

Lead the way!

A **Practical** Guide to Team Leadership

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p1xelcoder



So they made **you** a lead?!

- Leadership requires a different skillset
- Most new leads struggle to adjust
- You can learn necessary skills



“So they made me a lead?!”

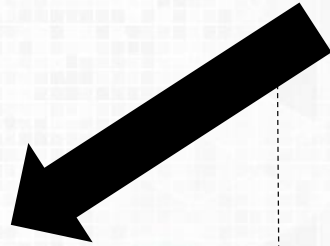




“How to be like that guy?”

Great boss

- Team morale was high
- My contributions were valued
- I knew where we were heading
- Good communicator



Supervisor I didn't like

- Didn't communicate clearly
- Goals not obvious
- My work didn't seem important
- No encouragement
- Team complained a lot

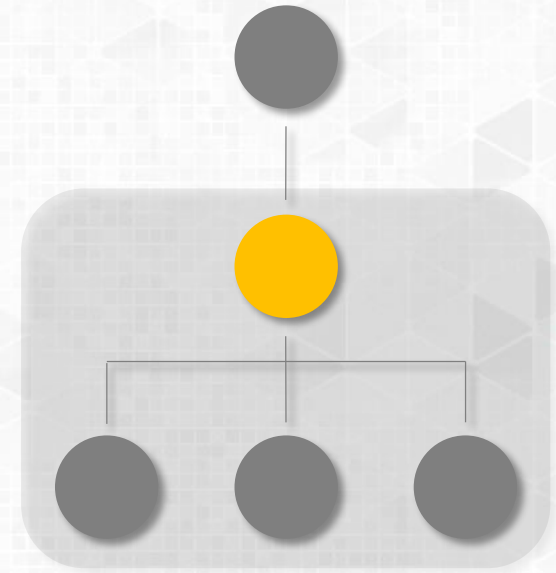
Why is leadership important?

- Deep hierarchies are uncommon
- Interdisciplinary cooperation is needed
- Team coordination is essential for success
- A good leader can make individual more effective

Core responsibilities

Building trust

- You are not a peer anymore
- Communicate professionally (don't gossip, no sarcasm)
- Treat people with respect and show that you care
- Be approachable and trustworthy



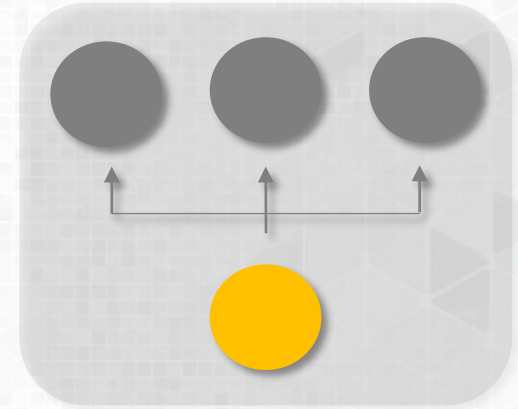
Setting a direction

- Have a near and long-term plan
- Concise vision statement
- Communicate goals



Supporting the team

- You're responsible for team's success
- Make sure people have what they need
- Provide guidance



But what about my **actual** job?

- Leadership **is** your actual job
- More conversations, mails, meetings, ...
- You'll spend $\leq 50\%$ of your time with coding, art, design...
- Being a lead **always** comes first

There is **no** secret to good leadership.



Mike Acton:

“If you absolutely must have a formula for doing your [leadership] work, here’s mine:
Figure out what doesn’t work and do less of that;
Figure out what works well and do more of that.”



Getting started as a lead

Find a mentor

- Practical advice is invaluable
- Discuss progress and specific problems
- Ideally someone in your organization

Reach out to fellow game developers



Zac Duff @greenlig · Jun 27

When I got my first lead position, I emailed @romero on a whim for advice about getting my team to invest in their work. [cont..]



2



4



Zac Duff @greenlig · Jun 27

@romero's reply was practical and considered. Can't speak highly enough of him. I always encourage young devs to reach out. It's worth it.



2



2



[View conversation](#)



Zac Duff retweeted



John Romero @romero · Jun 28

Thanks, glad to hear my advice was useful!

Effective communication

- Key leadership skill
- Requires more time than you think
- It's okay not to know everything, gather information and follow up

Effective communication

- Be proactive – Don't wait for someone else
- Be transparent – Things go wrong, find a solution
- Be clear – Team can't read your mind

Learn to listen



Ask open ended questions

- Encourage people to elaborate
- “What” and “why” are important
- Helps you to get more information

Ask open ended questions

- Example
 - Open: "What do you think about this feature and how long will it take?"
 - Closed: "We are going to add this feature. Can you get it done this sprint?"

Active listening

- Re-state or paraphrase what you heard
- Allows communication partner to hear what you understood
- Resolve miscommunication right away
- Essential for conflict resolution

One-on-one meetings

- Builds **mutual** trust
- Meet regularly (e.g. monthly)
- Don't skip even if there is not much to talk about
- Pick location so that sensitive topics can be discussed

One-on-one topics

- Not a status update!
- Talk about career goals, problems, ...
- Example questions:
 - “Do you enjoy what you are working on?”
 - “What do you think about the project?”
 - “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?”

Really listen

- No distractions! Turn off phone...
- Make people feel **important** and valued
- Take notes. Agree on action items together

Set clear expectations

- Specify explicit and clear guidelines
- Don't let people guess
- Write it down and send it to team
- It'll reduce your frustration

Learn to delegate

- Let people 'grab' tasks, assign the rest
- Help your team to think through the required work
- Don't overcommit yourself

Get the team involved

- People on your team are domain experts
- Delegate questions, scoping, ...
- Show that you trust your team

Provide challenges not solutions

- If possible avoid repetitive tasks
- People like to learn new skills and techniques
- Take interests and career goals into consideration

Know what your team is doing

- Be aware of team's progress not just your own
- Different approaches possible
 - Read Perforce commit messages
 - Meet with the producer
 - Talk to team regularly, ...
- Also helps to identify problems early

Provide feedback

The background of the slide features a repeating pattern of light gray triangles of various sizes, creating a textured, geometric effect. In the bottom right corner, there is a stylized graphic of a wing or a series of curved lines, also in a light gray tone, pointing towards the right.

Criticism

- It's not fun, but address problems right away
- Discuss in private and approach meeting with **empathy!**
- Treat people with respect, don't be condescending

Find a solution

- Work on plan for improvement **together**
- Share summary and action items with team member
- Follow up on progress and be supportive

Praise

- Boosts team morale
- Write down accomplishments so you remember
- Mention achievements in **public**

Leadership is **hard work** but not impossible!

You can **become** a great team **lead**!



Brian Sharp

“Comprehension \neq Mastery”

“Practice is the opposite of hoping”

This is just the beginning.



Thank **you!**

Are there questions?



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Attribution (CC):

- Gplay pattern by Haris Šumić @ <http://subtlepatterns.com/gplay>
- Subtle Grey pattern by Dimitrie Hoekstra @ <http://subtlepatterns.com/subtle-grey>
- Wireframe shapes by inZane @ <http://www.vectorfree.com/wireframe-shapes-bundle>



Resources



Presentations

- Concrete Practices to be a better Leader
 - Brian Sharp – GDC 2010 – Free GDC Vault video
- Great Management of Technical Leads
 - Mike Acton – GDC 2015
- Leading High Performance Teams
 - Madelaine Beermann – GDC 2015
- You're Responsible
 - Mike Acton – SIEGE 2013 – Free Video

Books

- Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most
 - Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, Roger Fisher
- Team Leadership in the Games Industry
 - Seth Spaulding
- How to Lead
 - Jo Owen

Web

- Lead Quick Start Guide
 - Mike Acton – Gamasutra, #AltDevBlog
- So they made you a lead; now what?
 - Oliver Franzke – Gamasutra, #AltDevBlog
- A Simple Test of Leadership
 - Keith Fuller - Gamasutra