company and Deloitte, to name a few.



My inspiration reached new heights when I recently participated in an APEX special event for new and aspiring executives, hosted in partnership with the National Managers' Community and the Canada School of Public Service. The panel discussion attracted over 1,200 participants and the level of engagement was extremely high. The content of this guide was also inspired by the wisdom of the panelists at this event and informed by the +120 questions participants raised.

I also leveraged various data sources available at Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), my home department, and APEX such as results of the [5th Survey of New Executives](#), feedback received during leadership events such as [Building the Next Generation of Public Service Leadership](#) and the [Advisory Services for Executives \(ASE\) annual reports](#). And I want to thank Carl Trottier, my CEO, for believing in this project and giving me the greenlight to proceed, and my colleagues at ECCC for reviewing and validating the content, and focus-testing it with new executives.

Special thanks to Bailey Murdoch for her contributions and advice throughout the guide in her capacity as Integral Master Coach™, and to the Federal Ombuds network.

Foreword by APEX CEO



I am delighted you are contemplating a career as a public service executive or have recently joined the ranks of the executive cadre! You are our next generation of leaders, ready to embrace a dynamic future. We need you to bring your love of people to leverage talent and help us rebrand the public service of the future. We need transformational leaders to help us rethink how we lead, recruit, and develop talent. We need leaders who are not afraid to challenge the systems and the status quo. We need connectors, relationship builders, innovators, caring and charismatic leaders.

APEX is your professional association, led by executives for executives. Our main role is to deliver value to the executive community nationally and internationally. This practical guide was developed in response to frequently asked questions by newly appointed and aspiring executives. At APEX, we are investing in you. We support you as an individual, as a community and we are your voice. We are building our research capacity, leveraging partnerships, developing centres of excellence in health and wellness, leadership, and total compensation. We are actively working to enrich your experience as an executive.

To remain relevant and connected to the interests and emerging needs of the executive community, we need your support and contributions more than ever! Give us feedback on our programming, services, tools, and resources; consider being an APEX ambassador in your organization, participate in our numerous initiatives and networking events for new executives.

You will broaden your leadership skills, build a strong network of colleagues across the public service that will act as partners and enablers to your achievements and optimize your personal brand as an executive. You are given a unique opportunity to become a positive driving force and advocate for your community by supporting initiatives that resonate with you as a leader.

Embrace and leverage the power of opportunity to achieve success. Be the change you want to be and see in the workplace. Best of luck in your leadership journey, and remember, you matter, and you are not alone!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Trottier'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Carl Trottier
APEX Chief Executive Officer

Making the Leap to the Executive Ranks

Reflections

Finding Your Purpose

You are considering making the leap to the executive ranks but are hesitant, doubtful, and fearful, not sure if this is for you? You are wondering what it takes to be a successful executive, and if you are ready? Take the time to write out your answers to the following questions to crystallize and fully articulate your purpose:

- Reflect on your career and leadership journey to date, it will help you self-assess your own readiness for a leadership role – are you thriving in your current role, hungry for a more influential role, some additional corporate responsibilities?
- What environment do you thrive in?
- How do you learn best?
- What type of superior do you prefer?
- How equipped are you when it comes to managing people virtually?
- How are you coping with stress and workload management?
- Find your why, your main motivation to become an executive, and clearly articulate it. What are the principles and values that guide you? What are you passionate about? What brings you energy and self-motivation?
- What environment are you creating as a leader, and are you equipped to create thriving and psychologically safe workplaces?
- Do you have a good network and support system, access to coaches, guides and mentors that can boost your energy, and help you address areas of development and assess readiness?



Talk to several executives at various levels and roles, and in different departments to confront assumptions, biases, perceptions, and beliefs. Determine what your expertise and value add is as a leader; this will help you assess the right fit for your first executive role.

Make an informed decision by consulting the [Treasury Board's Secretariat Policy on the Management of Executives](#) and the [Directive on Terms and Conditions of Employment of Executives](#) (if you are not part of the core public service administration, consult your Human Resources Branch for applicable policies, guidelines, and terms and conditions).

Considerations Prior to Accepting an Executive Role

Do your research:

- Do an initial fact finding about the position, the current operational and strategic context. Is this an acting or an indeterminate appointment?
- How comfortable are you with the role? Would this be a good fit for you or is it a stretch? If it's a stretch, how do you feel about the challenge?
- You are being offered a role on a silver platter? Be curious, negotiate your work conditions wisely and beware of pitfalls. The position might be difficult to fill for various reasons, and you want to find out why before accepting.



Engage in conversations about the leadership team, the work, the environment, and expectations of you:

- Do you know the organization, the unit, anyone working there that you can speak to in confidence to help you assess the challenges associated with the position and current workplace culture and leadership practices?
- Before accepting a role, be diligent about asking questions around flexible arrangements, setting boundaries, finding expectations around hours of work, leadership style preferences, questions around psychological health and safety of team, staff turnover rate, etc.
- Is there a mentor in your current or new organization that you can speak with about accepting an executive role/ being new in an executive role?
- Do your current superiors, mentors, teachers, and confidants believe you are ready or well suited for leadership? Ask them this tough question and be prepared for honest answers.



Personal reflection:

- The increase in responsibilities will affect your family and friends. Have these conversations and seek out personal support.

- Do you have an in depth understanding of the terms and conditions, financial and legal implications of becoming an executive? Do you understand performance pay and what it means to not have the backing of the union?
- Engage with APEX early to get familiar with the broad range of services and membership privileges. We offer you high-quality professional development opportunities, access to exclusive tools and resources, and confidential advisory services to proactively support your career. We also advocate on your behalf with central agencies and Deputy Heads to shape policies that can influence your working conditions.



Setting You Up for Success

- Where are you on your leadership journey, mandatory training, and other key leadership development opportunities?
- Have you considered joining the [CSPS New Directors Program](#)? Or any leadership development training?
- Have you tried job shadowing? Sometimes, experiential learning is a good opportunity to learn a concrete operating environment.
- Do you meet the bilingual profile of executive positions? What steps, formal and informal, are you taking to ensure readiness on this front and maintain your language levels? Being ahead of the game with respect to managing your career can go a long way to a smooth and easy transition into an executive role.
- Your character and personal development will influence this next phase of your career and life. Work with a coach to address areas that need more attention and deeper development.



Future of Work Considerations



Hybrid workplaces and the evolving nature of the future of work are not problems you'll need to deal with. If that is your mindset, it's time to change that! Future of work considerations are an amazing opportunity to transform the public service and the way we all work throughout our careers. Try to mentally hold these topics as exciting opportunities because then you'll set a positive tone for how you navigate the associated challenges and lead your teams through times of change. What have we also learned about leadership as a result of the pandemic? It's about change management, compassion, kindness, empathy, flexibility, building trust and relationships. What are the risks if organizations are not evolving their approach, competencies, and leadership behaviours to lead virtual or hybrid teams?

As the focus of coming to the office becomes more about collaborative work, learning and social interactions, this requires the public service to reconsider and recalibrate the distribution of space, use of technology with a focus on accessibility, address employees' expectations and their hybrid experience. With increasing competition for talent, creating the right hybrid experience for employees is essential. Providing 'choice' in the workplace is a powerful tool in achieving this through creating a wide range of work settings to cater for individual differences.

Efforts must be tailored to the employee's needs instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. Leadership skills will be more important than ever, and inclusion remains the key to success, as we will find new ways to equip employees with the mental, emotional, and interpersonal skills needed, not just to cope, but also to thrive.

Resource: [FlexGC - Future of Work Handbook](#) (The section for leaders in particular)

Knowing Yourself

Assess Your Level of Self-Awareness and Leadership Potential



Your leadership style and approaches have a direct link to the climate you create, not only within your team, but with your colleagues and supervisors. Never underestimate the impact you have on people. As you may have experienced yourself, when welcoming a new leader, the climate within a team can change in a matter of weeks.

As a leader, you have enough influence to completely ruin someone's weekend or their entire experience on a team. You also have the power to transform a workplace into an environment where people feel safe, grateful & motivated.

Our mindsets are determined by the types of questions we ask, how open-minded, curious, and creative we are in our interactions with others and in our attempts to solve problems, manage conflicts or change the status quo. In your interactions with colleagues, peers, and clients, are you promoting innovation, possibilities, breakthroughs or are you more focused on problems and workplace irritants, rather than solutions and creative ideas? Negative thoughts and behaviours can lead to defensive reactions, overall negative atmosphere, conflicts, and inertia.

Start your self-reflection by answering, with humility, courage, and authenticity, the questions in these areas of topic. Then ask someone you respect to review your answers and give you honest feedback.

Your gut reactions to people: Do you trust people, and do you think they trust you? How well do you collaborate and work effectively with others, especially those who have different views, perspectives, communication styles? What are your triggers? What makes you feel good or bad about someone or a situation?

Your treatment of other people: What tone and body language are you using in your communications and interactions with others? Would you treat a client or a superior the same way as you would treat a subordinate or a colleague? How aware are you about the impact you have on people? Are you actively listening to others or are you constantly interrupting to get your points across? When something goes wrong or conflict arises, how do you respond?

How people feel in your presence: Have you ever wondered how you are being perceived by others? Are you sometimes wondering why you receive criticism or why people get defensive in your presence? Try to determine your strengths and areas for development when it comes to working effectively with others and displaying positive and respectful behaviours. Don't be afraid to ask for feedback.



Know your derailers, triggers and stressors and seek opportunities to self-improve: How do you react under stress, when conditions are not ideal according to your preferences, your values, how you like the work to be conducted? What's your reaction to strong personalities, people with drive and initiative? How do you react when confronted with perception, judgement, bias?

Do a self-assessment against [effective and ineffective behaviours for each of the leadership competencies](#). Eliminate and act upon ineffective behaviours for yourself, and for your team.

Tools to know yourself better: Look for available resources and learning opportunities in your own organizations to reflect and develop your self-awareness and assess your level of empathy and emotional intelligence. Ask for opportunities to connect with a coach or a mentor, create safe spaces for frank and honest discussions and genuinely ask for feedback on how you can further develop and adapt your leadership styles to various people, situations, operating context, etc. Ask your team how you can improve and help them meet their needs and career aspirations.



Other options could be imbedded in strategic performance and talent management discussions with your manager, and could include a leadership or climate assessment, a formal 360 feedback exercise, professional counselling services offered by the Personnel Psychology Centre at the Public Service Commission or specialized HR firms.

Are you a Doer or a Leader?

So really, how different is the work at the executive level? How are the days different? What are your new responsibilities? What details should you no longer concern yourself with, and which details do you REALLY need to focus on?



The main difference between a working level manager and a leader at the executive level resides in the need to demonstrate effective key leadership competencies and behaviours at all levels of the organization. When you join the executive cadre, it's about casting a vision and strategy, the power of relationships, empowering and growing your team, delivering concrete results as per your mandate, exercising influence with respect and integrity, helping shape the future of work, challenging the status quo, driving change and innovation,

experimenting, and taking risks. Do you have what it takes to be a people-centric leader?

One of the biggest challenges faced by new executives is to balance the day-to-day, the pressures of senior management or key stakeholders, while being present for their team. To prove themselves, new leaders will take on more than they can handle and assume that if they work harder and longer hours, they will be more productive. This is the perfect recipe for burning yourself out! As a new executive, you will no longer need to be involved in all the details and all the meetings. You will need

to strategically manage your time and workload. Your main challenge will be to empower and guide your team, grow them, coach them and care for them.



You Are a New Executive, Now What?

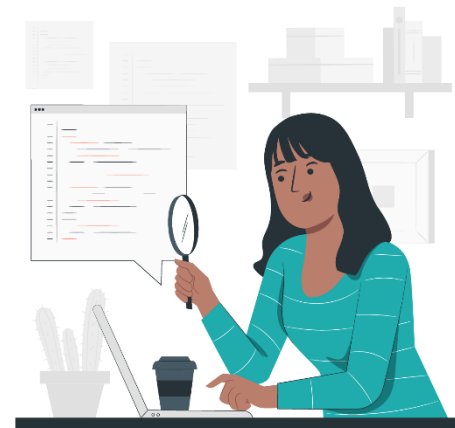


The minute you accept an acting assignment or indeterminate opportunity as an executive, be curious and ask learning questions. Don't make assumptions or take anything for granted! Take the opportunity to clarify your mandate and high-level commitments with your superior, meet your immediate colleagues and your management team in the early days or even prior to your formal arrival.

- Consider creating a [team charter](#) and having regular values-based discussions. It could prevent undesired behaviours from occurring in the workplace, and help create a healthy, inclusive, and psychologically safe environment from the get-go.
- Listen carefully and don't act too quickly! Make up your own mind, stick to the facts, not what you were told, especially if judgment calls were made on people and strong views about the perceived climate were expressed without concrete facts. Challenge assumptions and biases and form your own opinions.
- Ask your Executive Services team in Human Resources Branch for any onboarding tips, advice, and coaching, including mentoring opportunities at the department level. Some departments or agencies are pairing new executives with an experienced leader who knows the organization inside out. Ask for a buddy! Ideally at the EX-02 or EX-03 level, with a different background and lived experiences.
- Ask for the list of mandatory training for new executives.
- Ask for advice and direction on terms and conditions of executives and performance of executives. Departments usually have a high-level document that describes the performance management process and cycle, and you will receive instructions to create your profile and commitments in the Executive Talent Management System (ETMS).
- Consider reaching out to [APEX Advisory Services for Executives](#) for additional advice and conversations linked to your new mandate and role. Consider this like a prevention measure, and have an inspiring discussion based on breakthroughs and possibilities. Any section of this guide can be discussed further.
- Decode the culture – Know the organization, small politics involved, who knows what, who has influence and connections, who can best advise you on internal procedures and processes, non-written rules, who the boss listens to, who is the rumour mill in the organization (this is becoming harder to decode in a virtual context).
- Be sensitive to what happened in the past – You may have landed in an organization where trauma exists. A recovery plan, empathic and human-centric approach may be warranted.

Own Your Director Space, Career, Performance and Results

- Set realistic and achievable goals.
- Be accountable and document how you and your team are achieving commitments and results.
- Avoid passive aggressive approaches: If you don't get clear commitments and mandate from your superior, proactively propose some, and seek feedback and concurrence.
- Develop your own initial learning plan based on the list of mandatory training you will receive from your Executive Services team, and all the tips and tricks found in this guide.
- Take every opportunity to seek feedback from your superior, your colleagues, your team, your clients. Be a sponge in your first year! Take the feedback at face value, even if you don't agree – reflect on it, and try to reframe and see it from the perspective of the person giving the feedback. What if they were right? Develop influential strategies and tactics to prove them wrong. There are plenty of tools that can help you influence people based on their leadership style or communications preferences. Seek advice before you act!
- Don't wait for the ETMS to open to have strategic performance discussions with your superior and your employees. Ride the wave and remember that new or revised commitments can be added at any time during the performance cycle.
- At the beginning of any new fiscal year, start documenting your results each week, with concrete examples of how you accomplished the work, the obstacles and challenges you faced, how you [achieved results by displaying effective leadership competencies](#).
- Do not hesitate to ask your boss or your Executive Services team how the process works in your organization.
- If your role is more operational and internal to your branch, try to look for opportunities to be visible, attend corporate committees or working group, or ask your director general or associate deputy minister to bring you to meetings with senior management, ministerial briefings, governance committees. Include those opportunities in your learning plan.
- Use this evergreen list to be in the driver's seat when it comes to your performance management and career management discussions. In some departments, it is seen as a best practice and learning development opportunity to propose your own self-evaluation and narrative to your boss. This is a golden opportunity to ensure strategic alignment and build your self-awareness and see if there are any discrepancies with how you are being perceived by senior management.
- In your first year, be humble and keep in mind you are still learning and not fully thriving in your role. Therefore, it is not uncommon for new executives to receive a *Met Most* Rating and



Develop in Role placement on the talent management map. Accept it with humility and avoid self-doubt and imposter syndrome thinking.

Strategies, Options and Considerations When You Build Your Team and Hire New People

Your entire team is watching you!

- Be open and transparent about your vision for the team, your mandate, where you want to go, ask your management team if they see any competency gaps and growth opportunities. Check this against your organizational charts, your budget, what you are hearing from your superior or HR, etc.
- Be aware of perceptions and address issues proactively by talking about your values, your integrity, and work ethics.
- Have regular discussions on the future of the workplace and competencies required for an agile, equipped, inclusive and thriving team.
- Engage the team on your directorate or branch staffing plan, empower them to make the best decisions based on needs and competencies.
- Work with your management team on a proactive employee onboarding strategy. Acknowledge and leverage what already exists and build upon it. Your directorate onboarding strategy could include elements such as:
 - Making time and space for daily discussions and interactions with new employees.
 - Taking every opportunity to introduce new employees to team members, peers, colleagues, and senior management.
 - Making the employee feel comfortable asking all sorts of questions and creating an environment where they feel accepted and safe to raise questions without fear of reprisal.
 - Developing together their priorities in terms of mandatory and on-the-job training requirements.
 - Looking at documenting work processes and other guidance documents.
 - Pairing new employees with a “buddy” that will show them how the team operates, where processes are located, where they can find information about the entire branch and organization.



- Having regular pulse check with them to see how they are doing, and if they have suggestions and ideas to improve the workplace, what they need from their management team.

Keep in mind...

The best leaders act as coaches and focus on getting the best out of their employees.

- Don't forget about finding ways to integrate employees who might be returning from various types of leave. Stay in regular contact if appropriate. These employees aren't often included in onboarding efforts, but their transitions can be just as difficult as those faced by new hires.



Considerations when Hosting Conversations on Diversity, Inclusion, Harassment Prevention, Respect, and Bilingualism in the Workplace



- Through self-reflection, determine what you need to do to embrace these topics in your day-to-day work. Confront your beliefs and biases, broaden your perspectives, and be part of additional conversations with various networks and communities so that, in turn, you can be a true ally when it comes to changing mindsets, behaviours and evolving people-centric management practices.

- Acknowledge it will be uncomfortable and difficult at times to host courageous and meaningful discussions and take concrete actions. Assess your comfort level when it comes to dealing with sensitive topics and show some vulnerability and a desire to learn.
- Avoid lip service or simply stating these issues are top priorities.
- Develop your agility and resilience when it comes to addressing barriers in the workplace, micro-aggressions or need for workplace accommodations.
- Do not tolerate micro-aggressions, lack of respect or incivility and be a role model for your team.
- Watch for signs of toxicity or abrasive behaviours in your team and try to understand the root causes. Emotional distress can be an early sign of burnout. Be curious, resourceful, and considerate. Be a supportive, inclusive and caring leader.

Host Strategic Performance Discussions with Your Team

Leverage the power of relationships to enable strong, strategic, and authentic performance discussions with your management team. At the heart of building a culture of care and psychological health and safety is building trust, setting the stage for open and honest two-way discussions that identify barriers to success, and learning opportunities for growth and development.



Everyone likes being told they are doing a good job.

Performance discussions provide the perfect setting to document results and successes. Performance discussions are not just for setting objectives or discussing gaps or learning opportunities, they are also an opportunity for leaders to recognize individuals on their team. Happy employees are productive employees, and productive employees want to continue working for happy and caring managers.

Developing a comprehensive performance management strategy with your management team can ensure employees' activities and results are in line with our overall objectives, vision, principles, and values. This is critical to collective and individual success, and employee productivity and retention. The benefits of an effective performance management strategy include:

- **Reduced stress and anxiety:** Regular feedback and a consistent, established performance management process can improve relationships, enhance communication, and reduce employee anxiety. Employees who have a clearer understanding of expectations and know what criteria they are evaluated on, and who know how their performance is affecting the overall organization, experience less stress and are more engaged in their day-to-day work.

- **Increased morale, productivity, and performance:** When managers have regular conversations with their employees about their work tasks, responsibilities, and performance, employees have more opportunities to showcase their work and communicate the value of their contributions.
- **More employee empowerment and accountability:** Regular performance discussions give employees more autonomy to manage their responsibilities by empowering them with appropriate tools, as well as a safe space to share their concerns, fears, needs, hopes and aspirations. These conversations help identify so much; like best fit for various positions, or an employee's current learning and development needs and the nature of possible career paths, including lateral moves, stretch assignments, promotions, easier access to development programs, and language training to name a few.
- **Better workforce planning and developmental opportunities:** Workforce discussions at various management tables can lead to better coordinate people management strategies, including succession planning, talent management, and assessing employee readiness for managerial positions.

Setting Boundaries

Considerations for Work-Life Integration



Work-life balance has always been important, but when the pandemic hit, everything changed. Many leaders were confronted with paradigm shifts, biases, beliefs and were struggling to find new ways of leading, thinking and working in a virtual working setting while juggling new and emerging priorities and stressors at work and at home. Some thrived, others struggled, some unfortunately collapsed and had a wake-up call. They realized the status quo was no longer an option...Which is your experience?

If you and your team have been struggling to find or regain balance, reframing the conversation may help. Instead of discussing “work-life balance”, try exploring the idea of a healthy “work-life integration” because our work and personal lives have likely never been more intertwined.

First, what is work-life integration? It refers to blending both our personal and professional obligations and finding areas of compromise. Balancing the personal and operational needs of employees can raise some important challenges, but by communicating the needs, boundaries, and concerns, it can open a whole new world of possibilities to lower the stress levels and find more fulfillment.

The flexibility behind work-life integration may allow employees to coordinate their responsibilities and schedules in a more functional way. It can provide a higher sense of satisfaction in every aspect of their lives, and therefore, increasing productivity, both personally and professionally. However, it's important to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life. Have a discussion with your supervisor and management team to decide on a schedule that works for everyone. It's also important to note that work-life integration can have a negative impact on employees when not implemented correctly. It seeks a certain balance, so if employees don't set the appropriate boundaries such as flexible schedules, self-care activities throughout the workday, regular lunch times and breaks, etc., they'll find themselves with more stress, and will experience a considerable decrease in satisfaction and productivity. Are there ways for you to experience more harmony and ease in this new reality?

During your team meetings, have real discussions by answering the following questions:

- Could some of our meetings or bilats be in the format of “walking meetings” (mobile phone, earbuds, and sunshine!), if possible?
- How could a flexible schedule work to support a healthier work-life integration?
- For those individuals who have been working remotely (fully or partially), take stock of what's working and what isn't.

- How can you blend your responsibilities and adjust to create a day that is more convenient for you and your team?
- What does work-life integration look like for people with young families or those entirely without kids, or for those taking care of a parent? How can we find solutions that suit our different needs?

Recognize Your Staff and Celebrate Achievements



More and more people are practicing gratitude to improve their overall health and well-being, and to nurture a positive attitude and climate at work. Gratitude is genuine, unsolicited feedback that often becomes contagious, and creates a positive ripple effect!

Gratitude at work contributes to well-being, motivation, and team spirit, as well as confidence and loyalty in building and maintaining positive client relationships.

A simple "thank you" can send a powerful and positive signal. Leaders should make a point of giving authentic recognition and customizing the recognition to the needs of the individuals. There are so many ways to recognize your staff and celebrate achievements, using a mix of formal and informal approaches. Here are just a few informal examples:

- Provide positive and constructive feedback on a regular basis – be thankful about you and your team’s contributions “Catch yourselves being good.”
- Offer compliments.
- Offer the gift of time.
- Offer stimulating and challenging work assignments.
- Pay attention to what matters to each individual and customize your communications approaches to build trust and relationships, and a sentiment of security and safety.
- Help a colleague without expecting anything in return.
- Send a nice bravo note, virtual card or token of appreciation.

In your respective unit, individually and as a group, think about how you can cultivate a culture of care, empathy, and gratitude. Develop strategies to overcome feelings of anger, frustrations, disappointment. Brainstorm on options to build gratitude around you with small, daily, unexpected acts of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Consider the following:

- Actively role model practices that support mental health and well-being, including work-life integration and self-care practices.

- Consider the impact of your actions, directives, and delegation on the mental health of your employees.
- Advocate for the needs of your employees and take visible action to mitigate psychosocial risks identified in the workplace at the organizational or systems level.
- Proactively check in with your employees about their mental health and energy levels, ensuring they use strategies to safeguard it at a personal level.
- Take the lead in responding to employees exhibiting signs of poor mental health and direct them to appropriate support.
- Create team environments that embody psychological safety through vulnerability, empathy, accountability, and respect.
- Proactively initiate discussions about mental health at the team level while safeguarding privacy.
- Understand and manage risks to psychological health (e.g., workload prioritization) using a collaborative approach.
- Lead by example by taking regular breaks and vacation to recharge your own batteries.

Take the time to take stock of where you and your team members are at with respect to displaying these behaviours and start identifying priority areas as you continue your journey to building a strong culture of care, compassion, and gratitude.

Additional Resources to Consider:

[Increase emotional awareness, increase your mental health](#)

[How to set healthy boundaries](#)

[Emotional intelligence for leaders](#)

When Things Don't Go as Expected or as Planned

Despite all your best efforts to be ahead of the game, having planned your first few months like a pro and built, so you thought, solid relationships and foundation from the get-go, be prepared to face unexpected challenges, conflicts, and ethical dilemmas. It is inevitable. Learning how to strategically deal with conflicts, abrasive styles, and workplace irritants – and turning those difficult situations into learning opportunities – can be a game changer for you and can lead you to thrive rather than just survive.



The Real Truth About the State of Your Team and Your Operating Environment



Sometimes there are discrepancies between our understanding of our new role and mandate and what it really is day in and day out.

You may have, for example, ended up leading a team that has suffered trauma, is not performing well or lacks capacity or competence. Or maybe you are faced with major tensions, absenteeism levels and retention issues. If you do find yourself having to manage and lead during these types of challenges, you should make the time, early on, to engage with your supervisor, your HR colleagues, or any internal or external resources available to discuss preliminary strategies, options and ultimately develop a game plan and path forward.

Act early, before the issues escalate further and it affects your credibility and ability as a leader to achieve results and create the right conditions for your team to thrive and feel safe. Don't try to work

it out by yourself. Access all resources available to look for additional solutions and prioritize your issues.

Revisit your commitments and deliverables with your boss considering the new context and be realistic about what you can achieve. And of course, you matter too, so look for strategies to take care of yourself as well.

From Colleague to Boss

While stepping into an executive position is exciting and rewarding, you might feel a bit unequipped or nervous if you end up leading people who used to be your peers. You might perceive the situation as even worse if one or more of those peers were competing with you for the job. There will likely be a range of emotional reactions within your team, and you may face some ethical dilemmas.

- Give your relationships a new perspective – It will need to change. You may have to let go of some old habits and create more inclusive ones, and appropriate for your new leadership role. As an example, you may not want to be your peer’s confidant anymore or going to lunch exclusively with your “best buddy”. Be careful about the climate you will create, and how your employees will perceive it. Realize that you might become the person others talk about.
- Find a positive, unthreatening, and values-based approach with your peers and the entire team.
- Avoid office politics and gossip at all costs.
- Schedule one-on-one meetings with employees to address any concerns, talk about your vision, and connect on a personal level. In each meeting, the goal is to listen more and talk less so you can learn and build trust. Answer questions from a transparent and authentic perspective.
- Honour what is already in place. You probably have tons of ideas about how to lead the team, but don’t jump right in. One strategy may be to focus on some minor tweaks or improvements requested by employees to earn their trust and move forward.
- Don’t rush into making structural changes that may impact people’s lives right away unless necessary and part of your mandate. If that’s the case, be transparent and engage employees early in the process. The same goes for performance managing employees or wanting to get rid of people before you even have a chance to see them in action. Instead, coach them, and see their work from a completely new perspective as the boss. Be kind and compassionate, seek to understand the full situation, and stick to facts not perception, judgment, or bias stemming from your previous role or what you heard through the rumour mill, your predecessor, peers, or your boss.



- Talk to your HR team, request a full briefing on the health of your organization, understand your organizational chart, look at recent employee survey results, leverage all available data - analyze before taking premature action that you might regret.

How to Positively Deal with Conflicts and Differences in Leadership Styles?



While there are no easy responses to this question, and so many factors to consider, it is easier to focus on what we can control, change, and influence rather than trying to change other people.

As you embark on your new journey as an executive, how about trying to change your mindsets and ways of thinking, and responding to conflicts or difficult situations in a completely new way? Use positive reframing, new strategies and approaches that can lead to mutual understanding rather than confrontation and conflict. One possible avenue to consider is to exercise conscious leadership in action and master the art of values-based discussions.

Conscious leadership is to being aware of each other, how we think, how curious we are, and how we see the world. It is a practice of being mindful of our experiences, witnessing our default patterns of response, and being able to create the option to choose a different path to produce long-lasting change, and create new habits. Easier said than done, but a professional coach can help in this area.

Conscious leadership is based on these five high-level and most essential practices:

- Constantly develop your self-awareness.
- Know and identify your automatic operating methods to make them evolve.
- Develop your vision and create the future from the present.
- Encourage learning and cooperation between team members, colleagues, and the boss to develop agility, collaborative practices and foster collective intelligence.
- Develop your capacity for systems thinking.

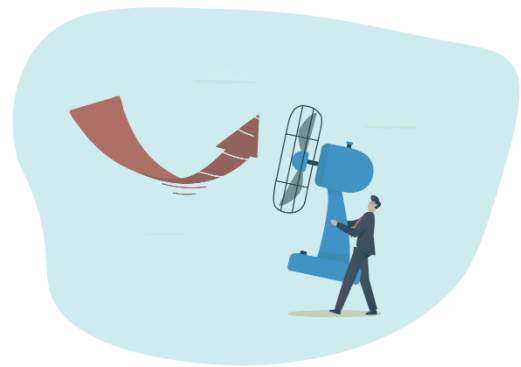


By developing your emotional intelligence, you will find it easier to motivate and positively influence the people around you, and to build strong connections and relationships. You will be more vulnerable and inclined to seek out other people's perspectives and ask for feedback to improve yourself. Expressing your vulnerability in certain circumstances allows you to instill confidence by revealing your human side.

- Give yourself time to think it over before you act or jump at the first opportunity, conclusion, or solution. Before you act, take the time to evaluate all your options to ensure that your strategy will align with your motivations and values.
- Nothing is worse for eroding confidence than someone who doesn't "walk the talk". You will be called to act according to your values, and to be consistent with your actions and decisions, even when faced with adversity or intolerable, and unfair situations.

Consider the following when faced with abrasive people who are rubbing you the wrong way, are pushing your buttons, trying to undermine your credibility as a leader, and provoke a huge physical or emotional and defensive reaction in you:

- Do not let their words, actions, judgment on you affect your self-confidence and self-worth.
- Build an armor for yourself, and do not let anyone attack your core values, beliefs, and integrity.
- When provoked or micro-aggressed, remain professional and calm, and do not bite or respond under emotional distress. You might lose control of your emotions, react in total contradictions with your core values and leadership preferences, make costly mistakes, and burn bridges that can damage your reputation. Document the incidents, stick to facts.
- When you regain control of your emotions, brainstorm strategies and seek advice on the best ways to address the situation.
- Align your actions, responses to traumatic and stressful events with your core personal and organizational values. Confront your beliefs, biases, and worst fears.



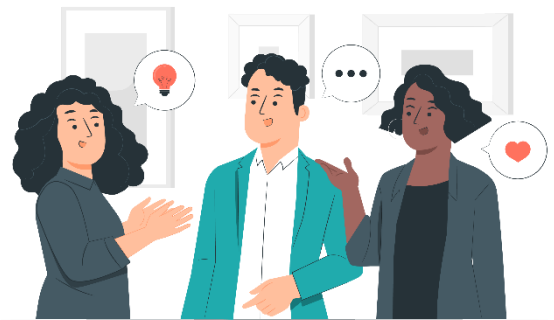
Resilience is not achieved by ease. Resilience is often born out of very difficult personal or professional situations where people were left hopeless, disappointed and/or disillusioned. So, there is hope to find the right pathway back to success! Accept the situation with courage and humility for what it is and adjust your thinking to be focused on finding solutions.

Additional Resource: [How to identify and manage your emotions](#)

Adopt Values-Based Conflict Management Approaches

There is a real opportunity to take a fresh look at how you strategically manage conflicts and disagreements. You can use them for growth and development, and for the further refinement of both your personal and team values. The following are examples of effective strategies to address conflict in the workplace. The real key to resolving conflict is respectful dialogue undertaken in good faith.

- Consider interests and values separately – Be hard on the issues, soft on people. Separate the person from the problem or issue at play.
- Lead the discussion from a place of curiosity as opposed to fear, anxiety, and defensiveness so you don't use blame and shame to get your point across.
- Acknowledge the feelings and emotions people are facing – Resist minimizing feelings of hurt, betrayal, or humiliation. Instead, help find a path that allows all parties to “save face” and walk away with a sense of dignity that will allow everyone to interact in new and better ways.
- Engage in relationship-building dialogue – Build relationships by establishing rapport and common cause.
- Appeal to overarching values – Appealing to common or shared values can help bridge the gap and bring colleagues closer to resolving their conflict.
- Confront value differences directly – The areas where you and your counterpart do not see eye-to-eye are areas of growth and opportunities for value creation. Once you both understand your differences, you can better reconcile those differences to achieve success.
- Focus on spheres of control, and influence through respectful and authentic conversations.
- Ask open-ended and non-threatening questions such as:
 - How can we do this differently?
 - What would be helpful?
 - How can I help you achieve this?
 - What would you like to do about that?
 - How can we do that in a way that is healthy for our relationship going forward?
 - How can we change that to work better for us?
 - What is a solution that you think would make this better for everyone?
 - I want to help you move forward to a more positive work situation. What would that take?



A process for [conflict response for leaders](#) can help you and your team move to a healthier path. However, if you are getting caught up in emotions and trust is starting to erode, you might want to consider reaching out early to a trusted advisor like your coach or mentor, to your ombuds office or conflict management team, APEX Advisory Services, or the Public Service Personnel Psychology Centre.

Final Thoughts

Here we are, already at the end of the guide! It is our hope you found its content useful and inspiring, and that it will help you take your leadership skills to the next level!

While your lived experiences will help shape the leader you are and want to be, do not be afraid to reach out for help. Embark on a journey of lifelong learning and self-awareness, and focus on maintaining a growth mindset, a great network of role models, and positive inner dialogue. You will encounter moments of self-doubt and discouragement, especially when things don't go as planned, or when faced with challenges that will put your resilience to the test. There will be times when you feel like you are all alone and you don't know to whom or where to turn.

There are plenty of resources available to support you and to help get you back on track! Use the guide as a basic reference and do not hesitate to contact APEX for any additional thoughts, tips, and strategies you want to explore further. APEX is keenly focused on supporting new executives to successfully navigate and excel throughout their career journey. We rely on our advisory services intelligence, leadership surveys and other relevant data, to ensure a specific focus on the wellness of new executives. We also leverage partnerships with external stakeholders to deliver our programming that provide training, support, and a mentoring network to assist new executives. Visit our [Events Page](#) to see what we have planned for you and subscribe to our newsletter and social media channels.

You will find strength and courage in adversity, and when you are equipped to deal with a vast array of difficult situations in the workplace, you can only grow and flourish as an executive.



“Leadership is what we make of the circumstances we face”

– Janice Charette, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet

Best of luck in your leadership journey and congratulations on making the executive ranks, it is a privilege to be of service to others and influence the future of the public service.



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