LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES

ADAPTIVE

IOWA

DEFINITION

Adaptive leaders are agile in the face of unexpected or uncertain circumstances, communicating with clarity and purpose to guide their teams effectively through change.

WHY IT MATTERS

Being adaptive can help you stay grounded and resourceful when things change. Whether you are leading a team or contributing within one, being adaptive may foster trust, may reduce stress, and may position you as a dependable presence when it matters most. While outcomes can vary, cultivating this skill often supports stronger collaboration and resilience across teams.

HOW CAN I MAXIMIZE THIS ATTRIBUTE?

Navigate uncertainty with confidence

- Open team, committee, or project conversations or group projects by asking, *"What's still unclear?"* or *"What assumptions might we need to challenge?"*
- You can highlight uncertainty and suggest a path forward in any role by saying: "*I noticed we're waiting for more info. Do you think it would help to test something in the meantime?*"

Elevate clarity in communications

- When things are changing, summarize updates using a "Now / Next / Later" format in your communications, even if you're not the decision-maker. Clear communication helps everyone.
- Offer to recap or clarify next steps after group discussions if things felt unclear.

Model and normalize learning in real time

- Share what you're learning when plans or conditions shift. For example: "*What worked, what didn't work, what next?*"
- In collaborative work, help normalize trial and error by sharing useful takeaways, not just wins.

Trial first, scale later

- Pilot on a small scale before committing. For example: "*What if we try this in one group/setting for a week and see what we learn?*"

HOW CAN I STRENGTHEN THIS ATTRIBUTE?

Ask better questions

- Try this in your next group setting or discussion: "*If things don't go as expected, what's our backup plan?*" "*What's one thing we could try, just to see what we learn?*"

Reframe resistance as insight

- When doubt comes up, look for insight to build on. You might say: "*That's a good point. What would help make this feel more workable?*"

Build reflection into your practice

- Regularly jot down one unexpected thing that happened and how you responded, and what you learned.
- In a group or team setting, share one quick reflection to help others learn from your experience.

Invite outside perspectives

- Whatever your role, ask someone outside your area: "How would you approach this situation?" Exposure to different perspectives helps you adapt more creatively.

TAKE ACTION

Choose one of the actions above and make a plan to use it this week. You may also want to use the Leadership Development Planner for more intentional leadership growth.