



Kansas LTAP Fact Sheet

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Preparing for Leadership and Supervisory Roles

By Mike McCarthy, Minnesota LTAP

Most people don't want to lead or be "the boss" because leadership is hard. According to Mike Colestock, leading people can be a very difficult job, and you can't do it well if you don't really like people. Colestock, an instructor with Hennepin (MN) Technical College, presented "Leadership Skills for New and Upcoming Supervisors" during a general session at the 2012 Minnesota Fall Maintenance Expo and Snow Rodeo.

Colestock provided an overview of what it takes to prepare for a leadership or supervisory role. His presentation focused on the challenges and difficulties associated with taking a leadership position. Colestock also offered tools, tips, and techniques needed to build personal influence and succeed as a leader.

Leadership is about influence

"Leadership is about people because it's about influence—understanding what's important to people, what motivates them, why they get out of bed everyday," Colestock said. "Can you motivate your people?"

Colestock began the presentation by saying that employees who aspire to leadership need to know why they want to be leaders.

"The best bosses are the ones who are good leaders," he said. "Supervision is about tasks—leadership is about people. People want to be led well."

Pay attention to communication styles. To lead well, Colestock continued, a supervisor must be aware of his or her own leadership style. Along with educational and technical competence, leaders need to understand the kind of person they are and the way they best communicate.

Colestock also stressed the importance of supervisors knowing the communication styles of their employees. "Part of leadership is knowing how you communicate and how your people communicate," he said. "Don't take [your workers] for granted. You need to get to know them."

Engage your workers. Though leaders may be unable to change the attitudes of their worker, Colestock said, leaders can create an environment where people can be fully engaged in their work. An engaged employee is someone



Moving into leadership starts with learning—about what makes effective leadership and about your employees, as people.

who has a larger perspective on what the company is trying to accomplish, knows the most efficient ways to do the work, and thinks for the organization.

"Good leaders engage their people," Colestock said. "I want to hire what's between their ears, not just their hands."

Know what good leadership looks like, and practice it. According to Colestock, good leadership traits are critical to success. Indecisiveness, lack of direction and organization, vindictiveness, and micromanagement are all signs of bad leadership, and these methods disengage workers. Colestock explained that in conflict, good bosses shouldn't be frustrated by their people, but instead should focus on the behavior that needs to be changed.

"Good leaders focus on the tangibles—here's what's wrong, and this is the behavior I need corrected. You have to get to the bottom of the issue," Colestock said.

Build and show respect. Fostering respect in the workplace is also critical for engaging employees. Colestock believes that when leaders respect their employees, employees will respect



their leaders.

“We have to realize that we’re both professionals and we’re here to do our jobs. I can’t get work out of a worker if he doesn’t respect me. Without respect, that worker is disengaged,” Colestock said.

Give credit where credit is due. Colestock suggested leaders practice “window-and-mirror” maturity with their employees. When something goes well, good bosses should look out the window and give credit to their workers. When something goes wrong, good leaders should look in the mirror and take it upon themselves to fix the problem.

“Your reputation as a leader shows up before you do and hangs around well after you leave,” Colestock said. “You need to know what creates success.”

Show your employees that they are valued. Ultimately, when leaders can demonstrate to their employees that they are valued, Colestock said, it helps motivate those employees to engage in their work.

“Good leaders fight for their folks,” he concluded. “The more people who understand that I care about them as a human being, the more they will engage and give all of their effort.”

A 1.5-minute video of Mike Colestock’s presentation is on the Minnesota LTAP website at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNYMG3RIYYA>. ■

Become a Road Scholar! An excellent way to get training in supervisory skills is to enroll in the Kansas Road Scholar Program and earn certificates in Level II Supervisory Skills and Level III Executive Development. For more information on the Road Scholar Program, visit <http://www.ksroadscholar.org>.

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