

**“Lead by Example: Reality or Fiction”**

800 words

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Many believe leading by example is a conscious decision. In fact, all leadership is done by example. Examples are set by leaders every day, both consciously and unconsciously. Anyone can be a leader and set an example, yet society promotes the idea that a leader needs to stand on a podium and direct people below them. This may be true; however, it is a narrow definition. This only describes primary leaders. The majority of the population falls into a different category: secondary leaders. It is within this group that leading by example is even more prominent. When leadership is classified, the reality of leading by example becomes obvious, and it is realized there is no leadership except that which is done by example.

Primary leaders are the figures whom we often identify as leaders. Their objective is to accomplish a goal and enable others to help them do so. Primary leadership follows a linear hierarchy: a primary leader leads a group of people below them. When a primary leader consciously chooses to set an example, they may be contributing to the team project, showing respect to their own leaders, or simply maintaining a strong work ethic. However, most examples a primary leader sets occur when they intended to set no examples at all. If the leader doesn't make an effort, those below them do not have any motivation to do their work. Likewise, if the leader does not take personal interest in a project they are responsible for, they set an example about the importance of the work and the dedication which it should be given. Where primary leaders set the strongest example is during the times they wish no one was watching: when they fail, and more importantly, how they recover. A leader is not a good leader because they are always right or because they always succeed. A leader is good because they are willing to learn and place trust in those around them. If a leader does learn from mistakes and is able to pick

themselves up, they set a strong example for how to act under pressure. However, if they do not exhibit grace in trying times, they set an even stronger example. This example is difficult to forget and creates an impression. A leader knows they are always being watched, yet many do not realize they are constantly setting an example. The strongest leaders set a positive example even when the situation is not ideal, and those around them take notice.

Secondary leaders are those who are often labeled as followers. They assist the primary leader with accomplishing a task. Unlike the linear hierarchy of primary leaders, secondary leaders form a web among themselves. This web is a network of peers, who may not have any authority over each other, yet watch each other for signals on how to behave, to what extent they should follow the primary leader, and how they can improve themselves. Consider the start of the American Revolution. Did every American colonist who fought in the Revolutionary War have a strong distaste for the British? Probably not. However, they saw the example set by those around them, adopted the ideas themselves, became a leader to others, and so on, until the colonies had raised an army. When a few people dissent, the idea spreads and encourages others to take up causes they may not have considered before. This can also work in a positive way, where a “trend setter” begins to spread a fad, showing leadership in their behaviors and decisions. Secondary leadership is also apparent in self improvement: everyone is looking to improve themselves, and one way secondary leaders lead is by setting an example of how to actualize ideas of self-improvement. Consider a student who does well on the SAT: their friends ask them what study tools they used or who tutored them. Some of these friends then follow this example, and in turn, improve themselves. Being willing to share successes and the tools to get there with others sets an example which leads others to improve themselves. Secondary leaders

set examples that they may not be aware of; however, these have a strong influence on those around them, and it is through secondary leadership the effectiveness of leading by example is best exemplified.

Whether one strives to be a primary leader or is content with being a secondary leader, every person sets examples daily. Primary leaders often set examples by how they handle themselves under pressure or how they treat their work. Secondary leaders set examples by influencing their peers or acting in a way others emulate. No matter what type of leader one is, being aware of the examples they set enables them to lead more effectively, and to make a meaningful impact on those around them.