

# 17 Coaching Tips for Great Leaders

by Howard Lees



## Get the Simple Stuff Right

**1** Make a list of your direct reports. Be a little more specific about what you want from them. Try to make it behaviourally sound (i.e. pinpointed), try to focus on simple behaviours, e.g. turn up on time, respond in a timely fashion etc. Everyone undervalues the power of getting the simple stuff right.

## 2 Fix meetings

Make the point to all that if most people spend most of their time in meetings then fixing meetings is the number one priority. Meetings will spawn the majority of unwanted/unhelpful comments.

## Measure the value of emails and meetings

**3** The behavioural research say that you get 'lazy responses' from email communication and 'guarded responses' in meetings. Neither of these mediums is therefore naturally going to be effective as a business process; ironic really. They are both popular and easy, that's why people find them so comforting. Beware stuff that you have just grown fond of over the years, beware just believing that traditional things are valuable. Measure the actual value and find out.

## Master the basics

**4** When I am talking about email and meetings I am talking about the basics of replying to email in a timely fashion and turning up on time, properly prepared to meetings; the simple stuff. The content behaviour is the real big ticket item: You can't even think of impacting that until you have discipline on the base behaviours.

## Pinpoint some objectives

**5** Have a think about some pinpointed objectives for your people, clients and suppliers going forward. It will be quite a journey from dubious trailing measures to a better balance of leading behavioural measures and trailing results.

## Make notes on others' behaviours

**6** It's not natural for most folks, but making notes on your peer group is a good discipline to get into: What you said, how they responded etc. It will help you develop an improved style in terms of asking for clarifications of people.

## Practice

**7** It is paramount that you have some phrases saved up and rehearsed. Practise them out loud when alone in the car. This will get you quickly to a new place in the pack. I can provide you with suggestions, if you wish.

## Use 'enquiry' frequently

**8** It's important to use 'enquiry' frequently. Also, get people to clarify what they mean when they say things in meetings. "Can you just expand on that for me please?" It's a great thing to swing to; it's more positive, less passive.

## Play the long game

**9** I don't advise aggression. It's important to stay calm and stay 'you'. The better armed you are prior to events, then the same old you will come through, just with a slightly more sophisticated and effective script. Leadership is a long game.





**10** **Make time for reading**  
It's important to make time for reading. I believe reading and having significant solo thinking time are crucial activities for leaders. Most don't make time; most are too busy, most are not planning, most are improvising their responses (albeit skilfully). If you have made time to think, read and be strategic then that will be noticed by everyone, widen your repertoire and improve your confidence.

**11** **Beware of marginalisation**  
Try to be aware when people are saying things that could be construed as 'marginalising'. The phrases "I do not accept the premise of the question" and "I do not accept the premise of the statement" are very useful. Others (the good guys especially) will recognise this. You may even hear them copy it (the ultimate compliment).

**12** **Identify the quick wins**  
There are quick wins to be had, so identify them early. Staples on this front are to ask your peers for advice (it's always received as reinforcing) and ask people for clarification and advice. When you are asked for advice, make your explanations short and easy to digest.

**13** **Help people envision a better future**  
If you are going to be successful in the quest for 'more enlightenment from your people' then you will, I suspect, have to deal with their perception of a more 'uncomfortable present' to get to a more 'positive future'. They have to believe that something different happening now is going to be better for them in the future.

**14** **Treat all your direct reports equally**  
There really is no substitute for treating all your direct reports equally. Great leaders do it religiously. It's worth it in the long run. At least start with giving 'equal time' to all.

**15** **Seek the truth**  
Your behaviour probably censors what people feel they can say to you, but it cannot censor what they think. It's your quest, I would suggest, to get as much of the current unsaid content out in the open. You need a 360 degree view of what's happening. You don't need to know all the detail, just all the information in the strategic sector.

**16** **Be a safe haven**  
One thing's for sure, you won't get the truth if people don't think you can handle it. They have to view you as a safe haven for the truth. People like working for a strong leader; not aggressive or loud, but strong i.e. bold, decisive and caring.

**17** **Make sure everyone plays in the right sandbox**  
As a leader, I believe you should be using your skills to reframe things for your team so you get more of what you want, more of who is playing what part in this elaborate drama. Make sure people are playing in the right sand box; strategic, tactical and operational. Nature tempts people to work one layer below where they should be.

