

Leaders tend to be smart people. That’s the problem. With an abundance of our own good ideas and answers, it’s hard to give others a meaningful role in our endeavors.

Our education-rich culture leads us to expect followers to flock to us if we simply reveal our wisdom. Sometimes short-term evidence affirms that idea. People get excited by our vision and imagine themselves in the picture. But eventually their energy wanes as they realize our vision lacks room for their ideas.

We don’t have the time (we think) to let others explore ways to shape the course we’ve plotted. Their job is to be compliant and execute. Maybe our experience assures us we know best. Or we might have to share the credit (ego alert!) if they actually have a good idea.

If you can accomplish your vision on your own or with a few well-programmed robots then no need to read further. But if you envision engaging others over the long haul to accomplish something bigger than yourself, you need to tap into their sense of commitment.



Commitment goes up when they have a real ownership stake in the outcome. It doesn’t have to be financial ownership although that can help. They envision a future where they’re looking back with pride, pointing to the difference *they* made. Being able to say, “I did everything the boss told me to do really well” doesn’t inspire them. They want to say things like, “that feature was my idea” or, “that decision wouldn’t have happened without my influence”.

But let’s assume for discussion’s sake that you really are smarter in every way than everyone you hire (which indicates you’re not very smart at hiring). You’ll spend way too much time managing a revolving door of employees unless you let pieces of your vision go so they can make them their own.

How do you do that? Here are a few starter tips:

- 1. Get over yourself.** Humility comes hard for most of us, but it is the steroid of influence. Arrogance says, “I know best”; humility says, “I need you”. You can’t fake it, and developing it is painful. But the most valuable things in life don’t come easy.
- 2. Put people before tasks.** Managers use *people as a means to accomplish tasks*. That gets the tasks done. Leaders see *tasks as a means to develop people*. That gets the tasks done *and* expands your capacity with energized, capable, loyal people.
- 3. Give fewer answers and ask more questions.** We feel valuable when we provide a good answer. So do they. Just because you know the answer (or think you do) doesn’t mean the smartest thing to do is give it. They’ll learn more by wrestling through issues than by hearing your answers. They might even stumble on good ideas you missed.

If you’re frustrated over why good people underperform or quit, maybe it’s time to reconsider how you lead them. **enLumen Leadership Services** is here to help.

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