

Let's Dive In to Learn Leadership

by ANDREA DAVIS CRANFILL SEPTEMBER 01, 2016



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BACK TO BASICS TO BECOME AN EXEMPLARY LEADER

Did you catch any of the Olympic platform diving? If you're like me, your stomach fluttered into your throat each time you watched the athletes inch to the edge and poise themselves backwards on that ledge.

Like all little kids learning to muster the courage to take that first leap off of the diving board, those Olympians started with a jump off the side of the pool, and after much "1-2-3-ing" and poolside coaxing, they eventually leaned forward into the water that first time. Were the dives flawless and free of splash? No! Belly flops and back smacks were the proof that the learning of diving was taking place, and *learning* was the master skill they were perfecting.

Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, in their book [Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader](#), suggest that if you're not belly-flopping and back-smacking, to speak, you're probably not doing the work of learning. With leadership, they urge, learning is the master skill and that the best leaders are the best learners. Accordingly, this month we're going back to basics of learning leadership.

“It doesn’t matter how you learn. What matters is that you do more of whatever learning tactic works best for you. Clearly linked to becoming a better leader is becoming a better learner.”-jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, Learning Leadership

To become the best leader-as with any sport or artistic endeavor-you have to continue to learn. You can’t simply master the front-dive. To be the best leader, you have to get back up on the platform and be willing to bonk your head, flip messily, and splash ugly if you’re ever going to be the best you can be.

Olympic Diver Steele Johnson didn’t stop learning after, seven years before the Rio Olympics, he suffered a near-death head injury during practice. Not only did he return to diving after his recovery, but he returned with a vengeance, making learning a daily habit and challenging himself to learn more and more difficult dives to the point of not only making the Olympic team but becoming a silver medalist with teammate David Boudia.

And so it is with leaders desiring to master the discipline of leadership. As with the best athletes (or musicians or dancers, etc.), they have a growth mindset. They believe they’re capable of learning and growing throughout their lives and careers. They make learning leadership a daily habit.

MAKE LEARNING A DAILY HABIT TODAY

One way to do that now is to start a leadership journal and take 5-10 minutes to jot a few notes at the end of each work day.

Start simple. Ask yourself: “What did I learn in the last 24 hours that will make me a better leader?” Doing this quick exercise each day will amaze and inspire you: you will be able to look back and identify areas where you are stuck or can improve, and over time you’ll see how far you’ve come as a leader learning leadership.

Thirty-three feet doesn’t sound very high, does it? Next time you’re on the third floor of a building, step over to the window. Imagine throwing yourself from that height into a 16-foot well of water. Chances are your first jump wouldn’t look very pretty-and it might hurt. Think of the Olympians who keep learning, who make learning and self-challenge a daily habit, and learn from them. Get up, make learning a daily habit, and keep on learning. You’ll become the best leader you can be.

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Andrea Davis Cranfill, Partner and Cofounder of FlashPoint, is passionate about all things leadership. You’ll find her wearing many hats—from managing business development and operations to creating solutions for clients.