**Leadership**

*Are you leading your small organization, or just managing it?*

Project management isn’t only about tasks and plans – it’s also about **leadership**. In a small business or nonprofit, the leader often wears many hats (owner, manager, HR, etc.), but it’s vital to step back and ask: *Am I providing true leadership to my team?* Effective leadership means inspiring people with a vision, guiding them through change, and modelling the values you want your organization to embody. Small enterprises thrive when leaders set the tone and direction. Consider a family-run cafe where the owner works alongside staff – their attitude will directly influence morale and customer service. Or a charity director rallying volunteers – their passion (or lack of) will be contagious. So, how can you improve your leadership game in a small-scale setting? Focus on a few core practices: building the right team, communicating clearly, developing others, planning ahead, and listening actively. Let’s explore these.

**Leading by Example and Vision**

Start with **hiring or recruiting good people** who align with your mission. In a small organization, each person has a significant impact on culture. Look for team members (or volunteers) who not only have the skills but also share values like integrity, customer service, or community spirit – whatever traits matter for your mission. As one leadership guide notes, *“hire good people and then give them your time and resources to show you value what they bring.”*​Set them up for success. This ties into the idea of *leading by example*: demonstrate the work ethic and standards you expect. If you want a friendly atmosphere, let them see you treating customers and colleagues with warmth. If safety is critical (say, in a kitchen or on a construction project), show that you personally follow all protocols. Team members will take cues from you. A strong leader in a small company is visible and hands-on, but also empowering – think of it as being the **“chief encouragement officer”**. Share your vision for the project or business frequently. Even if you’ve said it before, communicating the *“why”* behind the work keeps everyone aligned and motivated. Great leaders remind people of the purpose: e.g. “We’re catering this community event to bring people joy” or “Our youth mentoring program can change lives.” Connect daily tasks to that bigger vision.

**Five Habits of Effective Small-Org Leaders**

According to business experts, there are a few simple but powerful habits that small business leaders should cultivate

* **Be Clear:** Articulate your goals and expectations in plain language. Don’t assume others know what you’re thinking. Lay out project objectives, roles, and deadlines so your team isn’t guessing​. For example, if you’re launching a new product, clarify the timeline and who’s responsible for each step, and check in regularly to ensure everyone understands the plan. Clarity prevents confusion and aligns your team’s efforts.
* **Think Ahead:** As the leader, keep a “periscope view” on the horizon​. Reserve time to consider future challenges and opportunities. In a small enterprise, it’s easy to get bogged down in daily fires, but your team relies on you to steer the ship. Watch industry trends (is technology changing your business model? Are donor priorities shifting in your nonprofit field?). By anticipating changes, you can adapt your strategy proactively. Essentially, make strategic planning a habit – even if informal – so you’re not caught off guard by external changes.
* **Nurture Talent:** Your people are your greatest asset. Identify your high performers or those with growth potential and invest in them​. Give them additional responsibilities to foster growth, provide mentorship or training, and show a genuine interest in their career development. For instance, if you have an assistant who’s great with marketing ideas, let them lead a social media campaign. In a charity, if a volunteer excels at organizing, invite them to help plan the next fundraiser. Reward strong performance not just with praise but possibly increased authority or advancement opportunities (and when possible, financial incentives). This keeps talent engaged and loyal.
* **Listen Actively:** Make listening a core part of your leadership style. Employees and stakeholders on the ground often have invaluable feedback. Create channels for open dialogue – whether through regular one-on-one chats, suggestion boxes, or an open-door policy. When your team brings up concerns or ideas, take them seriously. As the Staples Business Hub notes, *“Listening to employees is a force multiplier for your business”*, expanding your perspective and effectiveness​. The same goes for listening to customers or beneficiaries of your services. A small nonprofit leader might host a town hall with community members to hear feedback, or a shop owner might personally engage with customers for input. By listening, you gain insights and also earn respect – people feel valued when the boss asks for and genuinely considers their opinion.
* **Decisiveness with Compassion:** Small organizations require quick decisions – there’s not a lot of bureaucracy or margin for delay. Aim to be **decisive** once you have sufficient information: weigh options, consult advisors or mentors if needed, but then take action. However, balance this with compassion and ethics. In a tight-knit team, how you make decisions (and how you communicate them) greatly affects morale. Explain the reasoning to those affected and show that you considered the human impact. For example, if you have to cut a project or change a plan, acknowledge the team’s work and feelings. People will accept tough decisions more easily if they trust your integrity and know you care about them.

Remember that in a small business or charity, **leadership is personal**. You likely interact with everyone from entry-level staff to major clients or donors, so your authenticity and behaviour are always on display. Strive to lead with empathy and enthusiasm. Celebrate successes publicly to boost morale, and handle criticisms or failures in private to maintain dignity. In nonprofits, especially, a leadership role often means inspiring people through passion for the mission – leading by *values* as much as by tasks. If you demonstrate commitment, resilience, and fairness, your team is more likely to mirror those qualities.

Finally, don’t neglect your own development as a leader. Seek out mentors or peer networks (for instance, join a local small business owners forum or a nonprofit leadership circle). Learn from others’ experiences and be open to feedback on your leadership style. Leading a small organization is a continuous learning journey. By focusing on clear communication, strategic thinking, nurturing your team, and listening, you’ll create a work environment where people feel guided and motivated. As one summary puts it: keep your people **enthused and empowered** and your organization looking forward, and you can weather just about any storm​. That’s the hallmark of strong leadership in project management – not just directing work but uplifting the people who do the work.

**External Resource:** *For a deeper dive into leadership styles, see* *“What Kind of Leader Are You? Five Leadership Styles for Nonprofits,”* Central Michigan University – *this article explains different leadership approaches (transformational, participative, etc.) and how they apply in nonprofit settings.* It can spark ideas on refining your own style.