



National Association of Probation Executives
Supporting Executives in Community Supervision Agencies

Monthly Newsletter

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NAPE President

Leadership Traits

We have all heard or said at some point, “there is a difference between a leader and a manager.” The overuse of this phrase has made it a bit cliché. What are we really trying to communicate when we emphatically make the distinction between leaders and managers?

In 2004, Harvard Business Review made the claim that managers focus on the process, they seek control and stability, and they have an instinct to solve problems quickly, even when they don't completely understand the problem. On the other hand, leaders can work in chaotic situations without much structure, and they will often delay solving a problem until they fully understand the issue. One may conclude that in most situations, a leader will be far more successful long-term than a manager. So, how do we grow as leaders and resist the temptation to simply manage?

I recently read Simon Sinek's book “Leaders Eat Last.” I was drawn to the book based on how Sinek chose the title. He claims that leaders are willing to give up something of their own for those they lead. He believes that humans have an instinctual need to feel safe and that a company's biggest strength doesn't lie in its services, but in its people. When the troops are taken care of, the rest will fall into place.

Like Sinek, most leadership experts agree that there are certain traits that are key to developing and maintaining successful teams. We are measured by our abilities to relate to people and motivate them toward change, serve the courts, protect victims, and our stewardship of the resources we have been given. Service is the root of our profession, which must be driven by our ability to understand where others come from, admit when we don't have the answers, and at times, eat last.

Empathy

Putting yourself in the other person's shoes can be powerful. It changes the dynamic and opens communication. Motivational interviewing taught many of us the skill of reflective listening and rolling with resistance. These skills are effective because the person on the other end is provided with the sense that the listener is fully engaged and understands what he or she is saying and feeling; defenses go down when the leader begins to empathize.

Some leaders have a natural ability to understand others, but what about those who need to sharpen this skill? I have personally coached leaders that have struggled with expressing empathy, but over time have learned to unpack, if you will, an employee's motive or what is actually behind an employee's behavior. A friend of mine refers to this as the “thing behind the thing.” It requires critical thinking,

which may be a less intimidating concept to tackle. Some universities require critical inquiry classes with the goal of producing educated individuals that know how to think outside the box and not react based only on perceptions. Looking for and developing this skill in leaders will help ensure that your employees are seen as human beings and not just tools within your agency, which may help staff feel valued and motivated to serve.

Vulnerability

While empathy is one of the human sides of leadership that makes us relatable to one another, vulnerability acts in a similar manner. Researcher and author Brene Brown describes vulnerability in her many TED talks and books as “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure...that feeling we get when we step out of our comfort zones or do something that forces us to loosen control.” Vulnerability is not about letting go of boundaries, rather having the ability, or courage to admit when we don’t have all the answers. Brown believes true vulnerability takes an extraordinary amount of courage. At the peak of COVID-19, none of our employees would have believed us if we told them we knew exactly what to do next and how to respond to the crisis. Trust is built through honesty. Staying in control, making our employees feel safe, and creating a plan became more important than having all the answers.

Humility

Humility is understanding that it takes the whole team to be successful and that talent comes from every area within the organization. Forbes magazine reports a number of research studies that have concluded that humble leaders are better listeners, inspire teamwork, and have a greater ability to focus on organizational goals.

Humility must not to be mistaken for a lack of confidence. A 2016 Washington Post Article describes humility as the ability of the leader to assess his own strengths and weaknesses and understand that he is a part of something bigger than he. He will use his abilities to contribute, but also recognize his flaws so that he can grow. This type of leader is proud to give the credit to others when things go well yet is not afraid to be vulnerable and admit when he has made a mistake.

Why is it important that we get it right as leaders?

I once heard someone say that a leader without followers is just a man out taking a stroll. Leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, and many others, simply would have been individuals with an idea without their abilities to inspire and lead others, yet their actions have influenced and benefited generations after them.

We chose a profession with tremendous responsibility. The situations we tackle daily are rooted in pain, trauma, substance use, disabilities, poverty, and violence. We literally deal with life and death situations that can’t tolerate disjointed and dysfunctional teams. We are public servants, and we owe it to those we serve to be the best leaders we can be.

All three of these concepts work together and I would argue that it is difficult to have one without having some aspects of the other two. As we seek to develop leaders within our organizations, recruit staff, and work to improve ourselves, these traits can keep us grounded and focused on our goals and the importance of our positions. They can also bind us as teams and help us move in the same direction. They will assist us in building trust not only amongst ourselves, but with our stakeholders. Most importantly, these are traits that can help us improve overall as human beings.



YOU ARE INVITED!

NAPE Annual Luncheon and Awards Ceremony

Marriott Marquis
New York City, NY

Monday, August 25, 2025
12:30pm-2:00pm
9th Floor Upper Terrace

Corporate Corner





Attending APPA in NY?

- Learn how to better protect your officers in the field
- Exclusive draw for NAPE Members: Win a \$150 Amazon Card

Visit Booth 401!



Join the NAPE Network

We invite members to share information about NAPE with other community supervision executives to help expand our network and strengthen our opportunities, data, and expertise. Affordable annual NAPE membership options are available and can be purchased/renewed at napehome.org

Visit www.napehome.org/join to join NAPE online!

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NAPE is dedicated to enhancing the professionalism and effectiveness in the field of community corrections by creating a national network for executives, bringing about positive change in the field, and making available a pool of experts in community corrections management, program development, training, and research.

Learn more: napehome.org

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