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Amplifying Life

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Leadership

Having leaders in our schools, communities, work place, and even our home is critical to the operation of everyday life. They are important to help make things run smoothly. In the past several years, U.S. higher education institutions have incorporated leadership training programs to offer students coursework that will help develop leadership skills and professional marketability. Most companies and organizations provide additional leadership development trainings to help mold new employees into the type of professional they require for the business.

What is leadership? One of the definitions used is “A person who guides or directs a group.” We have often heard the phrase, “Leaders are born, not made.” Sometimes this is transformed into the idea that “Leaders are born, made, and molded.” Some individuals have a natural tendency to rise to leadership positions. Everyone though could benefit from leadership skills. One of my favorite quotes is “Leadership is an action, not a position.” We look to leaders not only to guide, but also to set an example with the right choice. Of course “right” is a perception, which is why each person finds someone different to look up to.

Our society recognizes the importance of developing leadership skills of individuals and to build upon their strengths. There are many benefits to leadership skills, including being more marketable to employers. The University of Minnesota identified 8 qualities that employers are looking for. These qualities are: leadership, communication and interpersonal skills, intelligence, enthusiasm, flexibility, high energy level, maturity, and skill.

As a leader, you can use your skills to inspire and motivate others. It is no surprise that people you may never meet will see you in your leadership role and look at how you handle situations. As a parent, this may happen at the baseball field with other parents watching. Why all this talk about leadership skills? Sometimes people don't realize the power they have to help create effective leaders. I believe the development of leadership skills begins when children are young and continues throughout our lifespan. As a parent, we can be intentional in helping children develop these skills. As members of the community, young people watch and observe leadership qualities each and every day. What actions can be taken to help children and youth become positive leaders?

Youth can often be overwhelmed with too many choices or options. Adults can help narrow down the choices, talk through the pros and cons of choices, and help guide them in making decisions. As they grow from young children to young adults we hope that they become better decision makers and grow the skills that develop leaders. Eventually, they will understand the assessment of what needs to be completed as well as have the capacity to initiate the task with little direction. Becoming a leader is a journey not a destination. It doesn't end at high school graduation. It begins at birth and continues throughout our lifetime. Helping our youth develop their leadership skills has proven benefits. If we set the foundation, they can take on more of the responsibility as they mature.

More information on the development throughout the lifespan, feel free to contact me. Shandi Andres, Flint Hills Extension District, 501 W Main, Council Grove, KS 66846. (620) 767-5136 or sdandres@ksu.edu