

3 Surprising Secrets of Smart Leadership (Which Many Don't Practice)

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Having coached and trained leaders for two decades, I can state this with confidence: There are [clear leadership behaviors](#) that positively impact businesses to grow to their fullest potential.

Let me first acknowledge that becoming a [smart leader](#) is ultimately an inside job -- it's who you are at the core of your being, not what you "do" from a prescribed list found in the latest [management book](#).

To lead smartly means leading with emotional intelligence, which may be surprising and rare in itself. It takes skill, heart, and head, but any leader willing to learn and grow is capable of it. Here's a quick roadmap to starting on your path of practicing smart leadership:

Lead with curiosity

The reason for curiosity as a rare leadership strength? Research has found it to be a solid framework for acquiring knowledge. We all know having a growth mindset is a good foundation to keep learning, and it takes curiosity to do that.

Not only is curiosity key to the learning process, it's also great for overall life satisfaction, according to science. [Several research studies](#) suggest curious people have better relationships, connect better, and enjoy socializing more. In fact, other people are more easily attracted and feel socially closer to individuals that display curiosity.

Lead with self-awareness

One of the cornerstones of emotional intelligence, self-awareness may be the most important skill for a leader to master. And it's arguably the *most* important attribute for a leader who wants to create a culture of growth and development.

With self-awareness, you can probe your emotions in any given situation to understand what you're feeling and why. You can boil it down to one important question: *Do you really understand yourself?*

This is key for understanding how to appropriately respond, rather than impulsively react to a situation going south.

Lead by accepting feedback

The tendency for many leaders is to hear the good ideas and opinions of others but only truly consider their own. It is a theme that points to a lack of good listening skills. To reverse course, the path starts with accepting feedback.

Every good business leader has a coach who will give them honest feedback and help them improve and push themselves. That means opening yourself up to scrutiny from colleagues -- through 360 reviews, engagement surveys, and other forms of potentially stinging feedback -- but the payoff will be worth it. It helps to create a culture of openness and transparency, and to establish trust and awareness at the organizational level.