PRINCIPLES OF UX LEADERSHIP

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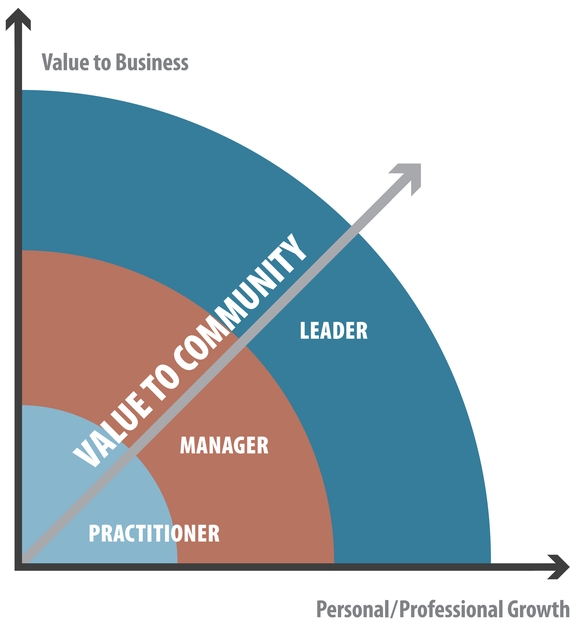

Leadership goes above management. Managers handle resources; leaders inspire people.

- **Know yourself and seek self-improvement, both in the field and personally**

  Make sure that you understand what you want to do in this field, why you want to do it, and how to ground yourself.

- **Be technically and tactically proficient in design**

  Know a wide range of UX techniques. Know when to apply specific UX techniques, and ensure you have strong skills as a practitioner.

- **Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions**

  Your designs and those of your team matter. They have real impacts on people. Make sure that you take a sense of ownership and feel responsible for users' successes—and failures. Strive to take on more responsibility for larger areas of product development.

- **Make sound and timely decisions**

  As Steve Jobs famously scrawled on the whiteboard of the original Mac development team's area, "Real artists ship." Be decisive in your analysis as well as your critique of subordinates' designs.

- **Set the example for your peers, your staff, and your superiors**

  Not only should you be a good UX designer, you need to set the example in your demeanor, your work ethic, and your devotion to both client and user success.

- **Know your users as well as your staff, and look out for their welfare**

  It's critical for you as a leader to make sure that users' needs are addressed in their experience with products you work on. At the same time, take care of your people, ensuring that their needs are met.

- **Keep your staff informed**

  You need to ensure users know what they need to do in their tasks, but you also need to keep both project team members as well as your staff are knowledgeable about what is going on, what is expected, and what effect actions might have.

- **Develop a sense of responsibility in your team members**

  Not only should you feel responsible for users' success, but you should encourage your team members to accept this type of responsibility.

- **Ensure that tasks are understood, both before and after completion**

  When you create tasks for your team members, make sure that they know what they need to do and understand what success or failure they have achieved.

- **Build the team**

  This principle applies to both the UX team you lead, the development teams you work with, or the project team, or all. Building the team means imparting sound guidelines and principles of UX design & development.

- **Assign your staff wisely**

  As a practitioner, you make sure that what you design meets users needs, goals, and task expectations. At the same time, pay attention to the people on your team. Are they working on projects they have the ability to work on? Do you have someone who's interested in Little IA doing Big IA deliverables?

What's the difference between being a manager of a User Experience team and its leader? Leadership goes above management. Managers handle resources; leaders inspire people.

Sadly, user experience (UX) professionals move from individual practitioner to team leader to manager without having a grounding in leadership. It is leadership that elevates one above resource management and into inspirational guidance.

We need to look beyond practicing the craft and into leading the profession. Being a leader means incorporating strong values into your life and work, as well as following clear principles that help others understand what they need to do. It's more than just completing a wireframe or writing a Twitter post; instead, leadership is the art of inspiring people to accomplish goals.

Poster Design: Lyndsay Mazzola, Senior IxD, Keane Inc.