SIGMA
Leadership Series

Great Leaders Emphasize Excellence

SIGMA
ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS INC.

GREAT LEADERS BUILD GREAT TEAMS

> ❝ **Excellence is a continuous process and not an accident.**
>
> — A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

Leaders can deliver more to their organization than just high performance — effective leaders also motivate individuals to achieve excellence. This sense of striving, for excellence in one's own work and for excellence on the part of others, is a strong contributor to overall organizational success. Leaders who emphasize excellence ensure their organization remains competitive and maintains a reputation for high-caliber services and products. Rather than meeting industry best practices, these leaders aim to set the standard for their industry.

Leaders who are good at **Emphasizing Excellence** set challenging goals and high-quality standards, expecting their direct reports to perform at their best. Leaders who clarify role expectations help employees find more meaning in their jobs — which relates to higher satisfaction and engagement — and greater likelihood of staying with the organization.[1,2] Employees tend to rise to the standards that their leaders believe they can achieve.

Do You Emphasize Excellence?

In assessing your ability to emphasize excellence at work, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I know the difference between excellence and perfection?
- How do I model excellence to others?
- What is my process for setting appropriate standards?
- Am I clearly communicating my expectations to employees?
- Do I assist my employees in setting their own goals?
- Are instances of excellence frequently celebrated in my organization?

Improve Your Commitment to Excellence

Find the right level. Perfectionist leaders have unrealistically high standards, while leaders who emphasize excellence set challenging but attainable goals and allow room for their employees to make mistakes. The right balance of expectations will demonstrate faith in employee abilities without being too daunting or anxiety-provoking. Monitor your expectations regularly, evaluating whether employees are living up to these standards, or if adjustments need to be made to sustain engagement and success.

Model excellence. Leaders who expect excellence from their direct reports should also demonstrate it themselves. It is important for your direct reports to see that you are fair and consistent in your expectations. This involves dedicating sustained attention to important tasks, giving your best effort on all projects, and acknowledging when your own work falls short of excellence. By doing so, you will encourage a culture of self-discipline, personal responsibility, and growth through mistakes.

Familiarize yourself with industry standards. In order to set appropriate standards, it's important to understand what excellence looks like. A great place to begin your research is by comparing your organization's standards to general standards in the industry. Remember to compare with competitors who offer similar products or services. Once you've developed a solid understanding of the standards of other organizations, ask yourself if there is an opportunity to raise standards, even a little, in your team. This could be adjusting the standards in terms of quality, timing, or customer service — wherever your team is best positioned to excel.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Better Emphasize Excellence

The following steps can help you become better at emphasizing excellence:

1. **Be clear and specific when setting standards.** Many leaders expect their direct reports to produce excellent work without indicating what that should look like. As a result, their employees are often left feeling worried and lost about whether their performance meets expectations. Make it a habit to give as much detail as possible when communicating your expectations to others. Whenever possible, try to include details of all five Ws: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. Allow time for employees to ask any clarifying questions as needed.

2. **Involve and support your employees in creating standards.** Individuals are more likely to strive to meet goals if they have some power in setting those goals.[3] Encourage employees to set goals for their performance using the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals framework. Additionally, provide them with support to accomplish these goals, including a sense of your own expectations for success, and any resources they will need to meet these standards.

3. **Celebrate achievements.** An organizational culture that encourages excellence will celebrate it. Find ways to show appreciation for both the effort and success of your employees. For example, you might consider praising high-performing direct reports in team meetings, group emails, or one-on-one conversations. This kind of acknowledgment helps to recognize the effort put in by your employees, emphasize the specific behavior that was exemplary, and inspire other direct reports to meet these standards in their future work.

Assess Emphasizing Excellence With the LSP-R®

The Leadership Skills Profile – Revised® (LSP-R) is a personality-based leadership assessment that measures 50 core competencies, including Emphasizing Excellence. The assessment can be administered online in 25 minutes, and comes with an automatically generated Focus Report, including scores, personalized feedback, and templates for creating competency-based leadership development plans (view a sample Focus Report).

LSP-R® Free Trial

See how you score on EMPHASIZING EXCELLENCE.

Experience the LSP-R for yourself and see how you score on Emphasizing Excellence. Receive customized feedback and templates for creating a personalized action plan. Take 25 minutes and experience the impact that data-driven personality insights can have.

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From Perfection to Excellence

Management Tip: Expect Excellence

Develop leadership competencies with SIGMA's one-hour, high-impact Leadership Development Workshops, led by our experienced coaches.

References

[1] de Villiers, J. R., & Stander, M. W. (2011). Psychological empowerment, work engagement and turnover intention: The role of leader relations and role clarity in a financial institution. *Journal of Psychology in Africa, 21*(3), 405-412.

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