

SIGMA **Leadership Series**



**Great Leaders
Are Dependable**



GREAT LEADERS ARE DEPENDABLE

“ Ability is important in our quest for success, but dependability is critical.

— Zig Ziglar

Showing colleagues, direct reports, and clients that they can depend on you is a critical leadership skill. Research has shown that dependability is a key factor in performance, as leaders who are dependable are more inclined to ensure the timely execution of strategic initiatives¹. Leaders also set the tone for which workplace behaviors are desirable and acceptable. Therefore, leaders who demonstrate dependability in their own work communicate that keeping up with deadlines is a valued quality that others should also aspire to. A culture of dependability fosters high achievement across the organization, and research shows that employees who are more dependable perform better than their less dependable coworkers².

Dependability refers to the ability to be counted on to meet commitments and deadlines. Being in a leadership position often means that your actions have direct consequences for those around you. As such, it is important to consistently follow through on the commitments you make to others and to honour agreed upon timelines. Not only does this facilitate trusting relationships between you and your direct reports, it may also represent a key enabler of employee engagement and productivity³. When employees know they can rely on their leader, it allows them to carry out their work confidently and effectively. This is why dependability has been found to be particularly useful during times of change, as dependable leaders can help mitigate the ill effects of uncertainty by providing employees with stability and consistency⁴.

In assessing your dependability, ask yourself the following questions:

- How effective are my strategies for completing work by the agreed-upon date?
- Are there any common distractions that get in the way of my ability to be reliable?
- Does my track record give collaborators confidence in my ability to deliver?
- Do I check to make sure new tasks won't interfere with ongoing commitments?
- Am I able to keep track of what tasks need to be accomplished by what date?
- Do I set concrete deadlines for myself and others?

Improve Your Dependability

Self-discipline is key: Being dependable starts with the ability to be self-disciplined¹. In order to be dependable, you must be able to make steady progress in your work. This isn't always easy, but learning to minimize distractions and remain focused can help enhance your dependability.

Lead by example: Dependability is a foundational skill that is important at all levels of the organization. One way to facilitate organization-wide dependability is to build it into your company culture. A culture of dependability is good for interpersonal relations, for teamwork, and for making clients or customers happy. According to the experts, building a strong culture starts at the top⁵, meaning that leaders should model dependability in their own work and communicate this standard to others when possible.

Remember the Golden Rule: It may sound like a cliché, but it is important to demonstrate the conduct that you would expect from those you work with. To practice dependability, consider the impact your behavior has on others. When in doubt, you may find it useful to put yourself in the position of others who may be impacted by your inability to meet a deadline or uphold a commitment. If you would not appreciate your leader failing to deliver on time, then chances are your direct reports and teammates won't appreciate this either.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become More Dependable

The following steps can help you become more dependable:

- 1. Practice makes perfect.** Cultivating a reputation for being dependable requires consistency and practice. Although this can take some time, you can start now by introducing good habits into your daily routine. Take stock of your commitments and ensure you are tracking your progress toward deadlines. Consider the time it will take to accomplish work and adjust your schedule accordingly. Take it slow. Dependability is built gradually with each meeting you attend on time, each project you deliver by the deadline, and each promise to others you keep.
- 2. Beware of over-committing.** Sometimes the failure to meet a deadline stems from good intentions. When it comes to taking on new discretionary tasks, it is important to assess whether this will jeopardize your ability to uphold your prior commitments. It may feel difficult to say “no”, but it will feel worse if you say “yes” and then cannot follow through. Maintain an awareness of your capacity by tracking your commitments, noting deadlines or potential challenges that may slow your progress. Consider using an agenda, task list, or project management software to keep your deadlines organized.
- 3. Think SMART and take action.** In order to start being more dependable, you need to be clear on task deadlines and communicate these timelines to the right people. Do your best to avoid leaving room for interpretation or setting ambiguous goals (e.g., “I will do this in a few weeks”), as these are easier to put off. Instead, try setting SMART goals (i.e., goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) for yourself and your team. SMART goals will help you reliably deliver on your objectives by clarifying what needs to be done and when it should be done by. You may also find it useful to keep a running list of action items to facilitate goal completion. Action items keep track of the process goals that each person is responsible for. Not only is this a great way to stay organized, it can also facilitate dependability by holding people accountable to their own set of tasks.

Resources



[How to Be Relentlessly Reliable and Become a Great Leader](#)



[Why Good Leaders Need To Be Reliable](#)



Develop your dependability by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: support@SigmaHR.com

Call: 800-265-1285

References

¹ Wang, Y., Wu, C. H., & Mobley, W. H. (2013). The two facets of conscientiousness: interaction of achievement orientation and dependability in predicting managerial execution effectiveness. *Human Performance*, 26, 275-296.

² Fauth, R., Bevan, S., & Mills, P. (2009). Employee performance in the knowledge economy: Capturing the keys to success. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 2, 1-12.

³ Gottschalk, M. (2019). *If you want engaged employees, offer them stability*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2019/08/if-you-want-engaged-employees-offer-them-stability>

⁴ Colquitt, J. A., LePine, J. A., Piccolo, R. F., Zapata, C. P., & Rich, B. L. (2012). Explaining the justice–performance relationship: Trust as exchange deepener or trust as uncertainty reducer? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97, 1-15.

⁵ Forbes Coaches Council. (2018). *15 Best Ways To Build A Company Culture That Thrives*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2018/01/29/15-best-ways-to-build-a-company-culture-that-thrives/?sh=272dde121b96>