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A Great Lead

Introduction

At Bending Spoons, a great lead is first and foremost a great Spooner. They aspire to all the qualities described in the document *A Great Spooner,* and embody most of them. For example, a Spooner who doesn't consistently demonstrate *selfless team-play* is unlikely to thrive here, let alone become and progress as a lead.

Beyond that baseline, great leadership is about amplifying the growth and impact of those around us in the pursuit of the company's goals. Below are the behaviors common among leads who do this well.

Throughout this document, references to a lead's organization or colleagues are intended to encompass both Spooners *and non-Spooners*.

The document is primarily intended for team and function leads. However, we hope it inspires individual contributors, too. While not all Spooners can have formal leadership responsibilities, every Spooner should strive to act as a leader.

The behaviors of a great lead

⭐ Elevating ambition, drive, and results-orientation

A great lead thinks big and pushes things forward with dedication, focus, and urgency. They optimize for valuable outcomes, are hellbent on getting things done and seeing their organization—and Bending Spoons at large—succeed, and display constructive dissatisfaction when progress is slow.

These are the behaviors on which a lead's greatness depends the most.

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Identifying and prioritizing what matters most

A great lead identifies the opportunities that can create the most impact for Bending Spoons and keeps their organization laser-focused on them.

They're sophisticated and farsighted, constantly considering the indirect and long-term consequences of their decisions. They also possess a healthy paranoia, think hard about what could go wrong, and take steps to prevent it.

A great lead prioritizes ruthlessly—weighing tradeoffs and saying no to opportunities whose expected value doesn't justify the opportunity cost, added complexity, or risk to the broader company. They shield their colleagues from distractions.

They're deliberate in setting a direction for their organization, yet they frequently step back from execution to reanalyze the situation and quickly adjust as new information becomes available.

While they value harmony and evaluate all suggestions with an open mind, a great lead never prioritizes consensus—or pleasing their own leads—over doing what's right for Bending Spoons.

Fostering operational excellence

A great lead enables high-quality, rapid execution.

First and foremost, they do so by being exemplary in their execution as individual contributors, and by demanding similarly top-notch quality and speed from those around them.

They set sharp objectives, develop thoughtful plans, allocate resources wisely, anticipate and remove roadblocks, and communicate abundantly. They eliminate red tape and introduce structure where it helps. They bring clarity, order, and discipline without creating unnecessary bureaucracy or rigidity.

Furthermore, a great lead ensures that their organization contributes to—and fully benefits from—the expertise and tools available across Bending Spoons.

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Contributing from the trenches

A great lead is present in the daily operations, digs deep to uncover root causes and gather reliable information, maintains a firm grasp of the important details, regularly does individual contributor work, and gets their hands dirty with whatever needs doing. They often take on some of the least appealing tasks themselves.

These behaviors are essential to inspiring their organization, developing their own relevant skills, effectively assessing and coaching others, and making high-quality decisions.

Empowering and developing others

A great lead strives to build an organization so strong that they eventually become redundant.

They invest heavily in the growth of others, even at a short-term cost. They step aside so their colleagues can step up, entrust them with suitably difficult challenges, and focus their communication on objectives and rationales rather than prescriptive implementation steps. They calibrate their involvement to the individual, providing the support needed to succeed while leaving room for mistakes and learning. They give credit where it's due.

A great lead coaches actively and generously, including by collaborating closely on projects. They deliver feedback frequently, empathetically, and with radical candor. Those who work with them find them extremely demanding, but also deeply invested in helping them grow and make an impact.

Assessing others accurately and acting accordingly

Accurate assessments are key to providing high-quality coaching, assigning responsibilities effectively, and fostering a meritocratic environment. Working with the Talent team, a great lead therefore ensures that all team members in their organization are assessed reliably and regularly. To this end, they see to it that each colleague has at least one trusted assessor—often the lead themselves—who collaborates closely with them and gains firsthand exposure to their work. A great lead also gathers and weighs input from multiple sources.

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A great lead acts on these assessments. They reinforce excellent performance and show gratitude to those who go above and beyond. In concert with the Talent team, they address performance issues promptly and decisively, even when doing so may ultimately mean parting ways with a colleague.

Creating a safe and healthy environment

A great lead is self-aware and intellectually humble. They foster an environment where people feel comfortable speaking up, receiving criticism, and owning mistakes. Concerns are taken seriously, tough feedback is welcomed, and ideas are evaluated on their merits. When things go wrong, the focus is on learning and problem-solving rather than assigning blame.

A great lead manages their emotions and stress so they don't negatively affect others. They remain a steady presence in difficult situations.

They're also caring and perceptive. They monitor morale, fatigue, and stress levels. When they notice a colleague going through a challenging time, they offer lots of support.

Making their team a team

A great lead understands that ours is a team sport, and that working harmoniously and selflessly as a unit is essential to both succeeding and enjoying ourselves along the way.

While some of the behaviors described above help foster team spirit, a great lead goes further to enhance it. They encourage taking the work seriously without taking ourselves too seriously, create and promote opportunities for team members to spend plenty of time together in person, and frequently celebrate collective efforts and accomplishments, as well as actions that put the team first.

Strengthening the company's reputation

A great lead actively strengthens Bending Spoons' reputation, both within and outside the company. They push their organization to do superb work and uphold high standards of integrity in their dealings with team members, users, customers, investors, lenders, and other stakeholders. Beyond ensuring that the substance is impeccable, they see to it that the relevant communications are accurate, effective, and reach the right audiences.

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Conclusion

At Bending Spoons, a great lead is a force multiplier. They amplify the growth and impact of their organization, turning individual and collective potential into outcomes that move the company forward.