

SmartBlog on Leadership

Engage. Innovate. Discuss.

How do I lead former peers now that I'm the boss?

By [Joel Garfinkle](#)

You've been promoted! It's a day you've looked forward to for a long time and you expected satisfaction and confidence. But now the joy is mixed with fear, apprehension — and guilt. You spent years working together with your peers. They are bright, talented, effective and successful professionals. They were friends and colleagues. Now things have changed. When you were promoted, no one sat you down and said, "Here is how you make that transition from friend and peer to leader."

Here's how you can help your peers and yourself adjust to your new roles. Let me share with you five steps your boss couldn't articulate to help you succeed in your new position.

1. Identify the elephant in the room and your discomfort

Suddenly you can't have the same relationship with your former peers. Now you must manage and you must lead. It makes it awkward for all of you. Consider bringing it out in the open. Have a meeting. Say, "We are all in a new situation." Explain the ground rules. [Ask for support](#). Recognize there will be some slipping back into old habits but the goal is to move forward.

You want to be liked and be friends. Now this can no longer be your primary goal. It is the cost of promotion. It is the price of leadership.

2. Recognize your own feelings of inadequacy or guilt

Especially if you've been working with talented, successful professionals, you may feel inadequate leading them. Why are you special? Why did you get promoted? That's a good question to address. Make a list of your leadership qualifications. Write down the last [successful projects](#) you've accomplished. List the 20 to 30 things you do well. See how others in the company perceive your qualifications. As you do this, you will reaffirm why you were the one chosen for promotion. When you can own the qualifications, you can more easily take on the leadership role.

3. Claim your moment in time

Each of us have life stages. There's a time we start to date, our first day of college, the day we marry, perhaps the birth of our first child. At the time, each of these beginnings seems scary and overwhelming. There is so much that's unknown. Are we prepared enough? But as we look back, we realize the time was right. It was time to take this next step.

This is your moment in time. This is the time for which you've been prepared. You are ready to assume this leadership. You won't be expert or perfect immediately, no more than you were perfect on your first date or the first day of college. But it was *time* to be there.

Give yourself the challenge of stepping up into this new role. Plan stepping stones. Look to mentors to mirror yourself after. Recognize that as a new leader, you will not automatically have the skills and strengths of a Steve Jobs. Cut yourself some slack and allow for time for the growth to take place.

4. Adjective action step

List the adjectives of an ideal leader. Perhaps you'll write, "decisive, authoritative, directive, assertive, confident, appreciative." Choose one of those attributes. Write it down where you can see it for the day. As the day progresses, choose to act with that attribute — in e-mails, at meetings, when you talk face-to-face. Own that attribute for the day. Then next day, choose another attribute. As you act on these attributes, they begin to become part of you and you become the leader you want to be. You lead by design, not by accident.

5. Choose leadership

Each day there are opportunities to **step up into your leadership role**, or minimize yourself. First, look for and identify these choices as they come up in the day. Second, assess the direction of your decisions. Do you step up into leadership 15% or 20% of the time?

Now increase your percentage. Become hyper-aware of the moments of choice and decide to act as a leader. Bump up your percentage to 50% or 60%. Work to increase it further.

You were thrown to the wolves without training as you were promoted. It's natural to have concerns and to take time to master the skills. But with these five steps, you can quickly gain confidence and become the leader your former peers respect and want to follow.

Joel Garfinkle is an executive coach and author of **"Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level."** More than 10,000 people **subscribe** to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. If you sign up, you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"