

The following document contains both the My Current Leadership Challenge and My Personal Best Leadership Experience assignments. Please be sure you complete both!



My Current Leadership Challenge

During *The Leadership Challenge® Workshop*, you will have opportunities to apply what you are learning to a real, current leadership challenge of your own. The questions below will help you select a challenge to work on. This might be a new challenge or one that has been around for a while.

1. Think about the challenges that you are currently facing in your team and your organization. Select one that meets the criteria below:

Important—the situation is unlikely to change on its own, and the results of doing nothing are unacceptable

Linked to specific goals—the challenge must be addressed for you, your team, and/or the organization to achieve specific goals

Challenging—you do not currently know how best to improve the situation

2. Describe the challenge. Be specific. Who is involved? What is the current situation? What are the goals? Why is it important to address this challenge? What, if anything, have you already tried?

Bring this worksheet with you to the workshop. Please note: If you type directly into the PDF and print, the document will only print what is visible. You cannot exceed the standard text box or your response may be cut off.



Recalling My Personal-Best Leadership Experience

With leadership, as with most things in life, experience can be the best teacher, and it's important to base our leadership practices on the best of what people do—the actions that represent our highest standards.

Thus, *The Leadership Challenge*[®] *Workshop* will begin with a discussion of the Personal-Best Leadership Experiences of all the participants.

PURPOSE OF THE ACTIVITY

- To help you prepare to tell the story of a time when you did your very best as a leader
- To begin the process of learning from your own experience

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR PERSONAL-BEST STORY

Please prepare your Personal-Best story *before* the workshop and bring it with you. Come to the workshop prepared to share your experience with some of your colleagues in an informal discussion; you will not be reading aloud from the worksheet.

We suggest that you set aside about thirty to sixty minutes to use the following questions to help you think about your Personal-Best Leadership Experience and what kind of story it tells. The example of a Personal-Best story that follows this worksheet will give you some idea of what a Personal-Best Leadership Experience story might sound like.

Recall a time when, in your opinion, you did your very best as a leader. Your Personal-Best Leadership Experience might have taken place recently or long ago; while you were the “official” leader or manager of a team or group, or when you emerged as an informal leader; when you were working for pay or as a volunteer. The experience might have taken place in the workplace, when you were part of a community group or professional organization, or when you were a student.

(continued...)

1. Set the stage. Provide the context by briefly describing the situation: the organization, the people involved, the nature of the project or undertaking, and the challenges you faced. Also describe how you felt at the beginning of the experience.

2. Describe what happened. Be specific. What did you do? What actions did you take to address the challenge? To engage others? To keep others motivated, especially when things did not go as planned? What were the results?

3. Describe how you felt at the end of this experience and the two or three major lessons about leadership that you learned.

Read over what you have written. Have you used concrete, specific details? Is there anything important missing? Is there anything that is unnecessary? Make whatever revisions are needed so that you will be able to relate your story to your workshop colleagues in five minutes or less.

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Sample Personal Best Story:

When I walked in the door on my first day as the new site executive for Bank of America's Consumer Call Center in Concord, California, we had four hundred people working really, really hard, but they weren't winning. Their rep scores, which were their key performance measures, were way behind those at other call centers. More than half the employees felt they couldn't speak their minds, and most of those thought that nothing would happen even if they did. I thought it was very, very sad.

I firmly believe that everybody wants to win, to be successful, to make a difference. But the constant changes in leadership and priorities had led to poor performance. All I heard were reasons why we couldn't do this or that. So I set out to change the situation.

I took three full days just to talk with and listen to people and to gather information from other sources. Then I met with the call center's senior managers and support staff. I handed out stacks of Post-it notepads and asked the group members to each write down five adjectives that described the center. I repeated this process two more times, asking them to write down five adjectives that described how they thought their peers, and then the customer service reps, would say. I put their responses up where everyone could see them. It was a bleak picture, mostly negative words like demotivated, failing, and frustrating.

Then I asked people to go through the process again, this time describing how they would like the call center to look in the future. The language they used to express their dreams, hopes, and aspirations was dramatically different: world-class, model for others, unique place to work.

Armed with this list of aspirations, I worked with the management team to craft a vision, mission, and set of values for the call center. Over the next six weeks, I held state-of-the-center meetings with every one of our teams to communicate and discuss the vision and issues. I challenged everyone to take the initiative to make the new vision a reality. I told them that when they had an issue, I wanted them to talk to their managers or to me and to give me ideas and proposals. I made it clear that changing the call center was everybody's business.

To maintain the momentum, I held monthly "town hall" meetings, even though it was tough to pull call center people off the phone. We reiterate the mission, commitments, and vision; give a "you said-we did" report; and discuss current initiatives. We conclude each meeting by publicly recognizing people who have made significant contributions.

For me, the challenge continues. I know that every day will present me and the organization with a chance to try something new and that if we're not willing to be innovative and do things differently, we'll have the competition pass us by.

There were lots of lessons in that experience. One is that if you keep your eyes open and periodically shut your mouth, and you have the courage to turn the mirror on yourself, it's amazing what you can learn and how you can change things. Another is that once people are positioned to win, you can just get out of their way and watch them rock and roll.