Leadership Essentials Refresher

This is a training module from the ScreenSkills Leadership Essentials programme.

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Introduction

Welcome back to Leadership Essentials! It's been a while since you attended the Leadership Essentials in-person training, and you've probably gained a lot more leadership and management experience since then.

In this module we'll refresh some key points from the training, by using a set of short scenarios to think through the leadership actions that would support the most positive outcomes.

In reality, we may know what we're supposed to do, but leadership often means handling complex situations and managing competing needs and requirements. Each scenario will ask you to reflect on what you'd do in the situation, or if it's something you've dealt with before, what you did do. Then we'll share best practice, to help you make the best decisions when you're faced with similar situations in future.

Even if you feel confident as a leader, you should still find some helpful tips in this refresher.

Let's get started.

Building trust with your team

Sometimes on productions, people can perform the same role but for different rates of pay, because of the experience or skills they bring. On a low-budget production, the department head has told some crew members that they're being paid the same – but in fact they're on different rates.

What impacts do you think this might have?

Take a moment to think about this.

In a situation like this, you have to assume that people will find out the truth, and that when they do it will cause a serious breakdown in trust. When people feel they're not being treated fairly, it can damage relationships - not just with the department head, but across the production.

Trust is vital in healthy working relationships. It relies on the leader showing honesty, integrity and consistency.

If crew members are being paid differently, the worst thing you can do is try and mask it.

Having promised parity the department head should honour it, even though it stretches the budget.

Let's look at another scenario.

Sometimes we have to find crew at short notice, for example dailies, assistants and trainees. These crew members will need to hit the ground running and learn on the job – right?

As the leader, would you take time to give each new team member an induction?

Yes, or no?

Time is always precious in our work, so you may feel that inducting each new team member just isn't practical.

But every production has its differences, so no matter how experienced, or not, the new recruit is, getting to know them and taking time to share the vision for your team is really important. That way, they'll know the goal they're working towards and be clear on their role and responsibilities.

In turn, you'll learn more about them and what additional support or training they may need.

The initial chat you have with new team members can help to break down barriers, build empathy and aid communication, which all help with avoiding stress and tensions later down the line.

Managing conflict

Imagine you're the head of department and two members of your team aren't getting on. Nothing serious has happened, but you've noticed there's friction that's making it hard for them to work together. What would you do?

    A. Step in and try to sort it out

    B. Stand back and let them get on with it

    C. Wait, then step in if something serious happens

When you're working with adults, you may well feel that they should sort out their own problems. But if you let this situation continue, chances are it will keep getting worse until it starts impacting on other members of the team - including you.

As the manager in this situation, the sooner you step in and actively manage the conflict, the better.

Best practice for handling this situation would be to start by speaking with each party individually, to find out what they think the situation is. Depending on the outcome of these meetings, you may want to bring them together to address specific issues and agree a way forward.

Remind them that even if the conflict is personal, it's essential that everyone can work together professionally.

Leaders protect their teams. This requires communication, empathy, and not ignoring situations that could damage the team. When you actively manage conflict, you show that you can be trusted to lead.

In this industry we work with many different types of people, and often for long periods of time. In this scenario, you're about to start a project as the manager of a new team. You've worked with one of the team members before and you know they can be very vocal. You're worried they could cause disruption on this project.

So what do you do? You may not want to upset this colleague before the job even starts, but should you wait until something happens?

Take a moment to think about this.

At the beginning of a project, the leader sets the tone primarily through their own behaviours. But you should also be clear with your team about what's ok and what isn't.

Even if it's uncomfortable, best practice would be to discuss appropriate behaviours with all team members as part of their induction. Everyone in the team should also know what to do if there's an issue, including how to escalate it, and they should be signposted to any useful resources.

When a team has a positive working dynamic, it's more creative, more productive and there's a lower chance of conflicts. A positive dynamic also supports individuals to manage their own behaviour, which will take pressure off you as the manager. It's founded in trust, consistency and showing that you're willing to step up as needed.

Creating inclusive work environments

It's time to relax for a moment. In this scenario, the HOD wants their team to start getting to know each other, so they invite everyone to the pub for drinks after work.

What do you think? Is this a good idea – or not?

Take a moment to think about this.

Creating opportunities for the team to socialise is a great thing to do, and for many people, the pub can feel like a natural setting. But there are lots of reasons why people either can't or won't go to the pub – for example if they don't drink alcohol, or if they have family or caring responsibilities.

It's a good idea to mix up ways of socialising, so if you go to the pub on one occasion you might go for an ice cream the next time. Wherever possible, socialising within the workplace and during the working day can make it easier to include everyone, for example by having team lunches and coffees, or playing a game.

Inclusion is about all of us. Diverse teams should be the norm, so we need every leader in our industry to help us achieve it.

Of course, being inclusive is also about hiring diverse teams. **Do you feel confident that you know the best practices for recruitment?**

Yes, or no?

As a leader, you have the power to help build inclusive cultures and workplaces. There are simple actions we can all take to make sure that our teams are safe and supportive for everyone. So keep up with diversity and inclusion trainings and think about how you can apply them to your work.

It's vital to keep inclusion in mind throughout a production. For example, when it comes to recruitment, think about how you advertise the role: does it *really* require someone with a driving licence? A requirement like this excludes people who can't afford to drive, as well as those with other access issues.

We should never expect minoritised people to educate us: it's our job to do the learning. But do ensure that you listen carefully, and without being defensive, when someone wants to share their lived-in experience with you.

There are loads of resources that can help you educate yourself about diversity and inclusion. Have a look at the ScreenSkills website and the course Padlet.

Giving constructive feedback

In this scenario, you're working with someone who's always cracking jokes. They mean well, but their language can be a bit 'old-fashioned' and they're at risk of causing offence.

What, if anything, would you do about this?

Take a moment to consider.

Our words matter, and they can make or break a respectful, healthy working environment. Challenging another person on their behaviour can feel very uncomfortable. But as the leader, it's your responsibility to explain to this person why their language is derogatory or offensive.

Language can shift over time, so that well-intentioned people can use words or phrases without realising they're not appropriate. If we let it go, we perpetuate the microaggressions, or outright harassment, that make other people feel undermined or excluded.

Be kind and clear when discussing this with your team member, and take the time to describe how language can create or damage inclusive working cultures, whether used intentionally or not.

This is a really important area and can be tricky to deal with. Take the time to find more information about this subject on the ScreenSkills website.

Here's a different scenario.

You have a team member who normally does great work, but recently they've been making mistakes. It's holding the rest of the team up, which is causing delays and frustration.

Have you been in a situation like this before? What did you do, or what would you do now?

Take a moment to consider.

If this person's work is normally good, then it's likely that something's going on for them which is making it hard to bring their full attention to the job.

Best practice would be to have a private conversation, give them feedback on the issue and tell them you're concerned.

You'll need to balance being specific about the issues and any impact they're having, with being human and checking that the other person is ok.

There is a difference between criticism and feedback. Feedback ultimately aims to benefit the person receiving it. It supports ongoing communication and builds trust. Criticism is unhelpful and damages team relationships.

In this scenario, you might reassure the team member that it's unusual for there to be problems with their work, and ask whether they need support with anything.

Identify the core issue and focus on a solution.

Is the production timing flexible, for example? If not, then:

- Be clear about what the team requires and

- Discuss with the team member whether they're able to deliver it.

- Find out if there's any additional support available that could help them.

Conversations to correct performance are always tough, which is why you should give feedback to your team regularly. Don't wait until improvements are required.

As a leader, sometimes you will need to deliver feedback in order to realign team members with the overall goal. When that happens, there are five things you can do to make sure it's constructive:

1. Act promptly

It's best to give feedback as soon as possible after the event.

However, if emotions are high on either side then wait until you've both calmed down.

2. Prepare

Feedback should always be given in private, so choose a time and place for the meeting that suits both of you.

Think constructively about what you want the other person to change and why it matters.

Check your facts and prepare notes if you need to.

3. Don't make it personal

When delivering the feedback, be clear, calm and direct, and maintain eye contact if you can.

Stay focused on the behaviours and actions that have caused issues.

Don't make personal comments, such as 'you need to', 'you should be' or 'you are'.

4. Stay on track

Deal with excuses respectfully but don't let them derail the conversation.

It's important that the other person understands what you want them to change, so ask them to reflect back what you've discussed to make sure.

5. Follow up

At the end of the feedback conversation, agree on the actions they need to take.

Choose a time that suits both of you to follow up and check whether they've made the requested change.

By following these five steps, you should be able to give feedback with more confidence and greater impact.

Remember that feedback can also go both ways: maybe there are things you can do differently that would benefit your team members. You can invite this feedback, and show that you're able to accept it.

Handling difficult behaviours

This topic is one of the most important.

Unfortunately, you may have experienced, or witnessed, bullying and harassment since you attended the leadership essentials course. Perhaps you've had to deal with an allegation of bullying or harassment yourself.

It's in all our interests to promote a safe, healthy and fair environment where people can work without fear of being bullied, harassed, discriminated against or victimised.

Bullying and harassment can be behavioural, verbal, physical or environmental. It could involve social media, physical or emotional violence or upset, and it can happen without a production's knowledge.

Employers have a duty of care for their employees. As an HOD, manager or leader, that means you have a duty of care for your team.

If you become aware of, or witness behaviour that could be deemed to be bullying or harassment, it's important that you know what to do. Keep in mind that as a leader or manager, it's likely that the first person the complainant will turn to is you.

Do you know your company's policy on bullying and harassment? Or would you know where to find it?

Yes, or no?

Each production company has its own procedures for managing complaints.

It's crucial that you find out whether your company has a policy on bullying and harassment, and if so where to find it.

Find out how to raise and escalate an issue at the beginning of each job.

Organisations including ACAs, The Film and TV Charity and Bectu all provide support, advice and resources for handling bullying and harassment issues at work.

The more power we have, the more impact our words have on others. We all need to be aware of our behaviours in the workplace, so look at the anti-bullying course on the ScreenSkills website, and flag it with your team as well.

The law now states that employers have a proactive duty to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. No one is above the law. It is important people make a stand against bad behaviour in the industry and feel confident in calling it out to ensure that it is highlighted and addressed.

Find more information on the Course Padlet. There is a link at the end of this module.

Conclusion

You've nearly completed this refresher course. Finally, do you know where to turn if you need some support? We all know that productions can be high-pressure environments, so if we want to look after our teams effectively then we have to look after ourselves.

Make sure you take time to do the things that help you build your capacity to lead. Small actions can make a big difference, like remembering to take a breather, getting some fresh air, eating well and doing exercise.

When you take care of your own health and wellbeing, it's easier to support positive, healthy, more resilient teams.

We've reached the end of this e-module. Thanks for taking the time to refresh your memory on the leadership essentials.

To summarise, leaders build healthy, creative and self-supporting teams through trust.

They sustain this trust by showing:

- Vision

- Honesty and Integrity

- Communication

- Consistency

- Empathy

To be effective, a leader will:

- Manage conflict proactively

- Promote inclusion and build self-awareness

- Deliver feedback not criticism

- Take action against bad behaviours

- Look after their health and wellbeing

Ultimately, this e-module can be captured in one word: Respect. We all want to work in an environment that supports us to deliver our best. As a leader you have the power to shape this environment for your team, and contribute to building a healthier, happier and more inclusive industry.

You've completed the ScreenSkills Leadership Refresher module.

You'll find more resources on the ScreenSkills website.

Here is a link to the Course Padlet (will open in a browser window)

This is the end of the content.