**The Top 10 Leadership Qualities**

By David Hakala on March 19, 2008

Leadership can be defined as one's ability to get others to willingly follow. Every organization needs leaders at every level. [Leaders can be found and nurtured](http://www.hrworld.com/features/find-future-leaders-020508/) if you look for the following character traits.

A leader with **vision** has a clear, vivid picture of where to go, as well as a firm grasp on what success looks like and how to achieve it. But it’s not enough to have a vision; leaders must also share it and act upon it. Jack Welch, former chairman and CEO of General Electric Co., said, "Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision and relentlessly drive it to completion."

A leader must be able to communicate his or her vision in terms that cause followers to buy into it. He or she must communicate clearly and passionately, as passion is contagious.

A good leader must have the discipline to work toward his or her vision single-mindedly, as well as to direct his or her actions and those of the team toward the goal. Action is the mark of a leader. A leader does not suffer “analysis paralysis” but is always doing something in pursuit of the vision, inspiring others to do the same.

**Integrity** is the integration of outward actions and inner values. A person of integrity is the same on the outside and on the inside. Such an individual can be trusted because he or she never veers from inner values, even when it might be expeditious to do so. A leader must have the trust of followers and therefore must display integrity.

Honest dealings, predictable reactions, well-controlled emotions, and an absence of tantrums and harsh outbursts are all signs of integrity. A leader who is centered in integrity will be more approachable by followers.

**Dedication** means spending whatever time or energy is necessary to accomplish the task at hand. A leader inspires dedication by example, doing whatever it takes to complete the next step toward the vision. By setting an excellent example, leaders can show followers that there are no nine-to-five jobs on the team, only opportunities to achieve something great.

**Magnanimity** means giving credit where it is due. A magnanimous leader ensures that credit for successes is spread as widely as possible throughout the company. Conversely, a good leader takes personal responsibility for failures. This sort of reverse magnanimity helps other people feel good about themselves and draws the team closer together. To spread the fame and take the blame is a hallmark of effective leadership.
Leaders with **humility** recognize that they are no better or worse than other members of the team. A humble leader is not self-effacing but rather tries to elevate everyone. Leaders with humility also understand that their status does not make them a god. Mahatma Gandhi is a role model for Indian leaders, and he pursued a “follower-centric” leadership role.

**Openness** means being able to listen to new ideas, even if they do not conform to the usual way of thinking. Good leaders are able to suspend judgment while listening to others’ ideas, as well as accept new ways of doing things that someone else thought of. Openness builds mutual respect and trust between leaders and followers, and it also keeps the team well supplied with new ideas that can further its vision.

**Creativity** is the ability to think differently, to get outside of the box that constrains solutions. [Creativity](http://www.hrworld.com/features/nab-most-creative-thinkers/) gives leaders the ability to see things that others have not seen and thus lead followers in new directions. The most important question that a leader can ask is, “What if … ?” Possibly the worst thing a leader can say is, “I know this is a dumb question ... ”

**Fairness** means dealing with others consistently and justly. A leader must check all the facts and hear everyone out before passing judgment. He or she must avoid leaping to conclusions based on incomplete evidence. When people feel they that are being treated fairly, they reward a leader with loyalty and dedication.

**Assertiveness** is not the same as aggressiveness. Rather, it is the ability to clearly state what one expects so that there will be no misunderstandings. A leader must be assertive to get the desired results. Along with assertiveness comes the responsibility to clearly understand what followers expect from their leader.

Many leaders have difficulty striking the right amount of assertiveness, according to a study in the February 2007 issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, published by the APA (American Psychological Association). It seems that being underassertive or overassertive may be the most common weakness among aspiring leaders.

A **sense of humor** is vital to [relieve tension](http://www.hrworld.com/features/reduce-workplace-stress/) and boredom, as well as to [defuse hostility](http://www.hrworld.com/features/mediate-employee-disagreements-111407/). Effective leaders know how to use humor to energize followers. Humor is a form of power that provides some control over the work environment. And simply put, humor fosters good camaraderie.

Intrinsic traits such as intelligence, good looks, height and so on are not necessary to become a leader. Anyone can cultivate the proper leadership traits.

<http://www.hrworld.com/features/top-10-leadership-qualities-031908/>

## Leadership Characteristics

### by Karlene Sugarman, M.A.

*"Leadership is like gravity. You know it's there, you know it exists, but how do you define it?" Former San Francisco 49er Tight End, Dr. Jamie Williams*

Great leaders come in many forms. In one sense solid leadership is a subjective thing, in another there are certain characteristics that are, by consensus, typical of quality leadership. Leadership is the process of influencing team members to work hard towards, and be committed to, team goals. Leaders can either be task-oriented or person-oriented. Task-oriented leaders are most interested in training, instructing behavior, performance and winning. Person-oriented leaders are more interested in the interpersonal relationships on the team. Great leaders in sports are both task- and people-oriented, but lean more towards being task-oriented.

Leaders must possess the qualities they are trying to incorporate into their team. For example, if you want members to be confident, have self-control, be disciplined, etc., then you must first possess all these traits. One of the most powerful things you can do is lead by example. You serve as an influential role model for your players and everything you do will be watched. Vince Lombardi says, "Leaders are made, they are not born; and they are made just like anything else has every been made in this country - by hard work" (Dowling, 1970, p. 179).

Great leaders are often scholars in their field and are intelligent. Like all great scholars, they aren't know-it-alls, they feel there is always more to learn and have a willingness to admit mistakes. Outstanding leaders make decisions based on facts, and apply common sense and simplicity to complex tasks. You must select the right strategy for the right situation, even when the pressure is overwhelming. They are well organized, detail-oriented and, due to their thorough preparation, rarely caught off guard. Their great knowledge allows them to be great educators and motivators. They are also smart enough to know that many times they will have to alter what they originally planned due to changing circumstances, so flexibility and having an open mind are crucial to leadership.

Successful leaders are not only highly driven and intrinsically motivated but also foster that same enthusiasm in their associates. Charles Schwab says, "I consider my ability to arouse enthusiasm among the men the greatest asset I possess, and the way to develop the best that is in a man is by appreciation and encouragement" (Carnegie, 1964, p. 34). They have a high energy level, create task excitement and are catalysts for positive action. One must be a good motivator and have the gift for verbal persuasion to get athletes to "buy in" to the fact that hard work does pay off and that the pursuit of excellence, while a tough journey, is a worthwhile one. One cannot take motivation for granted. Even the players who are always motivated can use some outside motivation from coaches. They must be encouraged as people and as players.

Great leadership encompasses confidence, assertiveness and mutual respect. Great leaders take calculated risks and are innovative and confident in their decisions to do so. They realize that being timid will not get them where they want to go. This confidence and assertiveness will usually trickle down to the team members. The quality and effectiveness of a great leader will often show itself by way of the team's effort as a whole. A coach's confidence in the team can give team members added strength to do extraordinary things. One also must have respect for the players; if athletes are not treated with genuine respect, they will respect the coach. Sincerity is important because players can usually tell if positive talk is phony, and in that case they won't take it to heart.

To get the most out of each player and make the team experience a positive one, one must understand the individuality of players and the dynamics of group interaction. It is essential to know members well enough to be able to assess their strengths and weaknesses and use them to their fullest potential within the context of the team. Systematic delegation--getting the right players doing the right job--is vital on teams. For example, the selection of the right person to be team captain can be important. This is why it is so important for a coach to get to know each of the players as well as possible.

The great leader is a master in the art of communication. He or she is aware of the strong need for actions to match words. Leaders need to possess a willingness to listen to input with an open mind. Two-way communication, being approachable and having an "open door" policy makes for very good team relations. This is crucial in building a trusting and open environment. It must be an established norm that it is okay to ask for help and that players can communicate openly without fear of punishment. The way one communicates with and leads a team may play a big part in their motivation to work hard.

The goal is to push the team to perform to their full potential. The coach, along with the players, must set obtainable yet demanding team goals. Strong leadership becomes a moot point if the players are uninterested in the mission and goals. Coaches must develop a strong rapport which involves trust and confidence on both ends. "Good leadership consists of motivating people to their highest levels by offering them opportunities, not obligations" (Tzu, p. 135).

Murray & Mann stated that a proficient leader "has a vision, an intense focus on outcome and results, a realistic strategy to carry out the vision and the ability to communicate the vision and rally support of others" (Williams, 1993, p. 87). Leaders are there to coach, direct and nudge players in the direction of the goals. They have a strong ability to pass their intensity along to their others. They are always "in the game" right along with the players.

A leader guides a team, not rules a team. He or she charts a course, gives direction and develops the social and psychological environment (Martens, 1987). The leader--either the coach or a player with leadership qualities--provides an atmosphere where others can learn and grow. A coach must give some responsibility to the group and have the courage to foster independence. Otherwise the members will feel that they are not trusted to take care of themselves and will be irresponsible. There must be a balance where the coach accepts his or her share of responsibility and gives some back to the team members.

This article has looked at a number of characteristics that seem to go hand in hand with outstanding leadership. Excellence in leadership is acquired by people who have a strong sense of vision, have passion and are able to get people to commit 100% and take the necessary action to see that vision become a reality. Great leaders excel in the art of communication and motivation, mutual respect, instilling confidence and enthusiasm, and showing credibility and integrity on a consistent basis.

<http://www.psychwww.com/sports/leader.htm>

## Traits of a Good Leader

Compiled by the Santa Clara University and the Tom Peters Group: **Honest —** Display sincerity, integrity, and candor in all your actions. Deceptive behavior will not inspire trust.

* **Competent —** Base your actions on reason and moral principles. Do not make decisions based on childlike emotional desires or feelings.
* **Forward-looking —** Set goals and have a vision of the future. The vision must be owned throughout the organization. Effective leaders envision what they want and how to get it. They habitually pick priorities stemming from their basic values.
* **Inspiring —** Display confidence in all that you do. By showing endurance in mental, physical, and spiritual stamina, you will inspire others to reach for new heights. Take charge when necessary.
* **Intelligent —** Read, study, and seek challenging assignments.
* **Fair-minded —** Show fair treatment to all people. Prejudice is the enemy of justice. Display empathy by being sensitive to the feelings, values, interests, and well-being of others.
* **Broad-minded —** Seek out diversity.
* **Courageous —** Have the perseverance to accomplish a goal, regardless of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Display a confident calmness when under stress.
* **Straightforward —** Use sound judgment to make a good decisions at the right time.
* **Imaginative —** Make timely and appropriate changes in your thinking, plans, and methods. Show creativity by thinking of new and better goals, ideas, and solutions to problems. Be innovative!

<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadchr.html>