



# What It Means To Be A Forest Service Leader

## Stance and Habits

*Updated April 20, 2017*

### Introduction

The USDA Forest Service mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. In order to best advance this mission, early Forest Service leaders were schooled in the maxims of our founder Gifford Pinchot (see: [Gifford Pinchot 11 maxims](#)). While some maxims may be outdated after more than a century of service, there is still the same need to declare the qualities we bring to solve challenges and the habits we expect Forest Service leaders to embody. Declaring what we all stand for together as Forest Service leadership is essential to create desired culture around diversity and inclusion, safety, and other core agency values.

Leaders here come in many forms, some with a title and formal leadership position and others who lead without positional power by simple virtue of their character and commitment to mission success. This document describes essential (but not all) expectations for every formal and informal Forest Service leader, and for those who aspire to this role.

This picture of what it means to be a Forest Service leader comes from noticing where leaders are most successful. Reflect on this picture and consider how it conforms to your notion of Forest Service leadership and how you bring it to life in your daily work as an agency leader. This is not a response to a problem, but rather an affirmation of what's working well in our agency. As our workforce and public experience Forest Service leaders who show up in this way, they will come to expect it, and that will build our reputation as a collective prepared to lead in our second century of conservation.

# Leader Stance

## **1. *Stewards the Whole Place***

Helps all employees have a deep appreciation of the higher purpose of the Forest Service that transcends any part or program. Encourages people to cling a bit less tightly to their own sense of function by grabbing hold of something bigger and shared. Infuses into all aspects of the work the notion that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and agency leaders must have loyalty and responsibility for all of it. Creates a safe, rewarding and resilient work environment where all people are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect and is free from all forms of harassment and unwanted behaviors. At the end of the day, personally feels and holds success or failure everywhere in the agency, committing to a stewardship responsibility that is global as much as it is local.

## **2. *Sees Opportunity***

Imagines what the Forest Service “can be” as much as what it “can do.” The experiences and relationships we create are as important as the actions we accomplish. Holds an asset mindset, always inventorying what the Forest Service has to offer and how to leverage what others can bring to the table. Is self-aware and humble enough to see personal gaps in knowledge and abilities that can only be addressed by relying on the wisdom and talents of others. When encountering differences in point of view, becomes curious rather than defending a position, authentically appreciating people for having and sharing their perspectives. Takes pride in uncovering the real values that drive people to solve a problem in some way that improves lives.

## **3. *Shares Leadership***

Provides guidance for the entire agency and perhaps world, clearly expressing wants and desires. Offers options without telling people the solution; becomes decisive and initiates action when the time is right. Exhibits courageous leadership, even if people resist it at first because it marks a change. Actively listens for where and how to grow other leaders inside and outside the Forest Service. Leads with inclusion, humble in knowing that others inside and outside bring new learning and perspective vital to mission success. Takes calculated risks to innovate, exploring other people’s approaches and methods. Rather than holding too tight to power or letting go of responsibility entirely, strikes the right balance of letting ownership and influence be distributed across many leaders including but not limited to themselves.

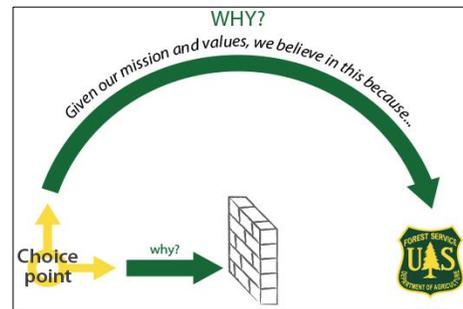
## **4. *Builds Community***

Strives to be inclusive and welcome new voices and diverse perspectives into the conversation, embracing a big group of people as easily as a small one. Builds trust and relationships through deep and personal commitment to the Forest Service intention to create a culture of inclusion that awakens and strengthens all people’s connection to the land. Talks openly and candidly about what the Forest Service stands for with personal stories about why they came and why they stay. Knows how to engage in ways that cause people to surface and share their own values by revealing what matters most to them and their communities. At the end of the day, builds relationships around shared values that can transcend differences in priorities and approaches. Creates an environment where every employee, contractor, and partner feels cared for, is treated equitably, and is valued for adding their ideas, ambitions, concerns, values and truths.

## Leader Habits

### 1. **Communicate the Big Why**

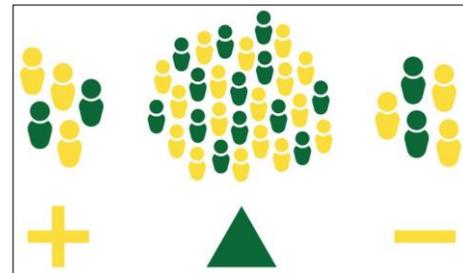
Tell a purposeful story that connects to people's values (what they stand for, their dreams) and puts our actions in the larger context of *why* the Forest Service mission and values cause us to take a stand. In other words, convey with context and transparency why we do something.



1. Getting to the Big Whys

### 2. **Find the Missing Middle**

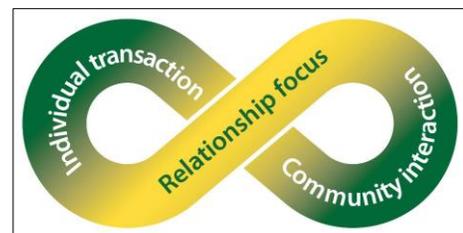
Find new people to talk to and ask them what we're missing in order to obtain fresh perspectives, learn what others know, and get beyond polarized conversation. Reaching and serving more of our public creates opportunity for solutions that draws more people into conservation.



2. The Missing Middle

### 3. **Nurture the Relationship Loop**

Invest in relationships, both to get work done and to do it in a way that improves people's lives. Get to know people (their values, history, needs, resources, etc.) as a core approach to shape our programs and do our work.



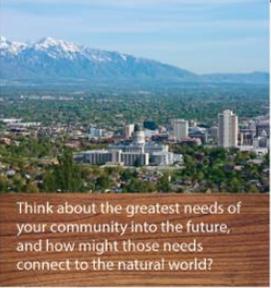
3. The Relationship Loop

### 4. **Engage to Explore. Interconnect. Express.**

Be a curious learner who begins dialogue by asking rather than telling, then interconnect what is said with what the Forest Service offers, and, finally, express how the Forest Service might best contribute in a fashion that engenders enthusiasm to work together.

Let's talk about improving lives over the next hundred years

**EXPLORE**  
Greatest needs of people and places



Think about the greatest needs of your community into the future, and how might those needs connect to the natural world?

**INTERCONNECT**  
Our unique contribution



Given what you know or what you've heard today, how might a conservation agency like the Forest Service contribute to improving lives in your community?

**EXPRESS**  
How we are experienced



How would an agency like the Forest Service need to show up to maximize your interest in working with us to meet the greatest needs of people and places?

4. Explore. Interconnect. Express.