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**A.** Leaders do have to be in charge. They put on the mantle of leadership, they step into it and they believe in themselves. They don't make apologies for that. They see themselves as being in a different role than just one of the team. They understand that they are accountable, and they understand that it's a big job they've taken on.

It *is* a question of balance, and I think that leaders can make two mistakes in this respect.

First, they can fail to properly put on the mantle of leadership. By that I mean that they don't really believe in themselves as a leader. They maintain the mindset of their last professional role. They don't step into the leadership role sufficiently. They don't understand that it's a different role.

The leaders who get this wrong sometimes end up being too chummy, or friendly, or close to the team. As a result, they can't take a stand when they need to – when a critical issue arises.

The other thing that goes wrong here – especially if you start to have some genuine success as a leader – is that you think the

mantle of leadership is a golden crown. You think of yourself more highly than you ought to. You think of yourself as someone who has all the answers and does not need to listen. And when you get that wrong, you are at risk of becoming unstuck as a leader.

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**A.** It's positive for the principal in three respects.

First, it frees up time. Too often, leaders complain that they don't have enough time. They're too busy. But what you find is that they're too busy because they're delegating tasks, rather than delegating leadership and accountability.

There are two very different leadership roles here. In the first, the leader is providing support, monitoring progress, and mentoring a team member who is leading. In the second, the leader is leading and getting ideas and advice from the team. That's much more time-consuming.

The second benefit is that the leader can now be more strategic. The leader can prioritize time more effectively and really focus on those areas where he or she alone can truly add best value.

Thirdly, one of the things we know works well is authentic leadership. People are more likely to follow you if they believe in you. They'll believe in you for two reasons. One is that you have credibility – that some of the time, you know what you're talking about. But the other is that they believe in you because you're genuine. You're honest about what you can and can't do. You're a real person, with strengths and weaknesses.

If you want authentic leadership, the notion of "imperfect" leadership goes with that territory. The key is not believing you're perfect, but embracing that you're imperfect, and going out of your way to find people who are better than you at the things you're not so good at.

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**A.** You welcome challenge and debate with your team. When you have a collaborative leader, there's a sense that you don't just have to say what the boss wants to hear. There's a genuine welcoming of other ideas and perspectives.

The leader goes out of his or her way to find different ways of thinking about things or addressing the issue. It's a more inclusive culture. People feel empowered and listened to.

And that doesn't just apply to the senior team. It applies to the way the organization functions. When you have genuine collaboration, people feel they're helping to shape what happens.

be perfect, we won't get any new leaders. And so there is a system-wide impact.

If we say that our leaders have to be perfect, it puts people off. They tend to think they're not up to it, that they can't do it. And that's no way to nurture a leadership system.

Another interesting aspect of this is that the portrayal of perfect leadership discourages women, in particular, from assuming leadership positions. This is very well-documented – there have been a number of studies on gender issues, not just related to leadership, but to applications for senior positions in general. The research indicates that men – as a broad group – are more likely to think they're up for the job, apply for it, and then worry afterwards about whether or not they can do it. Women are more likely, on the whole, to have more self-doubt about whether they can do the job and that can put them off applying.

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**A.** That’s true. You can’t just say “right, I’m going to learn on the job” because you may be lucky, and have outstanding practice all around you, or you may not – and you need to experience it elsewhere. So there needs to be exposure to outstanding practice, other than in your own context.

One of the ways you develop leaders is by exposing them to opportunities to visit other places and see other practice, especially high-quality practice. That could be a week-long placement, or a day-long shadowing, or a term- or year-long secondment. There are many ways to do it. But exposure to outside practice is crucial to leadership development. It has to involve more than learning on the job – unless you happen to be learning on the job at a fantastic place – otherwise your expectations will be too low.

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**A.** We select which schools are asked to provide placements. We have an inspection system in England that judges the quality of school management. You can’t be a placement school unless you have a good evaluation.

That’s the starting point. Then, you have to demonstrate that you’ve been developing your staff within your own organization and that you have coaching and mentoring skills. So you apply to be a placement school, and within that process you demonstrate that you have a track record of developing people and that you have some training on mentoring and coaching.

Secondly, even if it’s a good placement with good leadership, the attitude of the person going on the placement is important. If the attitude of the individual is wrong, if they’re negative and don’t take up the positives – even if the positives are “we do it in our school better than they do” – there won’t be a successful placement.

So every person has a coach who will talk with that individual, determine what their needs are, provide guidance on how to approach the placement, and hopefully help them go into the placement with the right attitude.

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**A.** Yes. We’ve determined that, in addition to learning on the job and being exposed to outstanding practice, you need access to coaching and mentoring from credible peers, and that this has to be built in. At certain times you may need both mentoring and coaching, depending on your role.

And my own experience bears that out. One of the most valuable learning experiences I’ve had as a leader came at a time of great challenge. I had gone to work as Director of

Education and Lifelong Learning in Knowsley, Merseyside which, at the time, had the second worst exam results in the country. After a year of my leadership, we had the worst exam results in the country. That experience of early failure, of not achieving success, of serious challenge, of people calling for my resignation, of feeling that you've let people down, is a very powerful learning experience. And there are few great leaders who haven't had some of that. But I had a great mentor who helped me and profoundly influenced my progress toward success.

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**A.** Yes, you need time for reflection. Because even if you are learning on the job, at a good place, you won't get the full learning unless you build in time to reflect on your experiences.

That means time out. Time away from the day job. It could be attendance at a seminar or course. It could mean time to discuss with your peers. But it certainly means time away from the job.

So you need to put all of these things together

– combine them all together. Yes. The fact of the matter is that it's not about the time you spend on the job, it's about the time you spend reflecting on your experiences. Because

