

Angie Morgan & Courtney Lynch, Lead Star's Founders

Best-selling authors Angie Morgan & Courtney Lynch learned these leadership fundamentals during their combined 18 years as Marine Corps Officers. Now they share practical leadership instruction with thousands of professionals in key Fortune 500 companies, law firms, professional service firms, nonprofits, and other leading organizations.



Create a Plan to Develop as a Leader



by Whitney Hopler

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Deciding that you want to become a better leader is a smart choice, but good intentions won't actually make you the leader you hope to become. You need to create a specific leadership development plan to make your desires a reality.

"The only way true change can come in our lives is when we make a commitment, create a plan and take action daily toward our goals," says Angie Morgan, Co-Founder of Lead Star. "There are many people out there who want to become stronger leaders, but they have no roadmap to direct them toward achieving this. Goals and milestones help us maintain our focus. Plans serve as great reference points. They hold us accountable, especially when we have many competing distractions in our lives."

Planning to grow as a leader is no different from planning to accomplish other goals, says Courtney Lynch, Co-Founder of Lead Star. "We need to approach our leadership development just as we would any other goal that we have. We wouldn't start a new diet without having a plan. We wouldn't begin a new exercise routine without a strategy. We wouldn't pursue a college education without a road map. Why should our leadership development be any different?"

Assess yourself. You can start to plan by honestly assessing your strengths and weaknesses, Morgan says. "It's important to begin by having an integrity-based internal dialogue about yourself. Then write down your strengths and your weaknesses. You might surprise yourself with what you discover."

Gather feedback. The next step is to ask people you trust and respect for their feedback, says Lynch. "Go to your colleagues and your friends. Share with them your desire to improve your leadership abilities. Ask them to honestly evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. And, most importantly, when they provide you their honest feedback don't be on the defense. Listen. Take it all in ... the good and the bad. Then thank them for being so candid. It might sting a little to get such feedback but don't focus on that. Focus on what you're going to do with that information. You just received information that can help you become a stronger, more confident leader. That's a great gift. Value it for what it's worth."

Viewing feedback as a gift could help you discover vital information you wouldn't have otherwise, Morgan says. "I know that if someone was withholding a critical piece of information that could make me a better leader, I'd want to know it. I'd set aside my ego and be open to that feedback."

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Develop a leadership style. Once you've discovered more about yourself, learn about qualities other leaders possess to broaden your awareness of what works for others and how you might develop your own unique leadership style, says Lynch. "For any professional — man or woman — who wants to improve upon their leadership abilities, they should spend time reading, studying and learning more about leadership. There are many great books that share insights on the qualities leaders possess. They should also spend time observing the leaders they admire—they can then discern some of the qualities that leaders possess. It's important to note, too, that you can take best practices from the leaders you admire...but be careful not to spend time trying to practice being like that leader. On your quest to developing your leadership skills, work to develop your own leadership style — one that allows your unique character to shine through."

Create goals. It's important to think through what types of specific goals you'd like to achieve as a leader, such as earning a promotion or increased responsibility, discovering new ways to be creative, strengthening your character, or attaining a better balance in your life, Morgan says. Then be sure to create goals both for the short term and the long term. "Long-term goals serve as a life strategy. They help you view life's bigger picture. They help you envision where you want to be in life and what you want your future to look like. Your short-term goals in many ways

serve as the tactics. The short-term goals help you move along your leadership continuum. Goals are achieved by action and initiative. When you achieve the short-term goals you find yourself closer to realizing your long-term goals. Short-term and long-term goals fuel each other."

Remain flexible. Along the way, says Lynch, it's important to remain flexible enough to adjust your leadership plan as you make new discoveries while living it out. "A plan is a reference point for change. Use your plan to serve as a catalyst for you to take action. Then, along your journey, you're going to learn more and discover best practices that will make you want to take advantage of new opportunities. Your plan needs to be flexible so it can accommodate all the changes you'll encounter along your path to becoming a better leader."

Practice your skills daily. Keep practicing the new leadership skills you're gaining as you make decisions every day, Morgan says. "Leadership skills are perishable skills. If you don't practice leadership skills daily then you will lose them. Also, leadership is a journey...not a destination. The journey is more fulfilling and enriching when you can experience the benefits leadership brings to your life daily."