

‘Leadership’s L.I.S.T.’

The Four Action Verbs of Excellent Leadership – a speech by Noah Sveiven

I... am a firm believer in lists. | Each night, before I go to bed, I write the next day’s schedule. Reviewing checked boxes and rewriting unchecked boxes provides a routine reckoning of what I have done and what I need to do. Lists can help you too.

Especially Leadership’s List.

Listen, Ignite, Support, Trust – This is the L-I-S-T that meaningful leaders follow.

Inspiring leaders *listen* to others, *ignite* those near them, *support* everyone’s happiness, and *trust* the people they have the honor of serving. Without each item on this list, a leader can’t be good.

First, Listen. “Listen” doesn’t just come first because ‘L’ comes first in L.I.S.T. Listen comes first, because listening is the first thing responsive leaders do. Leaders who make decisions without listening are only as strong as themselves, but leaders who listen to others before they act make decisions as strong as themselves and all the voices they hear. Responsive leaders know when to stop talking (pause intentionally) and tune into the voices of others. That’s why Benjamin Disraeli quipped, “I must follow the people—am I not their leader?” **Responsive leaders listen.**

The I: Ignite. Effective leaders ignite those around them. Innovation, Advancement, Change – these are all possible when, and only when, someone ignites the forces that lie within every one of us. Effective leaders rally others to strive towards a common goal. That’s why General Montgomery proclaimed that “leadership is...the capacity and the will to rally men and women to a common purpose.” Effective leaders cultivate the drive and the ingenuity that already lies within, untapped—waiting to be reaped. **Effective leaders ignite.**

The S: Support. Leading successfully means supporting always. Successful leaders support those around them and tend to the needs they can help meet. Not just when things are easy but when they are hard, because competent leadership cares. Support does not disregard or bulldoze; it cultivates and praises. That’s why Napoleon Bonaparte said that “a leader is a dealer | in hope.” **Successful leaders support.**

The T: Trust. Servant leaders trust others and are trusted by others. Trust makes or breaks the quality of leadership. If it doesn’t flow both ways, it never lasts long. If it isn’t maintained with

a constant commitment to truth, it unravels. That's why Harold Macmillan said that, "A man who trusts nobody | is apt to be | the kind of man nobody trusts." The absence of trust leads to worry and doubt. Consider our citizenry. Those in positions of political authority have not done enough to foster trust, and the public has returned in kind. Politicians are supposed to be public servants; and public servants ought to *trust* the will of the people, because **servant leaders trust**.

Listen, Ignite, Support, Trust.

For me, my mother offers a fine example of Leadership's L.I.S.T. Her students and her children make her a leader. Regardless of where she is, she is always listening, igniting, supporting, and trusting.

After work most days, she shares the stories of her students with my sister and me. Often filled with adversity and uncertainty, the lives of her students aren't easy. More times than I can count, my mother has taken a place in the hearts of those who chose to talk to her—who chose to talk to her about things not spoken of with ease. My mother listens, ignites, supports, and trusts, and that's what makes the difference.

Ladies and Gentlemen: as we all go about our lives and engage in that great challenge called leading, we must follow this list. If we want to be responsive leaders, we must listen; if we want to be effective leaders, we must ignite; if we want to be successful leaders, we must support; and if we want to be servant leaders, we must trust. May we all.

And now, I must take my leave. I have another list to write.