Using Introspection to Develop Leadership Traits

**Purpose**

This lesson addresses one of the primary questions concerning leadership: “How do I go about developing the traits, qualities, and principles necessary to become an effective leader?”

**Introduction**

The development of positive leadership traits and qualities is an internal maturing process that you control. It is up to you to decide what kind of person you are going to be. Character development takes a great deal of soul searching and introspection.

**Definition**

Introspection is when you examine your actions and motives to see whether you are acting in a correct and responsible manner. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, once said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” One might paraphrase Socrates by saying that the leaders who have not taken stock of themselves and have not corrected any mistakes are not worth following; nor will they be able to lead effectively.

Introspection, or self-assessment, takes time and effort. It requires that you be dedicated and patient. Developing strong leadership traits takes a great deal of hard work. The road to success in this respect has always been difficult, for there is no such thing as easy growth.

**Methods of Introspection**

Different people have different ways of achieving “self-assessment” or “introspection.” Most, however, take a few moments out of the day to take stock of their attitudes and actions of the past 24 hours. Some people call this a prayer exercise or meditation. Others refer to it as a moment of introspection or peace and quiet. Regardless of what it is called, it accomplishes the same thing: It gives the individual peace of mind and direction, provided the individual looks honestly at what has been done.

**Specific Time**

The best way to go about this exercise is to designate a certain time every day for contemplation and reflection. If you make
introspection a habit, eventually it will become easier. This is not to say that you will be able to take five minutes and solve all your problems. It means that you will become familiar with those attitudes and methods that allow self-examination. You will become more comfortable with the process and it will become easier for you to recognize problems as they arise.

**Involve Yourself**

The success of introspection depends on your willingness to involve yourself. If you are to become a leader, some endeavor involving self-assessment is necessary. Remember, it is for your own leadership development.

**Getting Started**

When you begin the exercise of introspection, you must establish the following guidelines so that the exercise is an effective and positive method of developing your leadership traits.

**No Perfect Leader**

The first thing to remember is that you need not try to make yourself into a perfect leader on the first day. No one is perfect; everyone has faults. If you were to list all of your faults every day, it would have a negative effect. Rather, try to come up with alternatives to how you could better handle a given situation.

**Learn from Mistakes**

You should not be too hard on yourself for making mistakes in areas where you are trying to improve. Suppose you have been trying to be more understanding and pleasant with members of your family. This is not always the easiest thing to do. You are human and are prone to mistakes; hence, in anger, you might lash out at someone unjustly. It is important for you to recognize that you have done this, just as it is important for you to not condemn yourself for one mistake. Correct it, stay with it, and above all, work on the problem. Self-improvement takes time and effort. It is not easy for anyone.

**Questions for Introspection**

When exercising introspection, you should evaluate how ethical your actions have been. You might ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Have I been honest with my teachers, peers, parents, and family?
- Have I been kind in my dealings with subordinates, peers, parents, and family?
- Have I been firm in my decisions?

You will find that this kind of inquiry will give you excellent insight into your own thinking processes and actions. It will give you a clear idea of where you are going and how you are getting there.

While you are involved in this, you should remember to be positive in your assessment, otherwise you will fall into the trap of negative thinking. The object of introspection is to improve yourself, not to concentrate on your faults. You should concentrate on what you can be. Few people ever realize their potential; however, if you work hard at it, you will reach yours.

**Positive Attitude**

During introspection, it is best to have a positive attitude. This does not mean, however, that you can afford to ignore your faults and weaknesses. It means that you should concentrate on what you can do to improve yourself. A positive attitude will allow you to make
improvements in your character by seeing what you can become. All that is asked of you is that you achieve your potential.

**Conclusion**

You should ask yourself: “What can I do today that will help me to become a better person? What can I do within my daily routine that will help me to develop the traits of leadership that I will need?” If you can generate one or two good ideas a week that will help you alter your behavior for the better, then you will be making excellent progress.