

TRIPLE CROWN LEADERSHIP

Paradoxes of Leadership

Paradox: A seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true.

Leadership is rife with paradoxes, competing claims, countervailing pressures, and conflicts. There is frequently a “thesis” and an “antithesis” in leadership dilemmas, often requiring a “synthesis.” Here are some leadership paradoxes and other interesting dualities we have learned:

1. Serving followers and being served by followers
2. Flexing between the hard (steel) and soft (velvet) edges of leadership
3. Being optimistic while staying grounded in reality
4. Having confidence and humility
5. Being decisive and collaborative
6. Protecting people and taking necessary “casualties”
7. Being in charge and unleashing other leaders
8. Getting results (ends) with integrity (means)
9. Preserving the best of the past and embracing change
10. Making some lonely decisions and being connected
11. Asking and telling
12. Speaking and listening
13. Being patient and impatient
14. Knowing answers and asking questions
15. Being strong and vulnerable
16. Protecting power and empowering others
17. Controlling and letting go of control
18. Being competent yet always committed to continual learning
19. Raising expectations and lowering expectations when necessary¹
20. Leading and following
21. Using reason and emotion
22. Being reflective and quick to act
23. Using masculine and feminine approaches

What other leadership paradoxes and pairings or dualities can you add? Email us at info@triplecrownleadership.com

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¹ Thanks to Harvard’s Ron Heifetz for this insight. Sometimes leaders need to lower the expectations of followers to a more realistic and achievable level.