



# How to Become a Leader

For Middle and High School Girls

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**All young women can and should develop competencies to become leaders.**

*“Knowing others well enough to lead them successfully can only be as powerful and as concrete as how well we truly know and understand ourselves.*

—Parker Palmer

*“Leaders grow, they are not made..”*

—Peter F. Drucker

*“The process of becoming a leader is much the same as the process of becoming an integrated human being..”*

—Peter F. Drucker

## Understand Yourself



One of the most important ways to become a leader is to focus on developing critical leadership competencies early in your life. One of the first competencies you can begin developing during your middle and high school years is self-knowledge—the ability to understand yourself. It is important that you challenge yourself to discover who you are and what you want. You can do this by rationally trying to figure out your strengths and weaknesses. Successful women leaders are able to see themselves accurately through their own eyes and also through the eyes of others. Sometimes people don't know what they're good at, and sometimes people don't know what they're bad at. Understanding these things can empower you to move forward in developing new skills. Remember that you can't be good at everything. In fact, each leader is different and each has her own combinations of strengths and weaknesses.

The more you can become aware of your surroundings and can learn to understand the reasons behind the way you think, act, and react—the more you can understand yourself. Reflecting on what happens around you can teach you many things. Watching and studying people and situations can provide valuable educational experiences if you can learn to reflect upon the meanings behind the situations and experiences you encounter. When you really begin understanding yourself, you can become better at changing or altering your behaviors based on your observations and reflections. These kinds of self-monitoring skills are very important for effective leadership.

## Value Feedback

Learning to give and receive accurate feedback is one of the most important skills for successful leadership. It is often very difficult to listen to people who are telling you what you did well and how you need to improve. Yet, if you develop at least a few open and honest relationships with friends and adults, you can quickly enhance your abilities to do many things that will help you become a better leader. Feedback is really a gift if you use it to your advantage.

Prominent women leaders have said that open and honest high school friends were very important in helping them 1) develop various leadership skills and 2) perform better in school and in life. Trusted friends who share honest ideas and opinions are those who will become your closest friends for life.



## For Middle and High School Girls



### PRACTICE LEADING

#### Why Should You Become a Leader?

Leadership is not just for business. Leadership skills can help you become more influential and effective in your homes, churches, schools, communities, and workplaces. If you want to make a difference in any setting, then challenge yourself to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead effectively.

*“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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## Get Involved

You can develop leadership in nearly everything you do if you are paying attention and open to change. In my research I have found that extracurricular activities can provide many developmental opportunities for young women. Competitive activities can assist you in learning many specific leadership competencies. Formal and informal team sports can provide rich environments to learn about teamwork, winning and losing, strength and toughness (physical and mental), responsibility, dependability, resilience, and more.

Competitive debate, speaking, contests, and other activities can be beneficial in developing leadership skills. Activities that provide opportunities for you to strengthen written communication skills (such as school newspaper, magazines, and yearbook) are helpful as well. Involvement in most clubs, groups, and activities can provide leadership development opportunities if 1) they are challenging, and 2) you approach them with a desire to learn, to do your best, and if you will reflect on your experiences.

General participation in activities can provide developmental opportunities, but the growth opportunities increase as you take leadership roles in any of these areas: school clubs, athletic teams, student government, church youth groups, community organizations, and so forth. These opportunities can give you opportunities to organize, administer, and lead. They can also give you responsibilities to mentor and develop others, which is a unique hallmark of successful women leaders.



## Listen and Learn

Observing and listening to what is happening around you can help you learn to becoming better at what you do. The key is trying to learn in whatever you are doing. Learn from what you hear, learn from what you see, and learn from what you feel.

Effective leaders find joy and passion in learning. They enjoy most elements of their formal schooling and thrive within engaging and enriching educational environments. They yearn to learn and find joy in intellectual growth and love being intellectually challenged. Developing leadership is all about learning.

Most top women leaders have loved reading most of their lives. Reading is linked with learning in many ways. You can find joy in opening up your mind to learn from what you read.

If you are committed to well-rounded intellectual, emotional, and social development, you can increase your confidence and desire to learn to lead by being actively involved in many facets of your school experience. Girls who become leaders find joy in their journeys. They are not always looking for something better ahead.

Remember that you are the one

who determines how much you learn and grow. Others can help, but it is you that makes the decisions and the difference.

Failures, struggles, and hardships can often provide more profound leadership development opportunities than successes—but only if you are reflective. Difficult times can bring out reflective opportunities that can help you deepen your understanding of life, become aware of your internal emotions and struggles, discover your strengths and weaknesses, and gain an awareness of your coping and self-management skills. Listen and learn.