

Dave Poling on Modern Leadership

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1 Leadership Changed After 2020

- **Expect a heavier lift.** Leadership used to mean driving performance and building culture; now leaders also carry the emotional toll of their people.
- **Name the shift plainly.** Going virtual exposed what gets lost without in-person connection — mentoring, relationships, and the casual learning that happens just by being around people.
- **Treat change as constant, not occasional.** Pre-pandemic, a few major changes rolled out a year. Now it is a daily expectation, so over-communicate and repeat your message.

2 Do the Work on Yourself First

- **Work across four pillars.** Development is not just business books — build yourself mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.
- **Start with one behavior.** Do not try to overhaul everything at once. Pick a single practice, like a meditation streak or a workout habit, and stack from there.
- **Fill the cup with whatever works for you.** The specific practice matters less than consistency — reading, nature, sport, faith, or reflection all count.

3 Answer Who You Want to Become

- **Ask who, not just what.** Early career success is measured in titles and money; sustainable leadership starts with deciding who you want to be.
- **Write down your vision, purpose, and standards.** Putting them in writing means you act from intention instead of reacting to whatever comes up.
- **Let authenticity drive connection.** Leading across five generations in today's workplace demands genuine transparency and trust, not performance.

4 Modeling Alone Is Not Enough

- **Expect people not to simply copy you.** Modeling healthy habits did not, on its own, get Dave's team to adopt them.
- **Make development non-negotiable.** Set the expectation up front that personal growth is part of the job, not an optional extra.
- **Create shared challenges.** Peer accountability, like a team meditation or cold-plunge challenge, turns an individual habit into a team culture.

■ ■ If you don't change the leader, how could you ever change the culture?

— Dave Poling, VP of Talent Delivery, TEKsystems