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TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Successful leaders are the power and intellect behind their organizations. They are the visionaries charged with steering their brand around pitfalls. They must know when to seize opportunities and how to rally employees to work hard toward their company's goals.

Effective leaders transcend the title of "manager" or "boss." They have found a way to achieve the right combination of charisma, enthusiasm and self-assurance, probably with a healthy dose of luck and timing.

It may seem like some people are just gifted with these skills, but the truth is most leadership traits can be learned and sharpened with time and practice. You can begin building your success by developing these 21 must-have traits of a powerful and successful leader.

Everybody defines leadership differently but I really like the way John C Maxwell defines leadership, “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.” Irrespective of how you define a leader, he or she can prove to be a difference maker between success and failure. A good leader has a futuristic vision and knows how to turn his ideas into real-world success stories. In this article, we take an in-depth look at some of the important leadership qualities that separate good leaders from a bad one.

Being a good leader isn't easy. While a leader's actions may be scrutinized when things are going bad, it is their leadership qualities that shine through the worst of times. It is these same qualities that employees look up to, respect, and work very hard for. This is why it is so important for every leader to work hard to gain the qualities of great leadership.

The best leaders exhibit certain qualities that make them hugely successful. Here are some essential traits or attributes of some of today's truly great leaders.

The leadership traits or qualities that can make you **a good leader**.

1. **Honesty and integrity**
2. **Confidence**
3. **Inspire Others**
4. **Commitment and Passion**
5. **Good Communicator**
6. **Decision Making Capabilities**
7. **Accountability**
8. **Delegation and Empowerment**
9. **Creativity and Innovation**
10. **Empathy**
11. **Resilience**
12. **Emotional Intelligence**
13. **Humility**

14. **Transparency**
15. **Vision and Purpose**
16. **Courage**
17. **Strategic Planning**
18. **Focus**
19. **Cooperation**
20. **Clarity**
21. **Respect**

1. Honesty and Integrity

“With integrity, you have nothing to fear, since you have nothing to hide. With integrity, you will do the right thing, so you will have no guilt.” – Zig Ziglar

In every strategic planning session that I have conducted for large and small corporations, the first value that all the gathered executives agree upon for their company is integrity. They all agree on the importance of complete honesty in everything they do, both internally and externally.

The 34th President of United States, Dwight .D. Eisenhower once said, “The supreme quality of leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office.” Honesty and integrity are two important ingredients which make a good leader. How can you expect your followers to be honest when you lack these qualities yourself? Leaders succeed when they stick to their values and core beliefs and without ethics, this will not be possible.

2. Confidence

To be an effective leader, you should be confident enough to ensure that others follow your commands. If you are unsure about your own decisions and qualities, then your subordinates will never follow you. As a leader, you have to be oozing with confidence, show some swagger and assertiveness to gain the respect of your subordinates. This does not mean that you should be overconfident, but you should at least reflect the degree of confidence required to ensure that your followers trust you as a leader.

3. Inspire Others

Probably the most difficult job for a leader is to persuade others to follow. It can only be possible if you inspire your followers by setting a good example. When the going gets tough, they look up to you and see how you react to the situation. If you handle it well, they will follow you. As a leader, should think positive and this positive approach should be visible through your actions. Stay calm under pressure and keep the motivation level up. As John Quincy Adams puts it, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." If you are successful in inspiring your subordinates, you can easily overcome any current and future challenge easily.

4. Commitment and Passion

"If a leader doesn't convey passion and intensity then there will be no passion and intensity within the organization and they'll start to fall down and get depressed." -**Colin Powell, 4-Star-General of the U.S. Army**

Your teams look up to you and if you want them to give their all, you will have to be passionate about it too. When your teammates see you getting your hands dirty, they will also give their best shot. It will also help you to gain the respect of your subordinates and infuse new

energy in your team members, which helps them to perform better. If they feel that you are not fully committed or lacks passion, then it would be an uphill task for the leader to motivate your followers to achieve the goal.

5. Good Communicator

Until you clearly communicate your vision to your team and tell them the strategy to achieve the goal, it will be very difficult for you to get the results you want. Simply put, if you are unable to communicate your message effectively to your team, you can never be a good leader. A good communicator can be a good leader. Words have the power to motivate people and make them do the unthinkable. If you use them effectively, you can also achieve better results.

Powerful leaders know when to talk and when to listen. They are effective communicators and are able to clearly and succinctly explain to their employees everything from organizational goals to specific tasks. If people don't understand or aren't aware of your expectations, they will fall short, so the more specific you can be, the better.

You need to be able to communicate on all levels: one on one, to the department and to the entire staff, as well as via phone, email and social media. Communication is built on a steady flow of verbal and nonverbal exchanges of ideas and information, so work on being approachable and involving people from different levels.

6. Decision-Making Capabilities

Apart from having a futuristic vision, a leader should have the ability to take the right decision at the right time. Decisions taken by leaders have a profound impact on masses. A leader should think long and hard before taking a decision but once the decision is taken, stand by it. Although, most leaders take decisions on their own, but it is highly recommended that you consult key stakeholders before taking a decision. After all, they are the ones who will benefit or suffer from your decisions.

7. Accountability

When it comes to accountability, you need to follow the approach highlighted by Arnold H Glasow when he said, “*A good leader takes little more than his share of the blame and little less than his share of the credit.*” Make sure that every one of your subordinates is accountable for what they are doing. If they do well, give them a pat on the back but if they struggle, make them realize their mistakes and work together to improve. Holding them accountable for their actions will create a sense of responsibility among your subordinates and they will go about the business more seriously.

Successful managers know how to use power and authority appropriately without overwhelming or overpowering employees. Effective leaders hold themselves accountable and take responsibility for their own mistakes—and they expect others to do the same. They can work within established procedures, and be productive and efficient in their decisions.

They appreciate the importance of supporting and encouraging individuality while also understanding organizational structures and the need to follow rules and policies. They are able to balance different perspectives while taking appropriate action.

8. Delegation and Empowerment

You cannot do everything, right. It is important for a leader to focus on key responsibilities while leaving the rest to others. By that, I mean empowering your followers and delegating tasks to them. If you continue to micromanage your subordinates, it will develop a lack of trust and more importantly, you will not be able to focus on important matters, as you should be. Delegate tasks to your subordinates and see how they perform. Provide them with all the resources and support they need to achieve the objective and give them a chance to bear the responsibility.

9. Creativity and Innovation

The greatest visionary of our time answers this question this way, “*Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.*” In order to get ahead in today’s fast-paced world, a leader must be creative and innovative at the same time. Creative thinking and constant innovation is what makes you and your team stand out from the crowd. Think out of the box to come up with unique ideas and turn those ideas and goals into reality.

Leaders must have the courage to risk experimentation and encourage creativity. Doing this will foster the innovation that will steer your organization to new destinations and around the twists and turns of a changing business landscape.

The key is to always be persistent in pursuing your goals, and open minded and flexible in how you get there. Encourage the people around you to spend at least 15 percent of their time exploring new ideas through brainstorming and prototyping.

10. Empathy

Last but certainly not the least, is empathy. Leaders should develop empathy with their followers. Unfortunately, most leaders follow a dictatorial style and neglect empathy altogether. Due to this, they fail to make a closer connection with their followers. Understanding the problems of your followers and feeling their pain is the first step to become an effective leader. Even that is not enough until you work hard and provide your followers with the suitable solution to their problems.

11. Resilience

“People are afraid, and when people are afraid, when their pie is shrinking, they look for somebody to hate. They look for somebody to blame. And a real leader speaks to anxiety and to

fear and allays those fears, assuages anxiety.” -Henry Louis Gates, former leader of the African and American Research Institute at Harvard University.

When the going gets tough, the tough gets going. You might have heard this adage many times, but did you know that great leaders also follow this rule. They are resilient and have a positive attitude. Irrespective of how difficult the circumstances might be, you will find them rallying their followers. While most people are busy in complaining about the problems, great leaders always focus on solutions, not the problems.

12. Emotional Intelligenc (EQ)

“There’s two parts of leadership. You have got to be a good leader – you’ve got to be somebody that people want to emulate and care about the other people. But the other guys that you have to accept their leadership. They have to respond to it. That’s the chemistry that you never know how that is going to happen.” -Football-Trainer at the University of Alabama

Good leaders always have higher influence but how do they increase their influence on the point where people accept what they say. They do this by connecting with people emotionally. That is where emotional intelligence comes into play.

Here are some of the reasons why a leader should be emotionally intelligent.

- **Manage emotions effectively**
- **Better social awareness**
- **Seamless communications**
- **Conflict Resolution**

With emotional intelligence, leaders can control their emotions, which prevent negative emotions from influencing their decision-making skills. As a result, they are less likely to make hasty decisions. Moreover, emotionally intelligent leaders are great at understanding the emotions and care about the feelings of others. That is not all, leaders who have this leadership

quality not only handles conflict in a better way but also play an important role in conflict resolution.

13. Humility

Humility gets results. Larry Bossidy, the former CEO of Honeywell and author of the book Execution, explained why leadership characteristics, such as humility, make you a more effective leader:

“The more you can contain your ego, the more realistic you are about your problems. You learn how to listen, and admit that you don’t know all the answers. You exhibit the attitude that you can learn from anyone at any time. Your pride doesn’t get in the way of gathering the information you need to achieve the best results. It doesn’t keep you from sharing the credit that needs to be shared. Humility allows you to acknowledge your mistakes.” – **Larry Bossidy**

Great leaders are those who are strong and decisive but also humble.

“Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real.”—Thomas Merton

How would you feel when you are promoted to leadership status? You will feel proud. Good leaders are always selfless and always think about his or her followers. That is why the leadership styles greatest leaders adopt put lots of emphasis on problem-solving and team dynamics instead of focusing on self-promotion.

Humility doesn’t mean that you’re weak or unsure of yourself. It means that you have the self-confidence and self-awareness to recognize the value of others without feeling threatened.

This is one of the rarer attributes – or traits – of good leaders because it requires containment of one’s ego.

It means that you are willing to admit you could be wrong, that you recognize you may not have all the answers. And it means that you give credit where credit is due – – which many people struggle to do.

14. Transparency

One of the best ways to win the trust of your followers is by being transparent. Instead of hiding information, you should openly share it with them. By giving visibility to your followers, they will buy into your vision and support you with conviction in achieving the goal. More importantly, it gives your followers clarity, autonomy and make them feel more empowered while keeping them engaged.

15. Vision and Purpose

“Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion.” – Jack Welch

Great leaders have a vision... They can see into the future.

They have a clear, exciting idea of where they are going and what they are trying to accomplish and are excellent at strategic planning.

Good leaders always have a vision and purpose. They not only visualize the future themselves but also share their vision with their followers. When their followers were able to see the big picture, they can see where they are heading. A great leader goes above and beyond and explain why they are moving in the direction they are moving and shares the strategy and action plan to achieve that goal.

This quality separates them from managers. Having a clear vision turns the individual into a special type of person. This quality of vision changes a *“transactional manager”* into a *“transformational leader.”*

16. Courage

“Courage is rightly considered the foremost of the virtues, for upon it, all others depend.” – Winston Churchill

One of the more important qualities of a good leader is courage. Having the quality of courage means that you are willing to take risks in the achievement of your goals with no assurance of success. Because there is no certainty in life or business, every commitment you make and every action you take entails a risk of some kind.

Among the seven leadership qualities, courage is the most identifiable outward trait.

17. Strategic Planning

“Strategy is not the consequence of planning, but the opposite: it’s the starting point.” – Henry Mintzberg

Great leaders are outstanding at strategic planning. It’s another one of the more important leadership strengths. They have the ability to look ahead, to anticipate with some accuracy where the industry and the markets are going.

Leaders have the ability to anticipate trends, well in advance of their competitors. They continually ask, *“Based on what is happening today, where is the market going? Where is it likely to be in three months, six months, one year, and two years?”* They do this through thoughtful strategic planning.

Because of increasing competitiveness, only the leaders and organizations that can accurately anticipate future markets can possibly survive. Only leaders with foresight can gain the *“first mover advantage.”*

A forward-thinking, open-minded approach is necessary for today’s leaders. According to a Harvard Business Publishing report, *Leading Now: Critical Capabilities for a Complex World*,

“Leaders must always be prepared to adjust their strategies to capture emerging opportunities or tackle unexpected challenges.” Thinking strategically is an ongoing process that involves assessing your business environment. You can cultivate strategic thinking by:

- Being curious and genuinely interested in your company and wider business environment,
- Being flexible in your mindset and trying new approaches and ideas,
- Focusing on the future and thinking about your company’s operational conditions, and
- Maintaining a positive outlook.

18. Focus

“Successful people maintain a positive focus in life no matter what is going on around them. They stay focused on their past successes rather than their past failures, and on the next action steps they need to take to get them closer to the fulfillment of their goals rather than all the other distractions that life presents to them”. – **Jack Canfield**

Leaders always focus on the needs of the company and the situation. Leaders focus on results, on what must be achieved by themselves, by others, and by the company. Great leaders focus on strengths, in them and in others.

They focus on the strengths of the organization, on the things that the company does best in satisfying demanding customers in a competitive marketplace.

Your ability as a leader to call the shots and make sure that everyone is focused and concentrated on the most valuable use of their time is essential to the excellent performance of the enterprise.

19. Cooperation

“If your imagination leads you to understand how quickly people grant your requests when those requests appeal to their self-interest, you can have practically anything you go after.” – Napoleon Hill

Your ability to get everyone working and pulling together is essential to your success. Leadership is the ability to get people to work for you because they want to.

The **80/20 rule** applies here:

Twenty percent of your people contribute 80 percent of your results.

Your ability to select these people and then to work well with them on a daily basis is essential to the smooth functioning of the organization.

20. Clarity

They are clear and concise at all times--there is no question of their vision and what needs to be accomplished. This gives others the opportunity to digest their goals and decide whether or not they will support their cause. Generally, very few people know what they want, much less how to get there, so they will gravitate towards those who appear to have a clear picture in mind--good clarity leads to great achievement.

21. Respect

Treating people with respect on a daily basis is one of the most important things a leader can do. It will ease tensions and conflict, create trust, and improve effectiveness. Respect is more than the absence of disrespect, and it can be shown in many different ways. Explore how you can cultivate a climate of respect at work.

You must have all these qualities but if you lack some of these qualities, then you might struggle to make the mark in the world of leadership. You will have to set a good example for others to follow. That is where your commitment, passion, empathy, honesty and integrity come into play. Good communication skills and decision-making capabilities also play a vital role in success and failure of a leader. Lastly, innovation and creative thinking, as well as the futuristic vision, are a couple of leadership qualities that make up good leaders.